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EXPECTATIONS AND ACTUAL PERFORMANCE IN THE CLASSROOM: An Explorative Study of Students' Perceptions of Professors of Color at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's).

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Abstract

To what extent do the stereotypes and prejudices of white American college students influence their perception and expectations of non-white professors? An adjunct to this is the measure of the students' perceptions of the actual performance of the non-white professors in juxtaposition to the expectations. This is a benchmark study to determine the possible congruity between White students' perceptions, expectations of performance, and the actual performance of professors of color in predominantly White institutions otherwise referred to as PWIs. The question is: To what extent is race a determining variable in the perception of the expertise of the professor facilitator, whose job it is to build positive and cooperative learning environment for the students, albeit White students in predominantly White institutions?

This question becomes pertinent because of the wave of multiculturalism sweeping the country, which, in itself is a reflection of the burgeoning nonWhite population that is fueling racial diversity in America's colleges and universities. Contrary to prejudicial expectations, the perceptions of predominantly White students in the predominantly White University under study are favorable and non-discriminatory toward their professors of color.

Introduction

Students bring with them to the classroom prejudices, stereotypes, and general pre-cognitions of the classroom experience. In many instances college students prefer to register for and take classes with professors with whom they identify, like, and have expectations of success. Oftentimes, however, the choice is not available to the students, and this may lead them to take classes with professors they do not necessarily know, care about, or perceive to meet their competency expectations, and in whose class they are not sure of a chance of higher success. This may be the case with white students with professors of color in predominantly white institutions.

As the issue of professor preference is prevalent among college students and, that such expression of preference may determine the success or failure of professors in their academic and classroom activities, the issue of students' perceptions, expectations of, and the actual performance of the professors, is worthy of examination and evaluation.

A distinction is expected between student perceptions and expectations of professors, who are of the same race as against those who are not of the same race with the students. That is, racial divergence between professors and students is expected to yield divergence of perceptions and expectations of the students. Consonance of perceptions and expectations is expected between students and professors who are of the same race. This expectation is informed by prevalent racial segregation and classification of schools and colleges in the United States, and the rhetoric of white superiority and dominance that pervades mainstream media and channels of popular discourse in the nation. The likelihood that a white student would like or prefer a white professor to a non-white professor, and thus rate the white professor highly or more favorably, is equally informed by the mainstream white (Anglo-European) domination of the American cultural and intellectual space. In the same vein, in face of the critical scholarship of Afrocentrism (Asante, 1997), a claim is made that students of color would identify with, like, and have positive expectations of professors of color. These are assertions that should be empirically examined.

To what extent do the stereotypes and prejudices of white American college students influence their perception and expectations of non-white professors? An adjunct to this is the measure of the students' perceptions of the actual performance of the non-white professors in juxtaposition to the expectations. This is a benchmark study to determine the possible variability between white students' perceptions, expectations of performance, and the actual performance of professors of color in predominantly white institutions otherwise referred to as PWIs.

In the restructuring of higher education in America, a great emphasis has been placed on teaching and learning (McGowan, 1996). Traditional education paradigm relied on the professor to disseminate expert information to the students (Angelo, 1993), while contemporary paradigm emphasizes the role of the professor as that of a facilitator of knowledge (Bonwell, 1997; Plater, 1995). McGowan (1996) observes that the contemporary paradigm presupposes that the professor develops positive, cooperative relationships with the student. To fuse the two paradigms, one has to infer that a facilitator is also an expert, who occupies , in the eyes of the students, position of high credibility through expertise and who can harness, interpret, and evaluate information in the process of facilitating student understanding through critical analysis. The question then becomes, to what extent is race a determining variable in the perception of the expertise of the professor facilitator, whose job it is to build positive and cooperative learning environment for the students, albeit white students in predominantly white institutions?

