White Racial Attitudes and White Empathy: The Moderation of Openness to Diversity

Ruth Chu-Lien Chao¹, Meifen Wei², Lisa Spanierman³, Joseph Longo¹, and Dayna Northart⁴

Abstract
A key step toward the actualization of social justice is understanding under what circumstances (i.e., high vs. low openness to diversity [OTD]) non-Latino Whites in each White racial identity attitude status show empathy toward targets of racism. Among a sample of 252 self-identified non-Latino White students, we found moderating effects of OTD. Specifically, for White undergraduates in the two least sophisticated racial identity statuses (i.e., Contact and Disintegration), those who were more open to diversity remained high on White Empathy regardless of their levels of Contact/Disintegration; conversely, those who were less open to diversity demonstrated less White Empathy. In addition, Whites in the last two statuses (i.e., Pseudo-Independence and Autonomy) showed that those who were more open to diversity still remained high on White Empathy regardless of their levels of Pseudo-Independence/Autonomy. However, for those who were less open to diversity, higher levels of Pseudo-Independence/Autonomy were associated with higher levels of empathy toward racism. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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As the populations in the United States become increasingly diverse, it is crucial to reach out to those who suffer from racism to promote social justice (Vera & Speight, 2003). A social justice perspective emphasizes societal concerns such as issues of equity and interdependence. Social justice indicates that people in a society understand that the distribution of resources is not equitable and all members, especially those who feel oppressed, do not feel physically and psychologically safe and secure (Bell, 1997). On college campuses, some students of color endure racist comments such as “You are lucky to be Black . . . [it is] so easy to get into college” (Vingiano, 2014). Mounting evidence has documented that students of color continue to be targets of racism and racial microaggressions on campus (Hernández, Carranza, & Almeida, 2010; Sue, 2008; Sue et al., 2007). To create better campus racial climates, educators and psychologists must explore ways to promote proracial justice attitudes among non-Latino White students and foster racial empathy for targets of racism. Thus, it is important to help students explore their own beliefs and biases, provide information and education, help students understand the sources of injustice, and assist them in appreciating the differences between groups (Snyder, May, & Peeler, 2008).

In counseling, the social justice mission calls attention to understanding the impact of privilege and discrimination on mental health. The goal of social justice is to establish equitable distribution of power and resources to ensure that all individuals (i.e., non-Latino Whites and racial minority people) have the tools for a “good life” (Ratts, Anthony, & Santos, 2010). For Whites, the “good life” may include harmonious relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Pedersen, 2008) and the ability to empathize from a White individual’s perspective (i.e., White empathy; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). White empathy refers to White students’ expression of empathy through a deep understanding of their fellow students’ experiences, especially those of racial and ethnic minority students suffering from racism. White students demonstrate their empathic reactions, including anger, guilt, sadness, and frustration regarding the existence of racism in society. White students may encounter more racial and ethnic minority students due to the increase of diversity at their universities; increasing diversity on campuses further highlights the importance of promoting social justice (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007). To promote social justice on campus, educators and counselors can begin by helping students understand sources of injustice and appreciate the
differences between groups (Snyder et al., 2008). An initial step to fulfill the social justice mission is to understand under what conditions White students’ racial attitudes are related to their empathy toward those individuals experiencing racism. A primary purpose of this study was to promote social justice by understanding how the construct White racial attitudes is related to empathy toward people oppressed by other individuals and institutional racism.

Although associations have been found between White racial identity and White Empathy (Sifford, Ng, & Wang, 2009), from a social justice perspective the critical question remains under what conditions this association occurs. Advocacy for social justice on campuses is promoted through the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics as demonstrated by the statement, “When appropriate, counselors advocate at the individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to examine [and enhance] . . . the growth . . . of [individuals]” (ACA, 2005, p. 5). If White Empathy is an area in which White students may experience growth, counselors should explore the conditions under which White students would develop White empathy toward individuals experiencing racism. Increasing numbers of students of color increases the probability of White students encountering more racial minority students and having more cross-racial interactions (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007). Thus, the increasing number of students of color on campus not only changes the demographic composition of students, but more importantly, creates conditions under which educators and psychologists can study the nature of White students’ responses to the increasingly diverse student population.

To understand individuals’ perceptions toward diversity, scholars (e.g., Miville et al., 1999) have proposed the concept of openness to diversity (OTD), which refers to the appreciation of similarities and differences across cultural groups (e.g., racism experienced by students of color but not by White students). OTD also implies a willingness and interest to explore unknown or unfamiliar cultures without presumptions. Specifically, when White students are less open to diversity, they may also be less willing to consider different perspectives on racial issues and how their Whiteness relates to the racism suffered by people of color. Yet, when White students show greater OTD, they may be more likely to understand how minority students experience racism. Ultimately, this may help White students to better understand their own racial identity and associated unearned privileges. Thus, we proposed that OTD moderates the relationship between White racial identity and White Empathy.

