

**Is Openness to Diversity the Path to Multiculturalism?  
A Case Study Testing an Updated ODC Scale  
and the Influence of Social Desirability Bias**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In this paper, we describe a case study conducted with graduate students in a major diverse university and suggest the addition of a more contemporary facet to the Openness to Diversity and Challenge (ODC) scale created by Pascarella and colleagues in 1996 which rests on sharing and symmetry. The intriguing behavior of students relating an assignment about multiculturalism, led us to review and update the ODC scale by integrating a self-oriented symmetric side to the scale previously based exclusively on others-oriented measure. Our research was composed of two phases. The first one was based on a case study using the direct-observation approach as the data collection method. The second one was testing the symmetric ODC scale through a 5-point Likert scale on a sample of 56 graduate business students in order to identify the relevance of the suggested update of the 25 year-old ODC scale. Results demonstrated that the main factor intervening in the use of scales remains the Social Desirability Bias (SDB) which comforted us in the accuracy of the direct observation method as an appropriate approach to study Openness to Diversity. Our findings also confirmed that the widespread use of the ODC scale created in 1996 does not reflect the contemporary young mindsets and reality.*

**Keywords:** openness to diversity, community, symmetry, multiculturalism, education, culture, curiosity

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Openness to Diversity has never been this timely and critical. Curiosity about others and acceptance of race, cultural and ethnic differences are a pivotal issue in our societies. At a time when Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) is ruling companies and the world, openness to diversity is a requirement for professionals from all industries worldwide. In order to reflect such evolution in mindsets and practices, universities should ensure students' preparation to take positions in a multicultural world.

So far, research about openness to diversity has been mostly conducted with undergraduate students. We argue that graduate students should also be integrated in such studies because they are active professionals at the same time as they are students in our universities. Graduate students are already working in this D&I environment and should be well prepared to face challenges relating to multiculturalism.

Indeed, graduate students are currently performing in companies and should also be well prepared to interact in multicultural settings. Some of them might and some might not have benefitted from multicultural exposure in college and yet are already working in companies and experiencing multiculturalism at a professional level. Interactions, both internal and external, with colleagues, clients, partners, and suppliers are dragging them into a multicultural environment at this very moment and one would wonder if they are well prepared to face such challenges. Professionals are confronted with multiculturalism in teamwork, communication and negotiation (Karsaklian, 2014, 2017, 2019).

The motivation for the research presented here emerged from an assignment conducted with two groups of graduate students in a Multicultural Marketing course. Students could freely choose one specific ethnic community to study and most of them chose the community they belong to rather than seizing the opportunity to explore an alien community. Such decisions were intriguing considering the multicultural background of the students and the topic at hand. As stated by Alt (2017), students' experiences in the classroom might be related to their Openness to Diversity and Challenge (ODC) perceptions. This prompted the urge to explore students' real perception of openness to diversity.

Even more intriguing was the fact that prior research has asserted that students immersed in multicultural campuses sported higher levels of openness to diversity. Admittedly, most previous studies had been conducted with surveys whereby openness to diversity was measured with a 5-point Likert scale based on the pioneer works of Pascarella and colleagues in 1996. Despite the knowledge and needed academic contribution provided by previous research, the use of those scales could easily introduce the Social Desirability Bias (SDB) in the responses. We believe that we avoided such bias in our study because there were no questions or scales involved in the assignments used in the research presented here.

In this paper, we seek to fill in important gaps left open by previous research. Our first contribution relies on our work with graduate students. Their input is very valuable because they are able to relate to ODC both in the classroom and in real life thanks to their professional experience in companies, most of them integrating D&I as a norm. Our second contribution is methodological, based on direct observation and narratives rather than the use of scales in order to avoid SDB. Our third contribution is providing a contemporary vision to the widespread ODC scale created by Pascarella and colleagues 25 years ago. Indeed, the ODC scale measures the openness to others in contemplating the willingness students have to interact with unknown people coming from alien cultures. By not integrating the symmetrical side of openness to diversity which is the interaction through sharing one's culture with others, the ODC scale is missing one unavoidable aspect of contemporary openness to diversity. In other words, we argue that the others-oriented scale should integrate the symmetrical self-oriented side of openness to diversity.

