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Student Learning in Principles of Sociology: Impact of Discussion Group on Development of Sociological Imagination and Sense of Civic Responsibility

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Sociology Senior Thesis
Messiah College
Spring 2004
Melody L. Boyd
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Abstract

This research project analyzes student learning in a Principles of Sociology course and explores the impact of participation in a fourth credit option discussion group on the development of students' sociological imagination and sense of civic responsibility. I used various theoretical approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to provide direction and insight as I designed and led the discussion group to emphasize deep understanding of the issues of race, gender, and inequality. Pre- and post-course surveys were administered to the students to determine the impact of the discussion group on learning, and content analysis of reflection papers and class discussion was used. Data from these surveys indicate that the students in the Principles course developed a greater sense of sociological imagination, and that this result increased for students who participated in the discussion group. Student self learning evaluations and reflection papers show that the discussion group accomplished the course objectives by fostering a deeper understanding of race, gender, and inequality issues.
Student Learning in Principles of Sociology: Impact of Discussion Group on Development of Sociological Imagination and Sense of Civic Responsibility

Introduction

This research project seeks to understand the impact that a Principles of Sociology course has on the development of students' sociological imagination and sense of civic responsibility. More specifically, I am interested in the way in which further discussion of sociological issues develops these results and increases student learning. In order to maximize the quality of the teaching and learning experience, I analyzed research on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL).

I am a senior sociology student, and my primary interests are in the area of stratification and inequality, particularly in the context of race and gender. I hope to teach sociology at the college level, and I will attend graduate school next year to pursue my Ph.D. in sociology. My interest in teaching race and gender formulated my desire to conduct this research project.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning began to interest me as I became aware of the tension in academia between research and teaching during the graduate school application process. I realized that emphasis and importance is being increasingly placed on research. Consequently, the value of teaching and the effort to teach for student understanding is diminishing. Similarly, the vision of higher education as a means to addressing the real needs and issues in our society is fading. This project stems from a desire to better understand the literature and methods related to improving teaching, as well as to apply this knowledge to the classroom.
I think it is important to consider how SoTL can be used in the framework of sociology to critically examine teaching and learning methods in sociology. I consider sociology to be a discipline that can recapture the aforementioned vision of education informing social issues. In the discussion group, I focused specifically on the areas of race, gender, and inequality. I believe racial and gender issues are significant to learn and understand because they shape the lives of every person in our society and our world. I also feel that many Americans are unaware of the significance of these issues and do not have a full understanding of inequality in these contexts. Thus, I formatted the discussion group in a way that promoted the use of a sociological imagination and development of a deeper understanding regarding these issues (see Appendix 1 for the syllabus).

**Literature Review**

The concern for considering the philosophy of education and developing curriculum is not unique to the present (Herrick 1965; Mayer 1958). However, in the past several decades, the effort to promote student learning by rethinking instructional methods has intensified. Increased emphasis is placed on improving the quality of education in order to heighten student learning through improvement in teaching styles and curriculum development (Drake 1998; Weimer 1990). Recent analyses of higher education include Shils' (1997) discussion of the need for university teachers to combine their desire for movement towards social equality and justice with the cultivation of truth within their particular field. This connection between social justice and teaching is the area on which I will focus.

Ernest L. Boyer informed much of the foundation for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and he endorsed four areas of scholarship - integration, application,
discovery, and teaching. Boyer promoted the need to affirm that teaching is the primary
task of education, and his research and works gave testimony to that (Boyer 1990; 1997).
Boyer's analysis of higher education included a review of the ways in which academia is
changing, and he emphasized that the goal is to not only to serve society, but to reshape
it. He acknowledged the interdependence between higher education and the rest of
society and strongly encouraged the combination of academia with addressing social
issues (Boyer 1990). Boyer also recognized the need for students to be encouraged to
learn about the world around them and develop a sense of civic and social responsibility
in order to discover how they can each contribute to the common good (Boyer 1997).

Boyer's work represents the framework I used for my research project. The entire
basis for why I think teaching and learning sociology is important is this notion of
academia reshaping society and addressing social issues. I believe sociology is capable of
achieving this, particularly when it is taught in such a way that students are encouraged to
make a meaningful contribution to society through the development of a sense of social
responsibility, as Boyer advocated. It is crucial for students to realize what sociology
consists of and apply it to the "real world" in an effort to promote verstehen (empathic
understanding) and a sociological imagination (Shils 1980; Miles 2001).

My research project uses the development of the sociological imagination within
students as an indicator for student learning and success of the course and discussion
group. C. Wright Mills argues that the sociological imagination "enables its possessor to
understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the
external career of a variety of individuals" and "to grasp history and biography and the
relations between the two within society" (1959: 5-6). Mills (1959) makes the distinction
between "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure," and contends that this is the essential tool of the sociological imagination. This awareness of history and social structures is exactly what I want to see understood by the students in the Principles course, and I believe the discussion group allows for more intentional development of the sociological imagination.

Atkinson (2001) recognizes Boyer's emphasis on the practice of teaching and asserts that the scholarship of teaching sociology must involve instilling a sociological imagination in students in the effort to solve social problems. She recognizes the need for students to understand the social structure rather than blaming the victims of stratification, and highlights the importance of teaching students from the middle class a sociological perspective. Atkinson says, "Our students represent our discipline's promise for influencing social change" (2001: 1226). This should be a sobering recognition of the responsibility that teaching sociology encompasses.

Cerbin (2000) analyzes the ways in which students are able to "think with" the subject matter they are learning. Phillips (2000) emphasizes the importance of asking students to use their sociological imaginations in examination of their own ideas and perspectives. These objectives are an effort to move students to "deep understanding" of the subject, the underlying issues, and our society and world in general. This deep understanding results from critically thinking about the issues that are studied and moving beyond rote memorization to truly engage with the material and concepts. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) outline ways in which to design activities to develop greater understanding through backward design. I used the model of backward design as I arranged the discussion course by conceptualizing deep understanding as the goal and
designing the course content to meet that goal. One of the objectives they cite is for students to be able to empathize with the "other." This, again, is a manifestation of students' sociological imagination and sense of deep understanding. This concept of deep understanding and empathy is exactly what I sought to promote in the course and the discussion group.

Boyer contends that scholarship means integrating, applying, and presenting knowledge, and that this process extends beyond the classroom (Boyer 1997). This is how I envisioned the discussion group - an extension of the classroom to involve more free interaction and dialogue. Wilson et. al. (1975) argue that the formal and informal teaching activities that occur outside the classroom are of equal importance to the teaching style of faculty within the classroom. Palmer (1998) emphasizes the need to create communities of learning among faculty and students, going beyond the rigid focus on teaching techniques and instead integrating the communal and holistic aspects of a teaching and learning environment. These ideas were the basis for my desire to have a discussion group that is more informal and discussion oriented.