**OTD as a Moderator**

A just society or campus understands and values human diversity and differences, as well as recognizes the dignity of each individual (Vera & Speight,
Based on the principles of social justice, an effective response to White students’ reactions toward on-campus demographic change can begin with understanding students’ attitudes regarding diversity. Miville et al. (1999) introduced the concept of OTD to better understand individuals’ reactions to the increasing number of students of color. By definition, OTD involves three dimensions: (a) be open to diversity and interested in participating in diverse cultural activities, (b) appreciate the impact of diversity on self-understanding and personal growth, and (c) feel comfortable with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Fuertes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 2000). Moreover, OTD represents an important step toward equity (Garmon, 2005). White students with more OTD may ensure that their fellow students have equal opportunity and access to resources instead of perpetuating marginalization or oppression. According to Ratts (2011), such identification of the impact of cultural inequality on racial minority people is a goal of social justice and critical for social advocacy. This appreciation of potential harms of being marginalized may also facilitate White empathy. Empirically, OTD has been positively correlated with White Empathy, with \( r = .47 \); this association indicates that individuals’ OTD is related to their empathic reactions toward racism experienced by racial minorities (Spanierman, Todd, & Anderson, 2009). Considering theoretical and empirical considerations together, high levels of OTD may moderate the association between each status of White racial identity and White Empathy. Further, if a White student has high OTD, the student may have high levels of White Empathy regardless of the student’s racial identity status. That is, OTD may be different in comparison with White racial identity. OTD refers to an individual’s openness, interests, and curiosity toward different cultures, whereas White racial status refers to Whites’ own awareness about being White and about racial relationships with others. In general, White racial identity development is an individual process resulting from differential reactions to racial socialization. The statuses in the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) are divided into two phases, Phase 1 and Phase 2. Moving through the earlier statuses is considered a movement away from a racist identity (Phase 1), whereas moving through the later statuses (Phase 2) is considered movement toward the development of a non-racist identity (Schuman & Krysan, 1999). Next, we provide our reasoning in detail.

**Phase 1: Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration**

Helms (1990) articulated two phases of White racial identity. The first phase focuses on the abandonment of racism and includes three statuses: Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration. In the Contact status, students are
characterized by “denial, obliviousness, and avoidant interpretation of racial information” (Helms, 1999, p. 122). White students in this status have only limited awareness of Whiteness, White privilege, and racism; they may not understand or empathize with the experiences of people of color (Miller & Harris, 2005).

OTD may explain when and among whom the Contact status would be negatively associated with White Empathy. White students with low OTD may not be interested in knowing other students’ experiences, and their Contact status may be negatively associated with their empathy toward racism. Yet, in the Contact status, despite growing up with limited meaningful interracial contact, those Whites with more interest and OTD may put themselves in the shoes of students of color (Brown, Boniecki, & Walters, 2004) and thus empathize with racial minority students’ struggles with racism. A possible scenario of someone high in the area of OTD and also high in the Contact status would be as follows: a White student has been exposed to limited racial interactions and was taught to ignore other racial groups yet, when this White student is interested in exploring other cultures, the student is curious about and willing to know other cultures. Therefore, White students with high OTD may maintain a relatively high level of White Empathy no matter how strongly they are in the Contact status. In the Disintegration status, students are characterized with “confusion and paradoxical responses to racial stimuli” (Helms, 1999, p. 122). White students in this status begin to acknowledge their Whiteness and feel disoriented, guilty, and anxious (Helms, 1990). White students with low OTD may still continue to avoid reducing dissonance regarding Whites and Blacks (or racial and ethnic minorities) and fail to appreciate the racism-related stress suffered by their fellow students of color. However, those White students who are more open to diversity may be interested in understanding how racial conflicts may hurt racial and ethnic minorities (Fuertes et al., 2000). Thus, White students with greater OTD may maintain high in White Empathy, regardless of how strong they adhere to the Disintegration status.

In the Reintegration status, students are characterized with “dichotomized thinking in which the White group is idealized and other racial groups are devalued” (Helms, 1999, p. 122). That is, White students consciously acknowledge their White racial identity and believe that Whites are superior to people of color. Although the Reintegration status (i.e., White superiority) has been negatively associated with White Empathy (Sifford et al., 2009), this status is also characterized by regression and transition from earlier to later statuses. When White students transition into the later statuses, they may oscillate between idealizing their socio-racial group and being intolerant of other racial minority groups. White students in the Reintegration status are in
the process of transitioning from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of White racial identity. Thus, level of OTD may inconsistently moderate the association between Reintegration and White Empathy. Therefore, we expected no interaction between Reintegration and levels of OTD on White Empathy.

**Phase 2: Pseudo-Independence and Autonomy**

According to Helms (1990), Phase 2 focuses on defining a positive White identity and includes two statuses: Pseudo-Independence and Autonomy. *Pseudo-Independence* is the first status in which White individuals attempt to redefine a positive White identity. In this status, White students are characterized with “intellectualizing liberalism” (Helms, 1999, p. 122) and actively begin to “question the proposition that people of color are inferior to Whites . . . and acknowledge the responsibility of Whites for racism” (Spanierman & Soble, 2010, p. 61). Although White students recognize the responsibility Whites have regarding racism, they may focus on intellectual rather than affective levels of racial issues (Helms, 1990). It is anticipated that, despite low OTD, the Pseudo-Independence status could be positively related to White students’ empathy toward targets of racism. Yet, more OTD may give indispensable resources to White students. With more OTD, White students not only intellectually understand racism but also feel more comfortable addressing racism issues with those who suffer from racism. For this reason, we expected that, among White students who are more open to diversity, their White Empathy would remain high, regardless of the extent to which they adhered to the Pseudo-Independence status.