This question becomes pertinent because of the wave of multiculturalism sweeping the country, which, in itself is a reflection of the burgeoning non-white population that is fueling racial diversity in America's colleges and universities. This has led, sometimes as a matter of necessity, to increased interest in multiculturalism. Reiterating McGowan (1996) confirms that "with the heightened interest in higher education multiculturalism, more than likely, predominantly white colleges and universities' student body and faculty will become more diverse. " The need for empirical literature on the impact of the race of the professor on teaching and perceptions of students is more pertinent than ever before. And as McGowan (1996) observes, there is dirt of literature on the subject of race and effective college teaching, which will become more important as colleges and universities strive to become multicultural. Such empirical literature, when available, can better inform the evaluation criteria of professors of color in predominantly white institutions and inform the employment and retention choices of non-white professors by administrators of the predominantly white institutions. This is especially necessary in light of the assertion of Moses (1991) that many predominantly white universities and colleges are placing greater efforts to recruit and retain African-American faculty. Consequently, students at predominantly white institutions will, more than likely, see more faculty of color in the classroom (Boutte, 1999).

This study is an empirical study of the perceptions white students have of their professors of color in their various predominantly white institutions. It is a self-report questionnaire designed to gauge the students' perception of professor of color's competence, intelligence, preparation, class performance, thoroughness, fairness, work load expectations , race preference, etc. --all contrasted with the report of actual evaluations of same variables by the students.

Purpose of study

The study was designed to measure the attitudes of students toward professors of color (independent variable) as it relates to classroom learning, expectations, behavior, and experience of students (independent variables), contrasted with the actual performance of these professors in the estimation of their students. A total of seven classes drawn from two universities and two community colleges on Long Island, each averaging 25 students were examined. Out of a total of 175 students, 137 of them actually participated in the study. The class standing distribution of the respondents is 57 freshmen, 35 sophomores, 23 juniors, and 22 seniors. The instrument for data collection was a self-administered survey questionnaire which had a total of twelve questions. The questions and the students' responses to them are stated and analyzed in the following pages.

Method

This study encompassed a total of four colleges and universities in the New York area, two of which are State or 2-year institutions (Community Colleges) offering Associate Degrees, and the other two are private four-year institutions, offering undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The respondents were the students in targeted seven classes which comprised of a total of 175 students of these predominantly white institutions of higher learning.

A survey questionnaire was the instrument designed to elicit the responses of the subjects of the study. The instrument contained questions that relate to students' perception and evaluation of professors of color vis-a-vis their counterparts in terms of a number of variables that relate to classroom experiences. In addition to demographic questions, the students were asked nine questions that serve as research questions to establish any variance in the students' expectations and recall of actual performance of professors of color vis-à-vis their counterparts.

The survey questions were designed to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. Do students in predominantly white institutions have any contact with professors of color? The answer to this is obvious, but the question serves to determine the relevance of the follow-up questions, in case the students had no contact with professors of color.
2. Do the students in these institutions have any preference for professors of a particular sex?
3. Do students in PWIs have any preference for professors of a particular ethnicity /race?

4. What effect, if any, does a professor's non-American accent have on the classroom experience of the students?
5. How do students in the institutions of higher learning under study rate their learning expectation when being taught by a professor of color?
6. How do students in PWIs rate their expectations of being fairly graded by their professors of color?
7. How respected do students feel they are treated while being instructed by a professor of color?
8. How would students rate their class work load when instructed by professors of color?
9. What were the actual classroom experiences of the students contrasted with their expectations, while being instructed by professors of color?
10. How would PWI students rate their instructors of color in contrast with their other counterparts in terms of professionalism, fairness, toughness, patience, understanding, easy-going, and friendliness?

The responses of the students were reported as percentages and presented as simple data distribution tables.

Findings and Data Analysis

The assumption of this study is that students at predominantly White universities and colleges must have had some classroom experience with instructors of color. To confirm such contact and to establish the premise for the study, respondents were asked to confirm if they had had any contact with non-White instructors in their various institutions. The responses confirmed that all of the respondents had prior contacts, albeit minimal, with instructors of color. 55 percent of them had been exposed to two or more instructors of color, while 45% of them had been exposed to at least one. The experience as minimal as it is for most of these students must be significant for such reason. Therefore, seeking their perceptions of these unique experiences will, without doubt add to body of knowledge about multicultural experience in the American colleges and universities and thus inform the performance of such instructors in the classroom, administrators who aspire to hire them, and the general explication of pedagogy in an increasingly multiracial diverse and global academia.

Table 1
Respondents' Contact with Professors of Color.