Wilson (1981) discusses the importance of students learning from other students. He outlines the idea of peer group learning as a supplement to traditional teaching approaches. Wilson argues that in peer group learning, students have a greater opportunity to interact with staff in small groups, have a more interactive role in discussions, and can learn from each other through the sharing of perspectives rather than simply accepting what the professor says. Atkinson (2001) conceptualizes this as the "teacher" present as the vehicle to student understanding rather than a lecturer. This was
the model used in the discussion group, as the students actively participated in the
discussion topics, and even shaped them in many ways.

Williams (1994) recognizes the new challenges that increasing diversity in our
society bring to the realm of teaching. He offers ways in which to frame discussion
regarding sensitive issues, many of which we faced in the discussion group. Brookfield
and Preskill (1999) analyze various methods of utilizing discussion as a technique for
teaching. I used their idea of framing the discussion around student questions, as well as
Phillips' (2000) suggestion of beginning each class with questions that relate to the
previous discussion. This further emphasized the importance of the students in the
discussion process and the validity of their viewpoints. Boyer asked the question:

Rather than have undergraduates remain passive in the classroom, why not
assume that these young students should in fact be teachers, too, at times, actively

This project is an attempt, at least, to answer that question.

The final goal of all of this is to promote what Boyer (1997) called the
"scholarship of engagement." This involves the need to connect the university to the
pressing social and civic problems of our country and our world today. My research
project and the goals of the discussion group are simply a small step in the effort to
reevaluate the objectives of education and emphasize the desperate importance of uniting
academia with the goal of reshaping society and improving the quality of life for
everyone.
Hypotheses

My hypothesis is that the Principles of Sociology course increases students’ sociological imagination and sense of civic responsibility, when the course is taught effectively. Thus, a joint hypothesis is that there are more effective ways of teaching and promoting deep understanding than are currently being used. My final hypothesis is that participation in group discussions facilitates and contributes to the expansion of students’ sociological imagination. Thus, I hypothesize that the students who participate in the fourth credit discussion group will exhibit an enhanced development of a sociological imagination and sense of civic responsibility beyond that of the students who do not participate in the discussion group.

Methodology

This research project involves the application of research on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This was accomplished through the use of a Principles of Sociology class taught by Dr. John W. Eby in the Fall of 2003. I was the teaching assistant for this class, and I had input into the course curriculum in order to incorporate my research into actual teaching strategies. I used insights drawn from my review of literature on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and teaching sociology in order to design teaching strategies for the Principles of Sociology course. I taught several of the classes throughout the semester in order to apply this research. Particular attention was given to methods for teaching the issues of race, gender, and inequality within the context of this class.
Discussion Course

There were 38 students in the course (N=38). A fourth credit option discussion course was presented to the students which consisted of a weekly discussion group. Participation in the discussion course was voluntary, and the students received a fourth credit in addition to the three credit Principles course if they participated in the discussion group. I had eighteen students interested in the discussion group, so we split the class into two separate sections (N=18). I created the syllabus for the discussion course (see Appendix 1 for the syllabus and Appendix 3 for the resource bibliography) and led the discussion groups. These groups provided a forum for dialogue about issues discussed in class, with particular emphasis on race, gender, and inequality issues. Thus, my independent variable was participation in the discussion group course, and my dependent variable was development of a sense of civic and social responsibility and a sociological imagination, particularly within the areas of race, gender, and inequality.

Quantitative Data

I conducted a quasi-experiment through the Principles of Sociology course in order to analyze the effectiveness of these implemented teaching strategies. A variety of research methods were used in order to accomplish this. I gave pre-tests and post-tests to gauge the perspectives of students on certain issues and the development of these perspectives throughout the course. Surveys were used in the beginning and end of the class to test the ways in which students’ perspectives progressed as a result of the course. I created questions addressing racial, gender, and inequality issues to add to a survey that Dr. Eby uses every time he teaches the course. I primarily used my own survey questions in the analysis, but I also used several questions related to civic and social responsibility
from the rest of the survey (Table 6). The survey was voluntary, so the sample I worked with was 30 students who completed both the pre- and post-course survey. Fifteen of those students were discussion group students, and fifteen were SOC 101 only students. The majority of the students who completed the survey were underclassmen - there were only 2 juniors and 1 senior, and only one sociology major was part of the sample.

In order to analyze the possibility of pre-selection bias of the students who chose to take the discussion course, I compared the GPA of the discussion group students with the students who did not take the discussion group (i.e. SOC 101 only students). I also compared the means of the pre-test survey scores of the discussion group students and SOC 101 only students for the questions that I created (see Table 1 and 2).

In my analysis of these surveys, I compared the responses of the discussion group students with the SOC 101 only students. I grouped the questions into race, gender, and inequality indicators. The questions used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. I coded the questions so that a high response represents the response I hoped the students would give. Thus, when comparing the difference between the pre- and post-tests, a higher differential represents the effect I anticipated the course would result in. I conceptualized these questions so that the "better" or more "positive" score represented what I felt demonstrated an increase in the students' sociological imagination and understanding of structural forces. Thus, I operationalized a less racist answer to be the "better" answer. Because some of the questions were worded in such a way that a lower score was more "positive", I recoded these questions so that 1=5, 2=4 etc. These changes are indicated on the tables. I also used questions from Dr. Eby's portion of the survey to create an indicator for social
responsibility. These questions were asked on a scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 4 (essential). I compared the means of the pre-test and post-test scores for both the discussion group students and the SOC 101 only students, and conducted a t-test for the differences in the pre- and post-course surveys to determine the statistical significance of the changes.

I administered a self-learning course evaluation to the fourth credit discussion group students at the end of the semester so that the students could themselves indicate what they felt they learned from the course. Sixteen of the eighteen students completed the evaluation. These questions consisted of a four point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). I calculated the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with statements about the course. I divided these questions into the following categories: the discussion group compared to the SOC 101 course, the discussion group fulfillment of course objectives, and the discussion course's contribution to fostering a sociological imagination.