In the *Autonomy* status, a person’s major goal is to internalize and apply a new definition of Whiteness. Students in this status are characterized by being “pluralistic and flexible in interpreting racial stimuli” (Helms, 1999, p. 122). A White student in this status who took Tatum’s class on the Psychology of Racism said, “Each step [toward new whiteness] is an accomplishment” (Tatum, 1994, p. 469). OTD may provide additional resources to White students in the Autonomy status and play a crucial role in the association between Autonomy and White Empathy. Theoretically, OTD means a deep investment in others’ perspectives and other-centered relations (Miville, Romans, Johnson, & Lone, 2004) that echoes the equity and inclusive multiculturalism of the social justice perspective. Thus, the other-centered relations embedded in OTD may provide additional resources to assist White students in this status to further recognize how people of color experience racism. An example of a White individual with low levels of OTD and high Autonomy status is one who is willing to take responsibility for White privileges and be flexible with race-related issues, but does not show much interest in further
exploration of other cultures. Although autonomy may still be positively associated with White Empathy and with low OTD, only more OTD may create a component beyond Autonomy status to change the association between Autonomy and White Empathy. So, with more OTD, White students may be willing to see racism through the eyes of people of color to truly experience how hurtful racism could be. Therefore, among those with high OTD, White Empathy remains high no matter the level of Autonomy status.

The Present Study

To further the mission of social justice, it is necessary to understand the role of OTD. Specifically, to promote social justice, the initial step begins with OTD (Ratts, 2011). To our knowledge, the current study is the first to examine whether OTD moderates the association between White racial identity statuses and White Empathy. We measured White racial identity with Helms’s (1990) WRIAS, and White Empathy refers to empathic reactions (e.g., anger, sadness) toward racism. Accordingly, our general thoughts on the WRIAS status, OTD, and White Empathy are that a White student with high levels of OTD would have more White Empathy regardless of the student’s WRIAS status (e.g., Contact, Disintegration, Pseudo-Independence, and Autonomy). Specifically, we proposed two hypotheses. For Hypothesis 1, we predicted that in Phase 1 of White racial identity statuses, the association between Contact status (or Disintegration status) and White Empathy would be significantly negative for Whites with less OTD. However, more OTD would change this negative association between Contact status (or Disintegration status) and White Empathy (i.e., White students would have higher White Empathy no matter the levels of White racial identity). For Hypothesis 2, we predicted that in Phase 2 of White racial identity, among White students with less OTD, levels of Pseudo-Independence and Autonomy would be positively associated with White Empathy. Yet, only among White students with high OTD would level of White Empathy remain high, no matter how strongly they identify with the Pseudo-Independence or the Autonomy status. Because we are proposing that OTD is a critical movement toward realizing social justice, the moderation effect of OTD has practical implications. More OTD (a) changes the negative association between Contact/Disintegration status and White Empathy and (b) adds extra resources to the positive association between Pseudo-Independence/Autonomy status and White Empathy.

Because White Empathy has been associated with several demographic variables in prior research, we planned to examine or control for several covariates in the study: social desirability, ethnic/racial minority friends, and sex. Previous studies (Karuppaswamy, 2006) found that if social desirability
was not controlled, it confounded the results in the empathy studies. In other research, the number of ethnic and racial minority friends was found to positively relate to empathy (Williams & Johnson, 2011). Moreover, perhaps due to their experiences with sexism, women were found to have more empathy than men (Spanierman, Beard, & Todd, 2012). Thus, sex might be a confounding variable for White students’ empathy toward racism. For these reasons, we examined social desirability, number of ethnic and racial minority friends, and sex of the respondent as covariates to account for their potential effects on White Empathy.

Method

Participants

There were 252 European American or White college students (167, 66.3% female; 85, 33.7% male) recruited from a Midwestern university. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 38 years (M = 19.44, SD = 1.84). Participants were asked a question regarding the percentage of friends who come from non-Latino White, African American, Asian American, Latina/o, or American Indian backgrounds, from 1 (none or almost none) to 5 (all or almost all). The majority of respondents (146; 57.9%) had all or almost all friends who were White; less than half of the participants had racial and ethnic minority friends. Specifically, 120 (47.6%) participants had no, almost no, or few, African American friends. These 252 White participants also reported having few Asian, Latino/a, or Native American friends. For example, the majority of participants (230; 91.2%) had almost no or few Asian American friends. Similarly, only 8 (3.2%) participants had some Latino/a friends, and only 8 had a few American Indian friends.

Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire included seven items that addressed students’ personal and educational information such as race, sex, age, percentage of friends from various racial backgrounds, and year in college.

Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR). The BIDR (Paulhus, 1991) measures the tendency to respond and exhibit behaviors or thoughts that are viewed as socially desirable, yet not accurate representations of the person’s attitudes or beliefs (Paulhus & Reid, 1991). The BIDR consists of 40 items with two subscales of 20 items each that evaluate impression management.
and self-deception. We followed Paulhus's (1984) recommendation that “impression management, but not self-deception, be controlled in self-reports of personality” (p. 598) and included items about impression management. Sample items of management impression include “I never swear” or “I don’t gossip about other people’s business.” Participants rate the items on the impression management subscale using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not true) to 7 (very true); 1 point is scored for each extreme answer (6 or 7) and a total score ranges from 0 to 20. Higher scores of impression management indicate a greater tendency to respond to situational demands in a manner that conveys a positive self-image (Paulhus, 1984). Rowatt and Franklin (2004) reported a coefficient alpha of .76 among a sample of White undergraduates in psychology. In the current study, a coefficient alpha of .83 was obtained. The impression management subscale has been shown to positively associate with other impression management scales (Sanzo, 2010), thus demonstrating its convergent validity.

**WRIAS.** The WRIAS (Helms, 1990) measures how White individuals think and feel about their own and other racial groups. White racial identity attitudes are measured on five subscales: (a) Contact, (b) Disintegration, (c) Reintegration, (d) Pseudo-Independence, and (e) Autonomy. Sample items include “I hardly think about what race I am” (WRIAS-Contact), “A Black person who tries to get close to you is usually after something” (WRIAS-Disintegration), “I have come to believe that Black people and White people are very different” (WRIAS-Reintegration), “I am comfortable wherever I am” (WRIAS-Pseudo-Independence), and “I feel comfortable talking to Blacks” (WRIAS-Autonomy). The 50 items of the WRIAS assess attitudes on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). In the present study, we used Helms’s original WRIAS with five subscales. We did not include the Immersion–Emersion subscale because it was not included in the internal consistency estimates reported by Helms’s (1999) meta-analysis across 38 studies.

We followed many studies (e.g., Carter, Gushue, & Weitzman, 1994; Gushue & Carter, 2000) that also supported the use of the original WRIAS with five subscales. WRIAS scores are obtained by summing responses to the 10 items in each subscale. In prior research, coefficient alpha reliabilities were .55 for Contact, .77 for Disintegration, .80 for Reintegration, .71 for Pseudo-Independence, and .67 for Autonomy (Helms, 1990). In the present study, coefficient alphas were .78 (Contact), .79 (Disintegration), .82 (Reintegration), .80 (Pseudo-Independence), and .74 (Autonomy). Construct validity studies have indicated that these racial identity attitudes relate
differently to value orientations and symbolic racism in a manner consistent with theory (Helms & Carter, 1991).

**Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale—Short Form (M-GUDS-S).** The M-GUDS-S (Fuertes et al., 2000) measures participants’ overall orientation toward cultural diversity. Fuertes et al. conducted three factor-analytic studies resulting in a 15-item scale with high correlations between the corresponding subscales on both the long and short forms of the M-GUDS-S. They also noted that “the three scales of the short form each appears to be conceptually similar to those proposed by Miville et al. (1999)” (Fuertes et al., 2000, p. 166). The full scale correlation between the original and shortened versions was .77, *p* < .001. Sample items include “Knowing different experiences of other people helps me understand my problems better” and “I attend events where I might get to know people from different racial backgrounds.” Responses to items involve a 5-point Likert-type response mode ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A total score ranges from 1 to 75, with a higher score indicating more OTD. The M-GUDS-S demonstrated adequate psychometrics using a White college sample. The coefficient alphas for the total score ranged from .73 (Thompson, Brossart, Carlozzi, & Miville, 2002) to .83 (Singley & Sedlacek, 2004). Our sample had a coefficient alpha of .88. In prior research, M-GUDS-S scores were positively related to a racially transcendent worldview (Helms, 1990) and negatively related to dogmatism and homophobia (Miville et al., 1999).

**White empathy.** We measured participants’ levels of White empathic responses toward racism via the White Empathy subscale (six items) of the Psychosocial Costs of Racism to Whites Scale (PCRW; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). When developing this subscale, Spanierman and Heppner (2004) named it White Empathy “on the basis of the themes regarding respondents’ anger, sadness, or other emotions in response to racism, where high scores indicate higher affective/empathic costs (e.g., anger, sadness, and so forth) of racism” (p. 255). Sample items include “I am angry that racism exists” and “I become sad when I think about racial injustice.” The response format is a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect higher levels of White empathic responses to racism. Internal consistency estimates for the White Empathy subscale have ranged from .70 to .85 (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004), and the coefficient alpha in the current study was .82. The test–retest reliability coefficient over a 2-week period was .84 (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). Validity has been evidenced by positive associations with multicultural education, racial awareness, and cultural sensitivity (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004).
Procedure