At least 1 Professor of color	45%
2-4 Professors of color	51%
5 and above professors of color.	4%

Preference of College Instructor in terms of Sex:

Isolating race as the only possible determinant variable of this study may prejudice the responses of the subjects, especially if the race question comes first in the series of questions in the survey instrument. Therefore, in addition to race, an attempt was made to determine the preference of the respondents regarding the sex of the instructor. The study, however, did not confirm sex as a significant variable in determining preference of instructors among the population of the study. The survey revealed that 7% of the respondents preferred a male Professor, while 2% of them preferred a female professor. In terms of class standing, freshmen students did not as yet form an opinion either way and this was reflected in the results. The majority of respondents (91%) reported sex of the instructor did not influence them in picking which professors' classes to take. See table 2.

Table 2
Percentage Distribution of Instructor Sex Preference

Class Standing	No Preference	Male Professor	Female Professor
Freshmen	54 of 57 (95%)	0	0
Sophomore	31 of 35 (89%)	3 of 35 (8.5%)	1 of 35 (3%)
Junior	22 of 23 (91%)	1 of 23 (4.3%)	1 of 23 (4.3%)
Senior	18 of 22 (82%)	3 of 22 (14%)	1 of 22 (4.5 %)
N 137 (100%)	125 (91%)	7 (5%)	3 (2%)

Preference of College Instructor in terms of Ethnicity /Race:

The following is a breakdown of the subjects' responses about preference of the race/ethnicity of their instructors. An overwhelming majority of the students, regardless of their class standing, had no

race/ethnicity preference in their choice of instructors. A rather insignificant number of the respondents (2.1%) preferred Black professors, while an even smaller percentage (1.4) preferred White professors. As expected freshmen students did not reflect any preferences, perhaps because they had yet to form opinions of their college instructors. Interestingly, none of the students who identified their preferences selected Asian or Hispanic instructors.

Table 3
Percentage Distribution of College Instructor Race Preference

Class Standing	No Preference	Black Professor	White Professor
Freshmen	55 of 57 (97%)	0	0
Sophomore	32 of 35 (92%)	2 of 35 (6%)	1 of 35 (3%)
Junior	22 of 23 (90%)	1 of 23 (4.5%)	1 of 23 (4.5%)
Senior	2 of 22 (100%)	0	0
N = 137 (100%)		131 (95.6%)	3 (2.1%)
			2 (1.4%)

Question: What effect does an instructor with a non-American English accent have on your classroom learning & performance?

15 percent of all respondents believed that a college instructor with a non-American English accent would have a positive effect on their classroom learning and performance. However, **58%** of all respondents believed that a college instructor with an accent would have a **negative effect** on classroom learning and performance. **27%** of respondents believed there would be **no effect** on their classroom learning and performance when instructed by a non-native American English speaking professor.

Table 4
Student Perceptions of Instructors with Non - American (U.S.A.) Accents

Class Standing	Positive/somewhat Positive	Negative/somewhat Negative	No Effect
Freshmen	12 of 57 (21%)	55 of 57 (97%)	18 of 57 (32%)
Sophomore	4 of 35 (11.4%)	32 of 35 (92%)	8 of 35 (23%)
Junior	4 of 23 (17%)	22 of 23 (90%)	6 of 23 (26%)
Senior	1 of 22 (4.5%)	22 of 22 (100%)	5 of 22 (23%)
N = 137 (100%) 21 of 137 (15%) 79 of 137 (58%) 37 of 137 (27%)			

Question: How would you rate your class performance when taught by a professor of color?

The perception of a majority of the respondents in this study that non-native English speaking professor's accent would adversely affect their classroom learning and performance, should be weighed against the actual performance of the students that had had professors with such different accents for some of their courses. In regard to their actual class performance when taught by a professor of color, the respondents were asked to respond by selecting one of the following choices ranging from **excellent, very good, or good, to fair or poor or not different from other professors.** **18%** of all respondents rated their class performance as either **excellent, very good or good**, while **82%** of all respondents rated their class performance as **no different from other professors.** **No respondents** rated their class performance as either **fair or poor.**

There is a divide between the perception of effectiveness of learning and performance when taught by professors with non-American English accents and the students' actual performance when they were taught by professors of color. This is not to suggest that all professors of color speak with non-native accent, but that a distinction should be made between professors of color who are native speakers and those that are non-native speakers. The variables at play here are, therefore, derivatives associated with color and not color itself.