Qualitative Data

Content analysis, a qualitative method of research, was used to evaluate much of the data from the discussion groups in order to determine their effectiveness. The discussion records of this class were analyzed through content analysis. The pre-test given at the beginning of the semester to the Principles students included a scenario of a social problem/issue, and the students were asked to give their viewpoints and opinions on the matter. The post-test was administered to students at the end of the course and presented the same scenarios to which students wrote their reactions and viewpoints.
I used content analysis to analyze the pre-test and post-test scenarios in order to determine the ways in which the sociological imaginations and perspectives of students changed throughout the course. I compared the results of the students who participated in the fourth credit discussion group to the students who did not. Also, the discussion group students wrote several response papers throughout the semester. I used qualitative analysis of these papers to determine the ways in which they expanded their sociological imaginations through the course and came to a deep understanding of the issues of race, gender, and inequality. I also used content analysis of the course evaluations, as the students commented on what they felt they learned.

Analysis

Pre-Selection Bias

I wanted to determine if there was a selection bias in the students who chose to participate in the discussion group and establish whether or not the discussion group students were already "better" students and more "advanced" in their understanding of sociological issues than the students who did not take the discussion course. In my comparison of the grade point averages of the discussion group students and the SOC 101 only students, I found that the discussion group students had a slightly higher mean GPA than the SOC 101 only students (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion group students</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC 101 only students</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.581</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, when I compared the mean pre-course survey scores of the discussion group students with the mean pre-test scores of the SOC 101 only students, the difference between the means of the of the two groups was significant for only 3 out of the 17 questions I asked in my portion of the survey (see Table 2). On all three of these questions for which the difference between the means was significant, the SOC 101 only students actually answered the question in a more "positive" way than the discussion group students did. Thus, I determined there was no pre-selection bias and that the discussion group students were not already more "advanced" than the other Principles students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude or belief</th>
<th>Mean of discussion group students</th>
<th>Mean of SOC 101 only students</th>
<th>Difference between means(^{^\text{a}})</th>
<th>Significance of Difference(^{\sim})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The discrimination that existed against Blacks in the past significantly influences the lives of Blacks today</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discrimination that existed against Native Americans in the past significantly influences the lives of Native Americans today</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks should be given extra opportunities in education and occupations in order to attempt to make up for past discrimination</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks are given too many allowances already and should make their own way in the world without extra help because of their race(^*)</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women should be allowed in combat warfare</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to see a female president of the United States someday</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers should stay at home with their children instead of working(^*)</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers should stay at home with their children instead of working</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current high rate of divorce is the result of more women going into the workplace(^*)</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women should change their last names to the man's last name when a marriage occurs(^*)</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wife is subordinate to the husband in a marriage relationship(^*)</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare is a positive way of aiding those in need</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless people are too lazy to get a job(^*)</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness is often the result of circumstances beyond a person's control</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people just do not work hard enough - if they worked harder they would have more resources(^*)</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping other people is an important part of who I am</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to understand the situations of other people without being judgmental</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options consisted of a five point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

*These questions were recoded so that a the response values are switched: 1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1.

The means recorded in this table reflect the recoded data.

\(^{\text{a}}\)This calculation was done by subtracting the mean of the SOC 101 students from the mean of the discussion group students.

\(^{\sim}\)A t-test was used to determine the significance of differences of means between the two groups.

NS indicates that there is no significant difference. Values (e.g., .05, .09) indicate the significance value.
**Race: Quantitative**

The discussion course focused primarily on race and gender, with particular attention given to inequality within these areas (see Appendix 1 for the syllabus). To analyze the development of students' sociological imagination in racial issues, I compared the pre- and post-course survey questions regarding race and also compared the differences between the two groups (see Table 3).

### TABLE 3

Statistical significance of pre- and post-course survey score differences in discussion group students (DG) and SOC 101 only students (101) on questions regarding race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude or belief</th>
<th>Pre-test Mean</th>
<th>Post-test Mean</th>
<th>Difference of Means</th>
<th>Significance of Change^*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The discrimination that existed against Blacks in the past significantly influences the lives of Blacks today</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discrimination that existed against Native Americans in the past significantly influences the lives of Native Americans today</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks should be given extra opportunities in education and occupations in order to attempt to make up for past discrimination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks are given too many allowances already and should make their own way in the world without extra help because of their race*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the US*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy to understand the anger of Blacks in America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options consisted of a five point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
*This question was recoded so that the response values are switched: 1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1.

The means recorded in this table reflect the recoded data.

^A t-test was used to determine the significance of differences of means between the pre- and post-tests

NS indicates that there is no significant difference. Values (e.g., .01, .02) indicate the significance value.
For only one of these questions the difference in means between the pre- and post-test means was not significant. The difference between the pre- and post-test means are also meaningful because they show a significant change in the opinion of the students toward these racial issues. In all but one of the questions, the discussion group students had a higher difference of means than the SOC 101 only students, indicating the discussion group students did, indeed, develop their sociological imaginations regarding racial issues more than the SOC 101 only students. However, the data also indicate that the SOC 101 students in general did develop their sociological imaginations, although not to the extent that the discussion group students did.

**Race: Qualitative**

The data from the surveys do not show drastic changes in the attitudes of the students, although the changes are favorable. However, many of the students in the discussion group demonstrated strong changes in their attitudes about racial issues and in their awareness of racism as a real problem. When we first discussed race and racism in the discussion course, I could sense that the students did not consider racism to be a contemporary problem. The topic of white privilege was very touchy, as was the issue of affirmative action. One student said:

Should I feel guilty? As a white, is it my "duty" to try to amend broken relationships with all minorities? Do I "owe" them something because I'm white? Is it my place to apologize for stuff I didn't do, but was done by people "like me"?

Another student commented:

I didn't put people in slavery. Giving more money to black people is a bad way to fight discrimination. As a white, I feel discriminated against. The government is so obsessed with making up for past wrongs that it's making white people mad that blacks are given extra opportunity. Just get over the past.
This idea of getting over the past was a common theme throughout the first class in which we discussed race and white privilege. However, I could see a change in some of the students even after the end of the first discussion class. The student who made the previous comment of "Just get over the past" approached me after class and said the following:

My views have totally 180'd from this conversation regarding affirmative action and reparations. Before, with reparations, I thought, dude, I didn't do anything. Slavery wasn't my fault, but I didn't realize that discrimination still happened so much or that it is so deep rooted. You totally 180'd me...I never realized the historical ramifications behind slavery before.

Many of the students had hardly touched on issues of race and racism before, and the simple fact that we were talking about these topics made them critically examine their own viewpoints and perspectives. Another student commented after the first class:

This is really cool. I've never had these discussions about racial issues before and I'm a sophomore. I didn't realize all this stuff. I've never heard it before. It's great to talk about it like this.