Participants were recruited from several introductory courses in social science, and the data of those who self-identified as White on the demographic survey were included for analysis. After they signed up to participate in this study, data were collected in classroom settings with 5 to 15 students per group. Participants completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire packet containing a demographic questionnaire, the BIDR, WRIAS, M-GUDS-S, and the WE. Students were told that this study was related to diversity exposure experiences. All students received extra credit for their participation. There were 281 participants who answered the surveys, but 29 had missing data or answered the validity items wrong (e.g., “A year has 60 months” or “An hour has 100 minutes”). We used the data from the remaining 252 participants who completed the survey.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows the correlations, alphas, means, and standard deviations of the relevant study variables. The correlations among predictors (i.e., WRIAS-Contact, WRIAS-Disintegration, WRIAS-Reintegration, WRIAS-Pseudo-Independence, WRIAS-Autonomy), the moderator (i.e., M-GUDS-S), and the outcome variable (i.e., White Empathy) ranged from −.33 to .59. Scholars have cautioned that White Empathy might be confounded with other constructs (e.g., social desirability) and demographic information (i.e., sex and number of friends from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds), and suggested that researchers control for those variables (e.g., Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). Thus, we controlled for them in our analysis.

We examined the data to ensure that they met the regression assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Five separate multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the interaction effects of M-GUDS-S with each of the five White racial identity statuses. The residual skewness and kurtosis of these five separate regression analyses indicated that our data met the normality assumption for regression analyses. The residual skewness at five statuses were 0.05 ($Z = 0.34, p = .73$; Contact), −0.28 ($Z = −1.80, p = .08$; Disintegration), 0.04 ($Z = 0.23, p = .82$; Reintegration), 0.07 ($Z = 0.47, p = .64$; Pseudo-Independence), and 0.09 ($Z = 0.60, p = .55$; Autonomy). Kurtosis was normal at all five statuses, −0.17 ($Z = −0.55, p = .58$; Contact), 0.43 ($Z = 1.41, p = .16$; Disintegration), −0.09 ($Z = −0.30, p = .76$; Disintegration), 0.21 ($Z = 0.92, p$
Because these results met the normality assumption for regression analyses, the original White Empathy score was used in the present analyses.

**Moderator Analyses**

We first standardized the covariate, predictor, and moderator variables to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991; Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). We conducted five regression analyses, and each analysis had one of the five White racial identity statuses (e.g., Contact) as the predictor variable and White Empathy as the outcome variable.

**WRIAS-Contact as a predictor variable.** In Step 1, social desirability, percentage of racial minority friends, and sex were entered as covariate variables to control for the potential confounding effects on White Empathy. The covariate variables (e.g., social desirability) accounted for approximately 19% of the variance in White Empathy, $F(4, 245) = 14.66, p < .001$. In Step 2, we entered WRIAS-Contact and OTD. The main effect of these two variables accounted for an additional 15% of the variance in White Empathy, $\Delta F(2, 243) = 27.06, p < .001$. In Step 3, we entered an interaction term, representing WRIAS-Contact
× OTD (see Table 2). The interaction effects accounted for an additional 2% of variance in White Empathy, \( \Delta F(1, 242) = 5.57, p = .019 \). The increment in \( R^2 \) provides the significance test for the interaction effects. Several scholars have indicated that interaction effects in the social science literature typically account for approximately 1% to 3% of the variance (Champoux & Peters, 1987; Chaplin, 1991). Because there were significant interaction effects, we conducted simple effect analyses to clearly depict the nature of the interaction. A common strategy for clarifying the effect of a moderator is to examine its effect at two levels (i.e., lower levels of OTD and higher levels of OTD; Aiken & West, 1991). Thus, as displayed in Figure 1, we conducted a simple slope regression analysis on White Empathy and WRIAS-Contact at lower and higher levels of OTD (i.e., one standard deviation below and above the mean score of OTD, respectively). The simple regression slopes of the significant two-way interaction were plotted with predicted values of higher or lower levels of OTD on White Empathy. Figure 1 indicates that the simple slope was not significant at higher levels of OTD (\( b = -0.97, \beta = -0.47, p = .13 \)) but was significantly negative at lower levels of OTD (\( b = -2.18, \beta = -0.43, p < .001 \)).

**WRIAS-Disintegration as a predictor variable.** The results from Step 1 are identical to those reported in the above regression of WRIAS-Contact as a predictor. The main effect of WRIAS-Disintegration and OTD accounted for an additional 16% of the variance in White Empathy, \( \Delta F(2, 243) = 30.25, p < .001 \). Table 2 (see the second section) showed that the interaction effect (i.e., WRIAS-Disintegration × OTD) accounted for an additional 1% of variance in White Empathy, \( \Delta F(1, 242) = 4.82, p = .029 \). We followed the same procedure to conduct simple main effect analyses. Figure 2 indicated that the simple slope was not significant at higher levels of OTD (\( b = -0.32, \beta = -0.39, p = .41 \)) but was significantly negative at lower levels of OTD (\( b = -1.74, \beta = -0.37, p < .001 \)).

**WRIAS-Reintegration as a predictor variable.** In Table 2 (see the third section), the main effect of WRIAS-Reintegration and OTD accounted for an additional 24% of the variance in White Empathy, \( \Delta F(2, 243) = 34.29, p < .001 \), over and above the Step 1 control variables. No significant interaction effect (i.e., WRIAS-Reintegration × OTD) on White Empathy was found, \( \Delta F(1, 242) = 2.71, p = .10 \). Because no significant interaction effect was found, there was no need to analyze simple main effects of the interaction between White Empathy and WRIAS-Reintegration.