As a matter of fact, students' environment has dramatically changed ever since the ODC scale was created and so did their understanding of multiculturalism. Students having been raised in the sharing economy learned to give and take at the same time. The growth of the consumer-to-consumer market is a perfect example of this sharing economy. Platforms such as Mercari, Poshmark and ThreadUP, just to name a few, are places where any consumer can buy and sell their belongings from and to other consumers just like them.

Sharing emotions and information on social media is as straightforward as sharing cultural practices to contemporary students. Another factor enabling easy contact with foreign cultures is the proliferation of affordable services such as low-priced restaurants offering ethnic food as well as low cost airlines and companies such as AirBnB and Uber which have immensely helped in creating invaluable opportunities for students to experience new cultures.

In addition, students who witnessed the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic materialized by countries closing their borders and study abroad programs turning into online courses experienced cultural isolation and could better appreciate the value of multiculturalism. Another cultural consequence of the pandemic was the stigmatization of the Asian community across continents which, along with the Black Lives Matter international movement, brought the discussion about racial discrimination back to the spotlight. All these factors have contributed to giving a new perspective of multiculturalism to current students setting them apart from those who attended college decades ago.

This turn of events along with the findings of our research led us to believe that it is time to revisit the ODC scale. An update will foster the

longevity of this essential tool to all multicultural researchers and will better suit the perspective contemporary students give to cultural diversity.

To do so, we first suggest a symmetrical update to the existing ODC scale by integrating the self-oriented side to it. Second, we test the symmetrical ODC scale with 56 graduate business students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Higher education institutions have a role in cultivating students' openness to diverse perspectives, regardless of whether they are grounded in racial, ethnic, economic, religious, political, or other such differences.

Research has indicated that college attendance itself engenders positive changes in tolerance and openness toward others (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Accordingly, Cassandra and Yeung (2013), stated that incorporating engagement in cross-racial or diverse interactions into the college setting enhances students' development and prepares them to address future challenges brought forth by an increasingly diverse society. Further research is needed to know if such exposure results in students seizing the opportunity to know more about others. As a matter of fact, other than being exposed to multiculturalism, students need to want to open up to others, and this willingness to know more about cultures has been defined as cultural curiosity (Karsaklian, 2020). Cultural curiosity is a two-way path. Culturally curious people are both self-oriented and others oriented. They like to get to know, explain and understand cultures in general.

Additional studies found that exposure to cultural diversity in the curriculum, racial diversity in the student body and among faculty, and social, cultural, and political diversity in race dialogues and cultural workshops contribute to greater openness to diversity, higher levels of intellectual engagement, increases in complex thinking, and increased motivation (Smith et al., 1997 and Milem & Hakuta, 2000). Some studies have specifically addressed the impact of interracial interaction and its role in developing cultural awareness and racial understanding (Antonio, 2001). Astin (1993), found that socializing with someone of a different race was associated with increases in cultural awareness, commitment to racial understanding, and commitment to the environment.

Fowers and Davidov (2006) argued that the primary virtue necessary for multiculturalism is openness to the other. The authors state that this multicultural focus on openness to the other is closely related to the concept of humility. Definitions of humility generally include both intrapersonal and interpersonal components. On the interpersonal dimension, humble individuals are able to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused, characterized by respect for others and a lack of superiority (Davis et al., 2011).

Accordingly and building on recent theory stressing multicultural orientation, as well as the development of virtues and dispositions associated

with multicultural values, Hook and colleagues (2013) defined cultural humility as having an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused, characterized by respect and lack of superiority toward an individual's cultural background and experience. Cultural humility can be seen as a requirement for developing cultural curiosity by the fact of being other-oriented rather than self-oriented. When people are interested in knowing more about other people, they are curious and when they are curious about people from other cultures, they are culturally curious. However accurate, the above statements support the asymmetrical approach to multiculturalism applied to the ODC scale whereas contemporary trends are symmetrical, that is, both self and others oriented.