Throughout the weeks of discussing race, watching videos, asking questions and critically thinking about their opinions, the students developed significantly in the way they approached and talked about racial issues. A common theme in their response papers to videos and discussions was that they were not aware of how much racism is still an issue and just being confronted with this reality was important for them:

I don't think I ever realized how much racism and discrimination were issues all around us. This discussion group helped me get a glimpse of the world in a new way.

I never really realized how much of an issue discrimination really is, and this class made me see that it's a big problem.

I never realized the extent that residential segregation affected African Americans and other minorities, or how it is so rooted in history.

I had a really hard time watching the video. I have studied the Civil Rights movement before, but I felt like it was the first time I'd ever heard about it or watched a video about it. I still cannot get over the hatred and cruelty during that time...It's hard for me to realize that it still goes on today, and I'm just not very aware of it.
The most striking thing that I've learned is how prevalent racism still is in today's society. After so many legal battles and protests and law changes, I had assured myself that things were calming down among the various races of the US. But, the readings and videos and discussion have proven my assumptions wrong.

I have learned a great deal about race and inequality - so much that I almost don't want to know anymore. I say this because it is so overwhelming to find out that all my life has been lived out ignorant of the social injustices that so many had and still do endure.

I guess I just thought that racism was a thing of the past and that people were just overreacting about it. I now know the truth, and to be honest, it's shocking. It's unbelievable how a person can be discriminated against so much simply because they have more pigment in their skin. It just doesn't seem logical to me, yet it happens everyday. This class has opened my eyes a lot to what's really happening out there.

The students came to a deeper understanding and awareness of white privilege.

They also began to understand that the American Dream is not equally attainable for everyone and that the "pull yourself up by your bootstrap" and "work hard and you will succeed" mentalities work for the advantaged but are not as meaningful for those without as many resources:

While I grew up with friends, coworkers, and neighbors of different races, I feel that this class opened me up to a lot about why our society is the way it is, and how my life has been (and is) affected by my race. I learned about recognizing my "white privilege" and that I have to deal with a lot less on an everyday basis than people of minority races.

My understanding of social structure and race has changed. I understand that even though slavery was abolished long ago, the effects are still prevalent in our society. I learned that it isn't as easy as our society would like to think to get out of poverty stricken areas.

I have seen even more about how our society is structured and how that shapes us as individuals. Being white, I have been taught and trained to not see my own white privilege. We are taught to be an individual, take care of ourselves...when in reality we need to be a community.

I will not pretend that this discussion course completely revolutionized the minds of the students and that they will all now be great advocates for racial justice. However, the majority of them came into the course with such paltry knowledge about racial issues or awareness of white privilege that the discussions led them to a deeper understanding:

My views have changed a lot. To tell you the truth, I was blinded to the fact that many blacks were struggling to make a daily living. I knew of their problems in the past and I thought we grew out of that hatred, but hearing what people still say and seeing how people treat minorities, my views have turned 180 degrees.
Race: Scenario

I analyzed the social issue scenarios to determine the ways in which both the SOC 101 only students and the discussion group students developed their sociological imaginations and how this was demonstrated in their analysis of a particular scenario (see Appendix 2 for scenario questions). The race-related scenario I asked is the following:

An African-American teenage boy is struggling academically in high school. He is also getting into a lot of trouble in school because he fights often with the other kids. He has been in trouble with the law because of his violent behavior outside of school. His dream is to become a medical doctor, but he does not plan on going to college.

*What are some possible explanations for this African-American boy's behavior? What circumstances could be contributing to the problems he is having? What, if anything, should be done to help change his behavior?*

I compared the responses given in the pre-course survey with those responses given in the post-course survey. Many of the SOC 101 only students and the discussion group students exhibited an increased sociological imagination in their analysis of this scenario. One SOC 101 only student wrote:

*PRE-Course:* He could be getting in fights because of the surroundings he grew up in.

*POST-Course:* He could possibly be discriminated against by society in the fact that he is hassled by racist people in school and out of school. In fact, he probably doesn’t start the trouble occurring in or out of school. Society needs to be aware of white privilege and subtle discrimination to give this boy a chance.

Another SOC 101 only student failed to consider race in the pre-course response but included it in the post-course analysis:

*PRE-Course:* He could behave like this because of his family life or because of how others treat him. I think if his family would encourage/discipline him more then he would not get into trouble for attention and may even plan to go to college.

*POST-Course:* This boy could have a bad home life or be growing up in a community where blacks are simply not accepted. Also, he could feel as though he has to act in a certain way or live a certain life because of the color of his skin.

Of course, these are not extremely sophisticated analyses, but they do recognize race as an important issue. There were many examples of students who did not consider
race in their pre-course analysis but did in the post-course analysis, and more discussion
group students demonstrated this changing awareness of race as an issue than SOC 101
only students:

PRE-Course: No mention of race in analysis
POST-Course: This boy may have troubles at home, or be angry at society. His dreams of being a
doctor may never be fulfilled. He knows because of his skin color and possible lack of money he
can’t go to college. College has become a great expense, making an unequal opportunity for the
poor to have the same education.

PRE-Course: No mention of race in analysis
POST-Course: Home problems, residential segregation and discrimination could all have
influenced this boy to believe he had no chance of going to college, let alone become a doctor.

Another discussion group student denied race as an issue in the pre-course
analysis but emphasized its importance in the post-course survey:

PRE-Course: Race is not an issue, fighting and doing the wrong things are not ok in any situation.
All people live under the same divine authority. He should realize that to become an MD, a
college education is necessary.
POST-Course: I don’t know why this individual student is struggling, but as an African-American
he could be facing racial injustice within his school and/or just within society in general.
Nonviolent reconciliation should occur between him and those he views as the opposition.

Gender: Quantitative

After discussing racial issues, we shifted the focus of the course to considering
gender. To analyze the development of students' sociological imagination in gender
issues, I compared the pre- and post-course survey questions regarding gender and also
compared the differences between the two groups (see Table 4).
TABLE 4
Statistical significance of pre- and post-course survey score differences in discussion group students (DG) and SOC 101 only students (101) on questions regarding gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude or belief</th>
<th>Pre-test Mean</th>
<th>Post-test Mean</th>
<th>Difference of Means</th>
<th>Significance of Change^a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women should be allowed in combat warfare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to see a female president of the United States someday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers should stay at home with their children instead of working*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers should stay at home with their children instead of working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The current high rate of divorce is the result of more women going into the workplace*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women should change their last names to the man's last name when a marriage occurs*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wife is subordinate to the husband in a marriage relationship*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options consisted of a five point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). *These questions were recoded so that the response values are switched: 1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1. The means recorded in this table reflect the recoded data. ^A t-test was used to determine the significance of differences of means between the pre- and post-tests. NS indicates that there is no significant difference. Values (e.g. .01, .02) indicate the significance value.