**Pseudo-Independence as a predictor variable.** In Table 2 (see the fourth section), the main effect of WRIAS-Pseudo-Independence and OTD accounted for an additional 13% of the variance in White Empathy, \( \Delta F(2, 243) = 23.67, \).
Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for the Variables Predicting White Empathy.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>β</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.19***</td>
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<td>Social desirability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Openness to diversity</td>
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<td>0.38</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
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<td>Step 2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.16***</td>
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<td>0.31</td>
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<td>0.38</td>
<td>-.25***</td>
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<td>Openness to diversity</td>
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<td>0.38</td>
<td>.23***</td>
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<td>Autonomy × Openness to diversity</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
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</table>

Note. Step 1 is the same throughout five regression analyses, so we did not list Step 1 for each regression analysis. SE = standard error.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
In Step 3, we found that the interaction (i.e., WRIAS-Pseudo-Independence × OTD) accounted for an additional 2% of the variance in White Empathy, \( \Delta F(1, 242) = 8.89, p = .003 \). The simple effect analyses indicated:

- **H:** \( b = -0.97, \beta = -.47 \)
- **L:** \( b = -2.18, \beta = -.43^{***} \)

**Figure 1.** The interaction effects of Contact and openness to diversity on White Empathy with openness to diversity as a moderator.

*\( p < .05 \). **\( p < .01 \). ***\( p < .001 \).

\( p < .001 \). In Step 3, we found that the interaction (i.e., WRIAS-Pseudo-Independence × OTD) accounted for an additional 2% of the variance in White Empathy, \( \Delta F(1, 242) = 8.89, p = .003 \). The simple effect analyses indicated:

- **H:** \( b = -0.32, \beta = -.39 \)
- **L:** \( b = -1.74, \beta = -.37^{***} \)

**Figure 2.** The interaction effects of Disintegration and openness to diversity on White Empathy with openness to diversity as a moderator.

*\( p < .05 \). **\( p < .01 \). ***\( p < .001 \).
that in Figure 3, the simple slope was not significant at higher levels of OTD ($b = -0.55$, $\beta = -0.40$, $p = 0.17$) but was significantly positive at lower levels of OTD ($b = 1.27$, $\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$).

**Autonomy as a predictor variable.** In Table 2 (the fifth section), the main effect of WRIAS-Autonomy and OTD accounted for an additional 15% of the variance in White Empathy, $\Delta F(2, 243) = 27.06$, $p < .001$. The interaction effects (i.e., WRIAS-Autonomy × OTD) accounted for an additional 2% of the variance in White Empathy, $\Delta F(1, 242) = 5.57$, $p = .019$. Figure 4 indicates that the simple slope was not significant at higher levels of OTD ($b = 0.13$, $\beta = .39$, $p = .74$) but was significantly positive at lower levels of OTD ($b = 1.78$, $\beta = .41$, $p < .001$).

**Discussion**

In the spirit of social justice, this study examined under what conditions (low vs. high OTD) White racial identity attitude statuses relate to White empathy. Our results supported our two sets of hypotheses. In our first set of hypotheses, we investigated whether OTD moderated the relationship between Phase 1 statuses (i.e., Contact and Disintegration) of White racial identity attitudes and White Empathy. When the levels of OTD were low, the association...
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between Phase 1 statuses (i.e., Contact and Disintegration) of White racial identity and White Empathy was negative. Perhaps White students in Phase 1 justify the belief that White people are not racist or that racism does not exist. These White students may have a superficial awareness of being White and may be oblivious to their White privilege. Yet, when levels of OTD were high, the associations between Phase 1 statuses of White racial identity and White Empathy were not significant (i.e., remained high; see Figures 1 and 2). In our second set of hypotheses, when levels of OTD were low, the association between Phase 2 (i.e., Pseudo-Independence and Autonomy) statuses of White racial identity and White Empathy was positive. Yet, when levels of OTD were high, the associations between Phase 2 statuses of White racial identity and White Empathy were not significant (i.e., remained high; see Figures 3 and 4).

Previous literature has indicated only the direct associations between White racial identity status and White Empathy (Sifford et al., 2009). The current study advances the literature by illustrating that this direct association depends on the level of OTD. OTD served as a moderator for two reasons. First, perhaps when White students display low levels of OTD, they tend to assume that racism results from the faults of the targets of racism (Paquette, 2005). Thus, they may not feel empathy toward people of color who may be under racism-related stress. Such ignorance of the impact of being oppressed

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**Figure 4.** The interaction effects of Autonomy and openness to diversity on White Empathy with openness to diversity as a moderator.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
actually misses the principles of social justice, which aims to reduce oppression (Ratts, 2011). However, for White students with high OTD, they may be willing to understand cultural diversity related to people of various backgrounds. Higher levels of OTD moderated the negative association between Contact/Disintegration and White Empathy, and this association became non-significant. Yet, there was no significant interaction effect between the Reintegration status and OTD on White Empathy. That is, the different levels of OTD did not moderate Reintegration and White Empathy. This could be due to the fact that White students in this status were transitioning from Phase 1 into Phase 2 of the White racial identity statuses (see Table 2). Thus, the reason for no significant interaction effect may be related to a mixture of positive and negative effects that cancel each other out.