Table 5
Class Performance When Taught By Professor of Color

<u>Excellent/Very good/Good effect</u>		<u>No Different From other Professors</u>	<u>Poor/Fair</u>
Freshmen	11 of 57 (19%)	46 of 57 (81%)	
Sophomore	5 of 35 (14%)	30 of 35 (86 %%)	
Junior	6 of 23 (26%)	17 of 23 (74%)	
Senior	<u>2 of 22</u> (9%)	<u>20 of 22</u> (91%)	
N = 137	24 of 137 (18%)	113 of 137 (82%)	0%

Question: How would you rate your learning expectations when being instructed by a professor of color?

Respondents were asked to select from the following choices ranging from **excellent, very good, good, to fair, poor or no different from other professors**. Again, majority (82%) of the respondents rated their **learning expectations** when instructed by professors of color as being **No different from other professors**. **17%** of the respondents reported their **learning expectations** as excellent, **very good or good** while **0.72%** rated their **learning expectations** as fair.

Table 6
Learning Expectations When Taught By Professor of Color

<u>Excellent/Very good/Good effect</u>		<u>No Different from other Professors</u>	<u>Poor/Fair</u>
Freshmen	12 of 57 (21%)	44 of 57 (77%)	1 of 57 (1.75%)
Sophomore	3 of 35 (9%)	31 of 35 (89%)	-----
Junior	5 of 23 (22%)	18 of 23 (78%)	-----
Senior	<u>3 of 22</u> (14%)	<u>19 of 22</u> (86%)	-----
N= 137	23 of 137 (17%)	112 of 137 (82%)	1 of 137 (0.72%)

Question: How would you rate your expectations of being treated fairly when instructed by a professor of color?

Respondents were asked to rate their expectation of being treated fairly by professor of color using the adapted Likert rubric of Excellent, Very Good, good, to Fair, poor or No different from other Professors. **22%** of all respondents rated their expectations of being treated fairly as either **Excellent, Very good or Good**, while **78%** of all respondents rated their expectation of being treated fairly as **No Different from other Professors**. A rather low percentage of the students (**0.72%**) rated their **treatment expectation** as **Fair**. Only 1 out of the total of 57 freshmen indicated he/she expected poor treatment from professors of color.

Table 7
Expectations of Fair Treatment When Instructed By Professors of Color

<u>Excellent/Very good/Good effect</u>	<u>No Different From other Professors</u>	<u>Poor/Fair</u>
Freshmen	10 of 57 (18%)	46 of 57 (81%)
		1 of 57 (1.75%)
Sophomore	8 of 35 (23%)	27 of 35 (77%)

Junior	8 of 23 (35%)	15 of 23 (65%)

Senior	<u>4 of 22</u> (18%)	<u>19 of 22</u> (86%)

N=137	30 of 137 (22%)	107 of 137 (78%)
		1 of 137 (0.72%)

Question: How respected you felt you were treated when instructed by a professor of color?

Respondents were asked to identify in this question whether they felt more respected, less respected or neutral, that is, no more or less when taught by a professor of color. **7%** of all respondents (10 students) felt they were **more respected**, **0.72%** felt **less respected** and **78%** of all respondents felt the effect was **neutral; they were neither more or less respected**.

Table 8**Feelings of Respect When Taught By Professors of Color**

	<u>Feel More Respected</u>	<u>Feel Less Respected</u>	<u>Neutral (Neither more or less)</u>
Freshmen	4 of 57 (7%)	-----	53 of 57 (93%)
Sophomore	4 of 35 (11%)	-----	31 of 35 (89%)
Junior	2 of 23 (9%)	-----	21 of 23 (91%)
Senior	<u>0 of 22 (0%)</u>	<u>1 of 22 (4.54%)</u>	<u>2 of 22 (91%)</u>
N=137	10 of 137 (7%)	1 of 137 (0.72%)	107 of 137 (78%)

Question: How would you rate your expectations on class work load when instructed by a professor of color?