The means of the discussion group students' responses to the post-course survey were higher for every question than for the pre-course survey, however this difference was low for most of the questions. Only a few of the differences in means are statistically significant. The question that had the highest difference in means for the discussion group...
students was "I would like to see a female president of the United States someday." The mean for the discussion group students increased by .60.

**Gender: Qualitative**

The qualitative data show similar results to the survey data. The students seemed to have deeply embedded ideas about gender roles that often stemmed from their religious views:

- God designed us [men and women] for different purposes.
- I don't believe women should have spiritual authority over men.
- Are we going against the Bible and its word of the man should be the head of the household to want more women's rights?

It was very difficult to discuss gender issues without emotional opposition to many of the topics. However, I think the open and honest discussions allowed the students to learn from each other and more critically evaluate their viewpoints. Several of the more "liberal" students often challenged the opinions of the others, leading to important discussions and question-raising about personal beliefs that many of the students said they had never considered before.

I started the gender unit by addressing the concept of feminism. I asked every student to tell me what they thought of when they heard the term feminism, and the majority of the responses included words such as "crazy, "radical," and "bra-burners."

Most of the students had such strong opposition to feminism:

- Inclusive language is just kowtowing to a bunch of feminists. It's ridiculous.

They also had very firm perspectives on what they saw as appropriate gender roles:

- I don't think women are equal to men. It's not right to say women are the same as men.
- Don't most men and women feel that men are more effective and trustworthy in positions of power?
I do think that men and women should be treated fairly in some aspects, but there's a point where we should realize that we will never be completely equal. I want equality, but I don't want it in everything we do. Why do we feel as though we have to prove our worth in society? (female student)

However, as the discussions continued and I asked students to think about these issues in a different way, some of their viewpoints began to shift and their automatic negative reactions to feminism lessened as we talked about the principles of feminism.

One student said:

I'm an equalist, not a feminist.

To which another student quickly responded:

It's the same thing. If you say you want equal opportunity, that's what being a feminist is.

Many of the students began to realize the importance of understanding the core values of feminism rather than rejecting it as a whole based on their preconceptions:

This class helped me learn what the feminist perspective is; that it involves more than men-hating. It is a key element in understanding women’s opinions and social action.

I learned that feminists aren’t all females, or crazy, like I thought.

I think the most important aspect of the discussions on gender involved the aforementioned shift in reactions to feminism as well as an increased awareness of gender issues that the students simply had never considered before:

I was really affected by our discussion about language. Like word order, husband and wife, man and woman. I never realized that before.

I’ve heard guys tease their friends who want to become male nurses by telling them that the reason they’re going to be a nurse was because they weren’t good enough to be a doctor. However, I’ve never heard anyone say that of a girl who wanted to be a nurse. I never really thought about the significance of that before.

Before, I didn’t ever think gender issues were that big of a deal and that most people just overreacted. I learned a lot in this class, especially about the male role from the video Tough Guise which was a huge eye opener for me.

I guess I never really thought about it in the past. My mom does have a second shift, and she has had a second shift every day of my life that I can remember... It is weird now that I think about it, how I never really questioned the work that my parents did.
Gender: Scenario

The gender-related pre- and post-course scenario I used is as follows:

Emily's dream has always been to study International Relations and travel to different parts of the world in the course of a career in this field. She gets married when she is a junior in college and has a baby right after she graduates with a degree in International Relations. She now desires to begin her career, but her husband thinks she should stay at home with the baby.

What do you think Emily should do? What would you do if you were Emily? Why would you do that? What societal expectations contribute to this situation?

Many of the students responded that Emily should stay home with the baby and did not change their perspective between the pre- and post-course surveys. Those who felt that Emily should continue with her career in the pre-course survey typically said the same thing in the post-course scenario. However, several students did change their perspective regarding gender issues as demonstrated in their responses to this scenario. In their pre-course analysis of the scenario, these students focused only on the mother. However, in their post-course analysis they mentioned the responsibilities of the father and the need for both the wife and husband to work together. Several discussion group students responded:

PRE-Course: If I were Emily, I’d hope I’d make the responsible choice to raise my child to an appropriate age and then travel more each year. I don’t believe the child should be in day care. POST-Course: I believe both the mom and dad should raise the child. I would expect my husband to contribute time and effort even if that did mean taking time off his job or bigger sacrifices. If he loved her, he’d help her follow through with her dream.

PRE-Course: Emily should follow her dream when the baby is older. Women should stay at home with the children. POST-Course: I would also point out that the husband could stay home, too. It’s only fair. They both made and wanted the child, so they both should take time staying home. Society expects women to stay home, so this will contribute to the husband’s wishes.

PRE-Course: I think Emily should stay at home with the baby at least until it’s in school. Her first responsibility is to be a mother, then a worker. If I were Emily, there would be no question that I’d stay at home. Family is more important to me. I think society would probably tell Emily to pursue her career, especially in the heat of the feminist movement.
POST-Course: I think Emily and her husband need to sit down and have a serious talk about their future. Her husband needs to be understanding of her dream career, but they both need to seriously consider what is best for the baby.

Inequality: Quantitative

We considered inequality throughout our discussions of race and gender, and we also spent some time discussing homelessness and poverty. To analyze the development of students' sociological imagination regarding inequality issues, I compared the pre- and post-course survey questions regarding inequality and also compared the differences between the two groups (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Statistical significance of pre- and post-course survey score differences in discussion group students (DG) and SOC 101 only students (101) on questions regarding inequality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude or belief</th>
<th>Pre-test Mean</th>
<th>Post-test Mean</th>
<th>Difference of Means</th>
<th>Significance of Change*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare is a positive way of aiding those in need</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless people are too lazy to get a job*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness is often the result of circumstances beyond a person's control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people just do not work hard enough - if they worked harder they would have more resources*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options consisted of a five point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
*These questions were recoded so that the response values are switched: 1=5, 2=4, 3=3, 4=2, 5=1.
The means recorded in this table reflect the recoded data.
^A t-test was used to determine the significance of differences of means between the pre- and post-tests.
NS indicates that there is no significant difference. Values (e.g. .01, .02) indicate the significance value.