Second, for White students at Phase 2 statuses of White racial identity (e.g., Pseudo-Independence), their racial awareness may be based on intellectual exploration via reading and gathering information (Helms, 1990). White students in Phase 2 statuses may attempt to build their positive White racial identity and defy racism. This could be why among those White students with low levels of OTD, there was still a significantly positive association between Pseudo-Independence/Autonomy and White Empathy. For White students at Phase 2 statuses of White racial identity, high OTD may deepen their racial awareness from intellectual levels to affective and behavioral levels (Fuertes et al., 2000). Acceptance of different perspectives on race-related issues actually goes beyond superficial or intellectual exploration of Whiteness, and requires cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement from White students. Thus, this group of students (i.e., those with more OTD) may share a similar level of empathy across different levels of Pseudo-Independence/Autonomy (see Figures 3 and 4). Our results indicated that the association between Pseudo-Independence/Autonomy and White Empathy depends on levels of OTD as opposed to a direct relationship, as reported in previous literature (Paquette, 2005). Those students with higher levels of OTD have higher levels of White Empathy toward targets of racism, regardless of the levels of their Pseudo-Independence/Autonomy White racial identity statuses (see Figures 3 and 4).

White students in Autonomy status have thought most about Whiteness and are heavily involved in activities to fight racism (i.e., important components of White empathy). Because OTD represents a complex attitudinal movement to other-centered relations with the world at large (Miville et al., 2004), White students who are more open to diversity may be willing to learn others’ perspectives (Miville et al., 2004). Therefore, more OTD may add an additional component to White students in this status to further welcome experiences with racism different from their own. With additional resources
from OTD, these White students may be willing to recognize the influence of diversity on their personal growth (Fuertes et al., 2000). Because more OTD adds extra resources to their Autonomy status regarding their new Whiteness, these White students may also accept other people’s experiences to help them better understand their own problems and show greater White empathy across different levels of the Autonomy statuses. In addition, the association between autonomy and OTD is .46, which indicates that they are different constructs (Karuppaswamy, 2006). Table 1 showed that the correlation coefficient between the number of friends of color and OTD was .32 ($p < .001$). Thus, having friends of color may be one of the conditions that facilitates White students’ interests in diversity. Yet, it may also relate to White students’ own willingness to explore diversity. In addition, Table 1 shows that the correlations between social desirability (measured by BIDR) and White racial identity attitude statuses (measured by WRIAS) range from −.23 to .20. This may indicate that social desirability and different statuses of White racial identity have respective relationships. Moreover, Table 1 also shows that the correlation between OTD (measured by M-GUDS-S) and White Empathy (measured by PCRW-WE) was .49. All the information further supported that OTD is an additional personal strength and a moderator for the association between autonomy and White Empathy. When White students are more open to diversity, they may be ready to redefine access to resources from the perspective of others, including themselves and their fellow racial minority students. Such understanding is important, as the welcoming of OTD reflects the true spirit of social justice (Ratts, 2011).

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

We recognize several limitations of this study. First of all, although our study was the first to examine the moderating role of OTD on the association between White racial identity and White Empathy, this study is still at a very early stage in research regarding White racial identity and White empathy. Importantly, some research suggests (Spanierman, Poteat, Beer, & Armstrong, 2006) that White empathy in and of itself is an abstract concept. Second, we only collected self-reported data, which critics suggest may inflate or inaccurately reflect participants’ actual levels of empathy (Cox, 2010). Third, we were limited to White participants’ interracial interactions because we focused on the association between White racial identity and White empathy toward racism. Consequently, the results cannot be generalized to other students such as the sexual minority population. Fourth, we did not measure White students’ pre-college levels of interest in diversity; it is possible that White students may be interested in diversity issues and learning about other
cultures more than other students before they attend college. Pre-college levels of OTD could be a confounding variable of White Empathy and should be controlled for in future studies (Otis & Loeffler, 2005). Also, we used the White Empathy subscale, which has six items to measure White empathetic reactions toward racism. As such, White Empathy may be limited in these six items, such as “I am angry that racism exists” (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004, p. 254). Finally, we did not include the Immersion–Emersion subscale, and thus we could not examine whether OTD moderates the association between immersion–emersion and White Empathy.

We also propose research directions for future studies. One, White students may be open to diversity (e.g., seeing others’ different experiences as a way to help understand one’s own problems better) and feel angry and sad that racism exists; however, they may still think that racism has nothing to do with them and perpetrate countless racial microaggressions toward people of color. Indeed, being open to diversity involves a deeper understanding of oppression in our society and a willingness to experience other cultural heritages as well. Future studies can use OTD as an indicator to better measure cultural sensitivity and racial awareness among White students (Butrus & Witenberg, 2013). Two, because White empathy is an important component of White students’ ability to develop positive interracial relationships, future studies can use antiracist attitudes (i.e., a concept broader than White empathy) as an outcome variable to confirm or disconfirm our findings. Also, self-reports may not actually reflect White empathy, and future studies can go beyond self-report methods to use other rating methods (e.g., observer ratings, assessments from peers, case conceptualization, or evaluating White students’ behaviors in actual experimental sessions).