When asked to rate their expectations of class work load when instructed by professors of color, the respondents had choices ranging from No Expectations, Less Work, More Work, and Same as other Instructors. The following are their responses: **4% (6 of 137)** of all respondents **expected more class work load; 0.72% (1 of 137)** expected **less class work load; 95%** of all respondents expected that it would be the **same class work load as that of other instructors.** All respondents had expectations.

Question: Provide actual classroom experiences when instructed by a professor of color as opposed to other professors.

Respondents were required to describe their actual experiences when taught by professors of color in regard to a sandwich of variables that capture the total experience of the students in the classroom beyond the specific variables identified in previous research questions. These variables are **thoroughness, understanding (agreeable), class workload, abrasiveness, patience, toughness; friendliness; easy going; intelligence, professionalism; helpfulness; student's classroom learning, and fairness.** In their

responses, the respondents were to rate the professors of color as more or less or neutral in terms of these variables when compared to white professors. **Neutral** indicated there was no difference in Actual Classroom Experience between the two categories of professors while **more** indicated that there was a **more positive effect or influence on** that category or adjective, in regards to Actual Classroom Experience when instructed by professors of color as opposed to other professors. **less** indicated that there was a **less favorable or negative effect or influence on** that category or adjective, regarding Actual Classroom Experience when instructed by professors of color as opposed to other professors.

Table 9
Class Workload Expectations When Instructed By Professors of Color

	<u>More Work Load</u>	<u>Same as other Instructors</u>	<u>Less Work Load</u>
Freshmen	3 of 57 (5%)	54 of 57 (95%)	
Sophomore	1 of 35 (3%)	34 of 35 (97%)	
Junior	2 of 23 (9%)	21 of 23 (91%)	
Senior	<u>0 of 22</u> (0%)	<u>21 of 22</u> (95%)	<u>1 of 22</u> (4.54%)
N=137	6 of 137 (4%)	130 of 137 (95%)	1 of 137 (0.72%)

Professors of color rated well on the positive side in 13 different categories, eight of which are highlighted below based on choices regarding whether professors of color exhibited the following characteristics in the classroom experiences of the respondents. Most respondents selected **neutral**, indicating that professors of color had no significantly different effect on their actual classroom experiences in the sandwich of variables when compared to white professors.

The following are the summary of the responses of the students in regard to their actual experiences in the classroom when taught by professors of color in contrast to their white professor counterparts.

Patience- **91%** of all respondents were neutral, while **9 %** of all respondents indicated Professors of color were **More Patient**, while 3% indicated they were **Less patient**.

Friendliness- 18% of respondents indicated that Professors of color were **Friendlier** and 72% were **neutral**.

Toughness- 13% of respondents indicated that Professors of color were **tougher, while 3%** indicated Professors of color were **less tough** than their white counterparts. **82% were neutral**

Easy Going- 13% of respondents indicated that Professors of color were **more easy-going** while 3% indicated they were **less easy going** than their white counterparts.

Intelligence- 15% of respondents indicated that Professors of color were **more intelligent** than their white counterparts, **85% were neutral**.

Professional- 16% of all respondents indicated that Professors of color **were more professional** than their white counterparts, while **84% were neutral**.

Helpfulness – 13% of all respondents indicated that Professors of color were **more helpful** than their white counterparts, **87% were neutral, and less than 1% (0.72%) indicated Professors of color were Less helpful**.

Learning- 12% of all respondents indicated that they **learned more** in classrooms instructed by Professors of color as opposed to those instructed by Professors who were not of color, 88% were neutral, and while less than 1% (0.72%) indicated they **learned Less** in classrooms instructed by Professors of color.

Thoroughness- 5% of all respondents indicated that Professors of color were **more thorough** than their white counterparts, while less than 1% (0.72%) indicated they were **less thorough**, **94% were neutral**.

Understanding- 4% of all respondents indicated that Professors of color were **more understanding**, less than 1% (0.72%) indicated they were **less understanding**, and **93% were neutral**.

Work Load- 6% of all respondents indicated that they **received more work load** from Professors of color, while **91% were neutral**, less than 1% (0.72%) indicated they **received less work load**.

Abrasiveness – 4% of all respondents indicated that Professors of color were **more abrasive**, while 2% indicated they were **less abrasive**, **94% were neutral**.