The mean scores did increase for every question for both the discussion group students and the SOC 101 only students, although the increases are not all statistically
significant. One question that shows a significant difference in the pre- and post-course means is the discussion group students’ responses to homelessness being beyond a person’s control. We focused specifically on homelessness during the discussion course.

*Inequality: Scenario*

One of the scenarios I used in the pre- and post-course survey is about homelessness. The scenario question is:

A homeless middle-aged woman sits on a ragged blanket on the sidewalk of the bustling city street. She holds out a dirty McDonald’s coffee cup that contains a one dollar bill, several quarters, a few dimes, and some pennies. Her clothing is ragged and she looks hopeless.

*Why is this woman homeless? What could have contributed to her current situation? What should she be doing about her situation? What is the responsibility of society in regard to this woman?*

One SOC 101 only student responded:

*PRE-Course:* It could be her own fault, or it could be because of reasons beyond her control. Instead of just wallowing in self-pity for whatever reason, she should decide to conquer her destiny and take the steps she needs to get back on her feet.

*POST-Course:* There are several reasons this woman could be homeless. Jobs are not always readily available. If this woman is black she could have an even harder time getting a job and a house. I think she needs to try to get back on her feet by doing whatever it takes. Society should begin to stop judging people and start helping by providing ways to help a person in such a hard situation.

One discussion group student analyzed the pre-course scenario by placing sole responsibility on the homeless woman but recognized the need for society's help in the post-course analysis:

*PRE-Course:* This woman is homeless most likely because she made some poor decisions earlier in her life. This woman should stop feeling sorry for herself and go into society with the attitude that she is going to succeed. The responsibility of society in this situation is to not help the woman until she helps herself. It is her own fault that she is living on the street and not society’s responsibility to take care of her.

*POST-Course:* This woman is homeless probably because she made some bad decisions earlier in her life. The responsibility of society in this situation is to lend support to the woman in any manner possible. She needs help getting reacquainted with society and properly situated.
Another SOC 101 only student demonstrated an increased ability to recognize other possible factors in the situation:

**PRE-Course:** I think that by her just sitting and begging for money she is not trying hard enough to make something of herself.

**POST-Course:** There are several reasons that she could be homeless. Initially one would probably assume that she just never wanted to work, but there are a lot of other scenarios as possible reasons. She could have lived in poverty all of her life. She could be suffering from discrimination or she could just not have the resources.

One discussion group student answered "strongly disagree" on the pre-course question of "Homelessness is often the result of circumstances beyond a person’s control," and answered "agree" on the post-course survey. This student’s analysis of the scenario reflects this realization of social structures impacting the homeless:

**PRE-Course:** This woman could be homeless for many reasons whether it was her addiction to drugs and alcohol or her lack of college education. She should get up and apply for a job! She could be receiving unemployment checks and working at the McDonald’s rather than advertising their logo.

**POST-Course:** This woman could have been abused, thrown out of her home, has no family, or got into a bad drug habit. She most likely was born into a poor family or had an extremely rough life to get her where she is today. Society’s responsibility is to have a shelter or some sort of housing opportunity and feeding available. She will die very quickly if her physical needs aren’t met. Shouldn’t that be what our taxes are paying for?

**Inequality: Qualitative**

Overall, the discussion group students began to recognize the systemic and structural components of inequality in our discussions of race, gender and poverty. Rather than simply looking at the individual level and blaming individuals, they demonstrated their sociological imagination by understanding C. Wright Mills’ distinction between "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure." When asked what they learned about inequality, the discussion group students responded:

Inequality is systemic – it is ingrained and needs to be taken out of our country and social classes.

I’ve realized that as much as I want to believe that I’m equal to everybody around me, it’s not the case for simple reasons such as where I grew up and who my childhood friends were.
The students benefited from being made aware of inequality and the extent to which it is an issue and affects the lives of people in a negative way. Many of them have never seen acute inequality firsthand, and it was extremely important for them to be made aware of it and then familiarized with the deeper issues surrounding inequality:

I now recognize that inequality is persistent and is a major force in society that needs to be dealt with. Inequality hurts people who try to make something good out of their lives.

I’ve learned the extent to which inequality is present in society today, and simply by recognizing it, it is a step along the way to making a difference.

*Civic and Social Responsibility: Quantitative*

To determine the students’ development of a sense of civic and social responsibility throughout the course, I analyzed questions from the rest of the survey that indicate aspects of this sense of responsibility (see Table 6).

**TABLE 6**
Statistical significance of pre- and post-course survey score differences in discussion group students (DG) and SOC 101 only students (101) on questions indicating a sense of civic and social responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude or belief</th>
<th>Pre-test Mean</th>
<th>Post-test Mean</th>
<th>Difference of Means</th>
<th>Significance of Change^a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Indicate how important these things are to you:</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for peace and justice</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for the poor</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping people in need</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working toward equal opportunity for all US citizens</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG students</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options consisted of a four point scale ranging from 1 (Not important) to 4 (Essential).

^a A t-test was used to determine the significance of differences of means between the pre- and post-tests.

NS indicates that there is no significant difference. Values (e.g. .01, .02) indicate the significance value.
There is a more statistically significant increase in means for the discussion group students than the SOC 101 only students, but these increases are not very large. Many of the students seemed to have difficulty linking their knowledge about the issues we discussed to their role in addressing them.

*Civic and Social Responsibility: Qualitative*

Throughout the discussion group it seemed as though the students developed their sense of civic and social responsibility regarding racial issues more than anything else. Many of the students indicated that they want to be involved in racial reconciliation and are now more conscious about racist actions and attitudes. Several students commented:

> Before this class, I knew there were racial inequalities, but I guess I never knew how severe things were. My views have changed in the simple fact that I am more conscious. Constantly throughout my day I am keenly trying to be alert to racial or prejudiced words or actions toward other cultures.

> My views about race have changed drastically. I feel like I am responsible to inform others of their wrong assumptions of normal human beings.

> I plan on trying to shape the views of my future family regarding racial issues.

> I plan on getting more involved in these issues about race. I actually think I'm going to change my major to sociology, just to learn and embrace these concepts on a deeper level.