Third, although our study focused on empathy toward the victims of racism, future studies can apply our model to explore empathy toward other types of racism. Future studies can also include pre-college diversity experiences as a covariate variable. In addition, because students at Phase 1 statuses of White racial attitudes have more White privilege that could relate to less White empathy (Sifford et al., 2009), a possible topic for future studies is to explore which dimension (e.g., attitude, affect, behavior) of White privilege most relates to White empathy (Pinterits, Poteat, & Spanierman, 2009). Moreover, future studies may examine whether other indexes of social justice moderate the association between White racial attitudes and White empathy. Another important future direction is to investigate White racial identity attitudes, OTD, and White Empathy using a longitudinal design. For example, future studies can examine whether OTD continues to be a moderator for the association between White racial attitudes and White Empathy throughout a semester. To advance social justice in counseling, future studies can also look
at these identity statuses in counseling to see how they affect counselors’ ability to empathize with the racial injustices experienced by racial minority clients.

Finally, Helms (1999) described the relationships among statuses as “a person is expected to use some of these schemas more than others” (p. 122). She also mentioned that a person is not expected to use both statuses (e.g., Contact, Autonomy) equally when responding to the WRIAS items. Therefore, we recommended that future studies explore the interactive and dynamic nature of White Racial Identity development. For example, future studies can explore what make White students move from Contact status to Disintegration status. Future studies can also use the profile analysis to take into account all statuses within an individual (rather than our approach of analyzing each status individually). Specifically, they might examine whether White Empathy differs with student characteristics or demographic profiles. It is also important for future studies to control for demographic information (e.g., number of ethnic/racial minority friends), which could be related to different levels of White Empathy.

**Implications and Recommendations for Training and Practice**

Our study has implications for how campuses can become a setting for social justice advocacy. This task relies on all students’ involvement, including White students’ responses to diversity. The present study highlights the importance of OTD, which moderated the relationship between White racial identity and White Empathy. Unfortunately, current research and education tend to emphasize the direct relationship between White racial identity and White Empathy (e.g., Sifford et al., 2009), instead of the moderation effects of OTD. Thus, a challenge in training and practice is how to increase the effects of OTD, which may help elevate White empathy regardless of their racial identity status. To help White students increase their OTD, counselors can initiate dialogues between students and authors of color such as Khaled Hosseini (author of *The Kite Runner*, 2003) and Alice Walker (author of *The Color Purple*, 1992). We also noticed two potential implications of our findings. First, as advocated by social justice scholars (Ratts, 2011), counselors need to be active agents of social justice. For example, although on-campus diversity programs address the needs of increasing White students’ OTD, these programs have failed to integrate OTD with White racial identity and empathy. Furthermore, to date, there are few courses that promote undergraduates’ multicultural sensitivity. To increase the success of these programs, counselors can conduct on-campus outreach programs to explain how OTD can deepen mutual understanding among students. Such outreach
programs can also help White students gain a greater understanding of what it means to be White. Because White empathy can meaningfully enhance the quality of cross-cultural encounters, educators and counselors can apply our findings to design programs to increase White students’ empathy toward targets of racism.

Second, counselors can initiate intercultural programs or workshops to create dialogues between White students and students of color who experience racism. In the dialogue, White students may learn to understand how racism hurts people. They may also reflect on their privileges. White students can be given a variety of opportunities to stimulate their reflection on diversity issues because those White students with more OTD had higher White Empathy, regardless of their levels of White racial identity attitudes. Higher levels of OTD can include diversity contact (e.g., participating in on-campus diverse social and cultural activities), comfort with differences, and an appreciation of the impact of diversity on self-understanding and personal growth. Educators can add service-learning opportunities (Wehling, 2008), film discussions, music or food festivals, cross-cultural friendships, and research projects both within and outside of their courses. Increasing these opportunities can enhance White students’ understanding of diverse cultures and people, their comfort levels with differences, and their appreciation of valuing the impact of diversity on personal growth. White students with more exposure to diversity may expand their ability to engage in cross-cultural empathy. When White students are open to diversity, there is a deeper understanding of power, racism, and oppression in society. Further, if a deeper understanding of appreciating differences is integrated into counseling psychology curricula, students may have more sensitivity to those who suffer racism and social injustice. The process of cultivating students’ openness to differences (or OTD) involves students’ empathy toward others and thus, it is critical that educators and counselors understand OTD from a developmental perspective. Our study provides empirical support for the necessity of social justice or diversity programs, as they may help produce a more integrated and understanding campus climate. It is our hope that such endeavors will provide a stronger foundation from which social justice can be advanced.

Finally, to fulfill the mission of social justice in counseling psychology, counseling psychology programs could integrate OTD into training programs. Currently, most training programs discuss diversity-related topics in specific courses or practicum. Programs can integrate OTD into every course. For example, a counseling theories course can explore how different cultures enrich our theories in counseling and inspire us to deeply understand the emotional tolls of discrimination. After integrating OTD, programs can become models of social justice that welcome diversity and appreciate racial differences among students.
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