Fairness- 7% of all respondents indicated that Professors of color **exhibited more fairness**, while less than 1% (0.72%) indicated they were **less fair**, **92% were neutral**.

Table 10
Evaluation of professors of color on a sandwich of variables

Variable	Percentage
#1 Friendly	18%
#2 Professional	16%
#3 Intelligent	15%
#4 Tough	13%
#4 Easy Going	13%
#4 Helpful	13%
#7 Learning	12%
#8 Patient	9%
#9 Fair	7%
#10 Work Load	6%
#11 Thorough	5%
#12 Understanding	4%
#12 Abrasive	4%

Discussion and Recommendations

Expectations vs. Actuality

Based on the results of this study, the majority of students have no higher or lower expectations of Professors of color in comparison to their White counterparts.

From the student's perspective, while there might be preconceived notions as to specific professors' teaching style, examinations, classroom expected behavior, work load, home work, and other factors as it pertains to class work, students are primarily concerned about their final grade regardless of who is issuing it, even though students tend to act or react to a professor based on what their peers (other students) may have recommended or indicated about that particular professor.

A qualified professor of color is accessed by a student in quite a similar manner (for the most part) as a qualified white professor; therefore, the expectations for each are the same.

The reality is that there are fewer professors of color at PWI's than there are white professors, and the questions are: 1) is this disparity due to a deficiency of qualified professors of color? Or 2) Is it due to competition between professors of color and their white counterparts, where white professors out-perform, demonstrate and or exhibit better interviewing and/or general teaching skills than professors of color? 3)

Could it be due to a lack of outreach on the part of school administrators and those in positions to recruit and hire qualified professors?; 4) Is it due to the edge in accessibility and recommendations favoring the white professor when it comes to hiring?; 5) Is there a hint of discrimination, where qualified professors of color are passed over for teaching positions in preference to their white colleagues, even when the qualifications might be identical or similar?.

In our estimation and experience on this issue, a solid recommendation seems to be the primary factor in a professor obtaining a teaching position as opposed to his or her curriculum vitae. Further research is required to ascertain the determining factors in hiring full time or Adjunct professors of color as opposed to a white professor of similar qualifications.

The other issue that must be examined is, do professors of color suffer from an inferiority complex brought on by self-imposed expectations and pressure, in other words, is there a socio-psychological factor to be considered here?.

Since students have a favorable evaluation of the performance of professors of color at PWI, as borne out by this study, the question then is, are professors of color treated differently at PWI's and if so, by whom? This study begs the point, since the premise of the study suggests that there is a difference in the experiences of professors of color at PWI in comparison to white professors.

If real, are the differences between professors of color and white professors merely artificial, an illusion – a psychosomatic problem residing in the minds of these professors of color, or is it real? , and if real, what is the basis for the difference, self-perception, is it color, culture or communication? These are complicated questions this study raises, and partially answered by a panel of Professors of color convened and hosted by Adelphi University, in February 2012 and again in February of 2013, during Black History Month.

Professors of color were given opportunities to discuss some of these very issues and their experiences teaching at Predominantly White Institutions, most professors sharing their experiences do acknowledge there are differences in expectations, in some instances, some insensitivity exhibited by administrators due to ignorance or a lack of awareness, therefore, it is not an illusion in the minds of professors of color, at least not to those in the february2012/2013 panel.

With diversity on college campuses on the rise, and a widening interest in multiculturalism in higher education, more and more PWI's have placed greater emphasis on recruiting and retaining qualified Professors of color.

Perhaps regular forums, workshops, panel discussions and lectures on cultural diversity at PWIs might be a great idea and a way for professors of color to express their positive as well as negative experiences at PWIs , which may lead to positive changes and further understanding of and appreciation for each other's differences and similarities in the ever shrinking global world.

For further study and clarification of the issues impacting the performance of professors of color in PWI's and their relationship with their white colleagues and administrators in general, there should be an examination of the relevant variables as they impact academic performance, evaluation, and promotion. The socio-psychological factors to consider based on the results of this study include

- 1) Standardized or measurable expectations of students, administration, and professors.
- 2) Clarity of perceptions as against reality.3) Hiring practices and 4) The impact of race and culture on items one, two, and three in the academic environment.

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