*Self-Learning Evaluations*

At the end of the discussion group course I had the discussion group students fill out self-learning evaluations. Table 7 indicates the students' evaluation of discussion group experience and its fulfillment of course objectives (see Appendix 1 for course syllabus and objectives).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Percentage of students who agree with statement*</th>
<th>Mean score on 4 point scale</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Throughout this course I reexamined my personal ideas and perspectives about the issues of race, gender, and inequality</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This course helped me develop a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This course helped me learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options consisted of a four point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
*Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree

These data indicate that the course was successful in fulfilling the course objectives I established for the students to critically evaluate their ideas, values, and perspectives regarding race, gender, and inequality. Table 8 includes questions that represent the fostering of a sociological imagination, and the students indicated whether or not they agreed that the discussion course contributed to this.
TABLE 8
Student self learning evaluation of the discussion group experience and its contribution to fostering a sociological imagination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Percentage of students who agree with statement*</th>
<th>Mean score on 4 point scale</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This course contributed to my understanding of sociology</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This course contributed to my understanding of race, gender, and inequality issues</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now look at racial issues in a new perspective after taking this course</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now look at gender issues in a new perspective after taking this course</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I now look at inequality issues in a new perspective after taking this course</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I now have a deeper understanding of race, gender, and inequality as a result of this course</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this course, I feel more strongly about the need to be involved in racial reconciliation</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree

Note: Response options consisted of a four point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

On all but one question, 100% of the respondents responded favorably that the course helped them develop a sociological imagination. These data indicate that the course was successful in fostering the "deep understanding" I hoped it would.

I asked the students to evaluate the discussion group experience in comparison to the SOC 101 course. Table 9 indicates the results.
TABLE 9
Student self learning evaluation of the discussion group experience and its significance in comparison to SOC 101 course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Percentage of students who agree with statement*</th>
<th>Mean score on 4 point scale</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussing race and gender issues helped me understand the issues beyond the understanding I gained from the SOC 101 course</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My sociological imagination was developed in this course beyond the understanding I gained from the SOC 101 course</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discussion course was a beneficial addition to the SOC 101 course</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discussion course should be a regular feature of the SOC 101 course</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options consisted of a four point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
*Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree

All of the respondents agreed that the discussion group helped them understand racial and gender issues beyond the understanding they gained in the SOC 101 course and 94% agreed that their sociological imagination was developed further in the discussion course. In their evaluations, students commented on why they felt the discussion course was a beneficial addition to SOC 101. They responded:

I feel like I learned more in this discussion group than in a more formal class setting and I think it benefited me a great deal.

This discussion course taught me more than I learned in SOC 101. It was more interesting, easier to be involved in and understand.

I think that this course really helps students understand concepts that we just breeze over in regular sociology class. I feel like I learned so much more during the discussions than I did in the normal sociology class.

The discussion course was a great way for students to further their understanding of social issues in a more in depth way,

You get deeper into some of the issues we touch on in SOC 101 and it helps as far as understanding that material as well as better understanding the world around you.
Conclusion

Summary

This project analyzes the impact that a Principles of Sociology course has on the development of students' sociological imagination and sense of civic responsibility. Beyond that, the project focuses on whether or not participation in a discussion group course increases the aforementioned results. The data from the course show that the Principles course was effective in fostering this learning, and that the students who participated in the discussion group exhibited an even greater sense of sociological imagination and deep understanding of race, gender, and inequality issues than the students who did not take the discussion course.

The discussion course was particularly successful in increasing students' awareness and understanding of racial issues. The students also developed a recognition of structural issues of inequality. The primary results of the discussion course were that students became aware of racial, gender, and inequality issues and developed a deeper understanding of these issues. My hope is that this awareness and understanding will lead to the fulfillment of students' civic and social responsibility throughout their lives as they embrace this new understanding.

Further Research

Further research needs to be conducted in the area of student learning in general, and in the effectiveness of the discussion group for the Principles course specifically. This project only analyzed a small number of students, and more discussion courses need to be conducted to compare results.
Recommendations

From my perspective, the course was successful in engaging students with sociological issues and allowing them to talk openly about their opinions and questions. Many of these students had never had discussions about racism or sexism, and many did not consider these to be a problem in contemporary society. I think it is crucial that we promote the open discussion of these important issues, and the discussion group is an excellent forum for that to occur.

Therefore, I recommend that the Sociology Department carefully analyze the value of discussion groups and consider adding them to the curriculum. While the department has solid methods of teaching the Principles course, I believe the quality of teaching and learning would increase if discussion groups were used more frequently. There are many ways of adding this to the Principles course, and I offer a few suggestions.

1. Conduct the Principles of Sociology course like the History general education courses in which the entire class meets two days a week and then splits off into sections for the third class of the week. The professor has different times allotted to lead smaller seminar sessions. Use this time for group discussion and deeper analysis of the issues that are of interest to the students. The students could take turns leading the discussions, or have input into what topics are discussed so that the areas they are really interested in are covered.

2. Keep the discussion course as an option for fourth credit and as a distinct course. The professor could lead this course, or an alternative is to have senior sociology students lead the course. These students can be teaching assistants.
for the Principles course and then lead the discussion course independently. If a syllabus is developed, the senior sociology student can use this as a model and simply facilitate discussion (see Appendix 3 for additional resource information). This provides an opportunity for senior students to gain experience in the classroom, and also allows the discussion group students the freedom of talking more openly in the class than they might if the professor were present. Many of the discussion group students in my course commented that they felt more freedom to give their opinions and ask questions since I was facilitating discussion and the professor was not in the room. Having a senior student lead the discussion course provides a more relaxed and open environment for conversation about important issues.

3. A related suggestion to the previous idea of having senior sociology students lead discussions is to have several options for the discussion course each semester. Because we had so many people interested in taking the discussion course when I led it, I had to hold two different sections, and more people would have participated if it had fit into their schedules. Thus, it would be beneficial to the Principles students if there were several options as to which discussion group they joined. These discussion groups could focus on different topics. For example, the discussion group I held emphasized race and gender. Other possible topics are poverty, government, environment, family, religion, etc. If there were several discussion group options offered in a particular semester, the Principles students would be able to take the course that interested them and the senior students could teach in their areas of
interest as well. These courses could even be offered to the students in
different sections of Principles.
Appendix 1 - Fourth Credit Discussion Group Syllabus

Syllabus

Principles of Sociology
4th Credit Option - Discussion Group
Fall 2003

Wednesday: 8-8:50 pm - Kline 104
Thursday: 3-3:50 pm - Kline 106

Melody L. Boyd, Teaching Assistant
E-mail: mb1278@messiah.edu

Introduction

The 4th credit option discussion group is designed to supplement the information and material provided in the SOC 101 Principles of Sociology course. Special emphasis will be given to the issues of race, gender, and inequality. We will use a sociological framework to further analyze and discuss these issues. Students participating in service-learning will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences with the group, allowing for dialogue and feedback.

Course Objectives

♦ Use a sociological imagination fostered in SOC 101 to examine the issues of race, gender, and inequality.
♦ Consider our own personal ideas and perspectives in light of this examination.
♦ Come to a deeper understanding of race, gender, and inequality.
♦ Learn to respect and value the opinions of others, even when they differ from our own.
♦ Appreciate the importance of dialogue and discussion about difficult issues, recognizing that we can learn a lot from others in the process.
♦ Develop critical thinking and analysis skills.

Course Components

The course will consist primarily of in-class discussion. In order to promote discussion and understanding, some of the class sessions will consist of videos and in-class readings. There will also be several reading assignments to be completed out of class. In order to ensure active participation and interaction with the issues discussed in class, students will be required to bring at least two thoughtful questions for class discussion each week. These questions can be based on readings, previous class discussion, or personal observation. Also, there will be opportunities for students to write brief response papers to readings, videos, and discussions.
Course Assessment

Grading for the 4th credit option discussion group will be based on competency grading. The course is Pass/Fail, and certain requirements must be met in order for a student to receive a passing grade.

♦ Attendance - Students must attend at least 10 out of the 13 weekly sessions.
♦ Participation
  ♦ Students must bring two satisfactory discussion questions to class each week. Questions will be graded satisfactory or unsatisfactory, depending on their relevance to the issues. A total of 16 questions must be handed in by the end of the semester.
  ♦ Brief response papers will be assigned both in class and out of class. These papers will consist of only several paragraphs, but they must be satisfactory in order for credit to be given. A paper will be deemed satisfactory if it is thoughtful and relevant. Papers that are graded unsatisfactory will be returned to the students, and students will have the opportunity to rewrite the paper in order to receive a satisfactory mark. Three of the four total response papers assigned must be handed in, and opportunities to make up for missed assignments will be offered if necessary.
  ♦ Discussion and dialogue in class is crucial to the development of one's own views of the issues, as well as to the success of the course. Therefore, in-class discussion is extremely important, and students should actively participate in the class by offering their viewpoints and questions.

Students who receive a passing grade in the course will have the option to skip the writing section of the final exam in SOC 101. Students will be notified of their grades prior to the end of the SOC 101 course, providing time for students to make the decision whether or not to forgo taking the writing section of the final.

Course Texts

All in-class readings will be provided to the students in each class session. All out of class readings are on reserve at the library. There are two textbooks on reserve, as well as several photocopies of articles. The two textbooks are two different editions of Rethinking the Color Line by Charles A. Gallagher. I have indicated in the Course Schedule the page numbers for the readings and their location in the respective editions. Some of the readings are found only in one edition, in which case I have made a photocopy of each of these articles in order for two copies to be available. Again, this is indicated in the Course Schedule for each reading assignment.
Course Schedule

1. Week One (9/10 - 9/11) - Introduction
   ♦ Review syllabus
   ♦ Introductions
   ♦ Discussion of involvement in service learning
   ♦ Overview of race, gender, and inequality

2. Week Two (9/17 - 9/18) - Race
   ♦ Video - Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads: 1965-1985 Series Introduction

3. Week Three (9/24 - 9/25) - Residential Segregation
   ♦ Video - Two Societies (1965-1968)

4. Week Four (10/1 - 10/2) - Poverty
   ♦ Video - The Promised Land (1967-1968)

5. Week Five (10/8 - 10/9) - Education
   ♦ Video - The Keys to the Kingdom (1974-1980)

6. Week Six (10/15 - 10/16) - Media
   ♦ "Put on a Happy Face: Masking the Differences between Blacks and Whites" by Benjamin DeMott (library reserve) Gallagher text Edition One pp. 358-365, and one photocopy.
   ♦ Video - Color Adjustment

7. Week Seven (10/22 - 10/23) - Reconciliation
   ♦ In Class Reading
     ♦ "10 Simple Things You Can Do..."
8. Week Eight (10/29 - 10/30) - Gender
   ♦ In Class Readings
     ♦ "A Feminist Sociology of Gender"
     ♦ "Theories of Gender Socialization"

9. Week Nine (11/5 - 11/6) - Gender Inequality
   ♦ Video - Sexism in Language
   ♦ In Class Readings
     ♦ "Sexism and Language"

10. Week Ten (11/12 - 11/13) - Work
    ♦ "Sex Segregation in the Workplace" by Renzetti and Curran (library reserve) two photocopies.
    ♦ In Class Readings
      ♦ "Gender and Housework"
      ♦ "The Child Care Dilemma"
      ♦ "Gender and Homelessness"

11. Week 11 (11/19 - 11/20) - Violence
    ♦ Video - Acquaintance Rape

12. Week 12 (12/3 - 12/4) - Advertising
    ♦ Video - Tough Guise

13. Week 13 (12/10 - 12/11)
    ♦ "Wrap Up" Final Discussion
    ♦ Evaluation
    ♦ Review
Appendix 2 - Survey Scenario Questions

Below are three brief paragraphs describing three different scenarios. For each scenario, please write at least several sentences responding to the scenario with your views and perspectives on the issue. Explain the scenario from your point of view. Several questions are listed to help give you an idea of what you should be thinking about as you analyze the scenario.

Scenario One -
A homeless middle-aged woman sits on a ragged blanket on the sidewalk of the bustling city street. She holds out a dirty McDonald's coffee cup that contains a one dollar bill, several quarters, a few dimes, and some pennies. Her clothing is ragged and she looks hopeless.

Why is this woman homeless? What could have contributed to her current situation? What should she be doing about her situation? What is the responsibility of society in regard to this woman?

Scenario Two -
An African-American teenage boy is struggling academically in high school. He is also getting into a lot of trouble in school because he fights often with the other kids. He has been in trouble with the law because of his violent behavior outside of school. His dream is to become a medical doctor, but he does not plan on going to college.

What are some possible explanations for this African-American boy's behavior? What circumstances could be contributing to the problems he is having? What, if anything, should be done to help change his behavior?

Scenario Three -
Emily's dream has always been to study International Relations and travel to different parts of the world in the course of a career in this field. She gets married when she is a junior in college and has a baby right after she graduates with a degree in International Relations. She now desires to begin her career, but her husband thinks she should stay at home with the baby.

What do you think Emily should do? What would you do if you were Emily? Why would you do that? What societal expectations contribute to this situation?
Appendix 3 - Discussion Group Resource Bibliography

- The following is a list of the texts I used in the discussion group course:


- "Theories of Gender Socialization." Pp. 68.
- "Gender and Housework." Pp. 164-165.
- "Sex Segregation in the Workplace." 196-203.

- The following is a resource list of theoretical material I read in order to prepare for the discussion group course:


Works Cited