The educational benefits of a racially diverse student body and engagement in cross-racial interactions, such as enhanced self-confidence, motivation, intellectual and civic development, and development of pluralistic orientations, have been well documented (Antonio, 2001a, 2001b, 2004a, 2004b; Chang, 1999; Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Jayakumar, 2008). Chang (1999) also found that interracial interactions in college enhanced student retention, college satisfaction, and intellectual and social self-concept; they also positively influenced students' knowledge of and ability to accept different races and cultures. Chang, Astin, and Kim (2004) added that it is not only important to consider the quantity of students' diverse interactions, but it is also important to consider the nature of students' engagement in diverse friendships and exploration.

Exploration relates to curiosity (Lowenstein, 1994) and students' engagement with diverse friends stimulates cultural curiosity. As a matter of fact, Chang (1999), found that students who socialized with diverse peers reported higher levels of satisfaction with college and their own social self-concept. While structural diversity is certainly an essential component of campus climate and is a predictor of racially heterogeneous friendships (Fischer, 2008), it is not the only component of climate worthy of examination. Therefore, studying in a multicultural environment does not preclude the development of cultural curiosity.

Cates and Schaeffe (2009) found that students who had multicultural training infused into practicum coursework had greater increases in perceived multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills throughout the duration of the course than students who did not have a multicultural component in their practicum course. Dickson and Jepsen's (2007) inquiry of the breadth and depth of multicultural curricula lead to a conclusion that the current conceptualization of multicultural competencies may oversimplify the complexities of actual multicultural interactions, followed by a suggestion that further examination of multicultural training implementation is needed.

Indeed, having students surrounded by people from other cultures is not enough to stimulate their cultural curiosity and understanding of cultures

because they tend to aggregate in groups with students from their own culture what has been called balkanization. The phenomenon of balkanization (Duster, 1991) is defined as the tendency for students to group themselves racially on campus. Accordingly, D'Souza (1991) concluded that the multicultural campus experience is marked by self-segregation and leads to increased ethnocentrism and racial intolerance.

In order to avoid balkanization and to enable students to thoroughly benefit from a multicultural environment, students should be taught about cultural diversity and the impact of multiculturalism in their private and professional lives. As openness to diversity has been defined as an attitude of awareness and acceptance of both similarities and differences that exist among people (Sawyer et al., 2005; Shrivastava & Gregory, 2009), both awareness and acceptance don't happen on campus without the help of guidance.

Over the past decades, there has been a general shift in sociological theory towards conceptualizing the self, culture, and society as multiple, fluid, and fragmented in contrast to a past pictured as unitary, stable, and coherent (Ollivier, 2008). An organizational climate open to diversity is an environment in which individuals respect the views of those who are different and where activities are not organized on basis of demographic similarities among group members (Hobman et al., 2004) provided that they had learned to do so.

The main issue is how to convey the importance of valuing what is different if we assume that openness to cognitive diversity (a) relates to the way in which individuals approach the different perspectives and knowledge of other group members and (b) incorporates the view that others should be allowed to freely express their differing views, the belief that there is value in others' knowledge and objectives and the perception that there is merit in using the best of others' ideas (Anderson & West, 1998; Hobman et al., 2004; Tjosvold & Poon, 1998). This last point is fundamental in developing cultural curiosity. People will only be curious about others if they see merit in their ideas and if they perceive some degree of reciprocity from the same people being curious about them.

We understand the role of universities as being an eye-opening guide to all students. To undergraduates, understanding openness to diversity is a way of experiencing it on campus and further propagating it in their personal and professional lives. To graduate students, it means providing them the tools to comply with professional multicultural settings.. Independent on the industry, company and position they will take, the likelihood of working in multicultural settings is at its highest. Universities should ensure students' preparation for such a professional life, not only technically but also culturally. Understanding how to integrate openness to diversity in contemporary curricula is a fundamental step in helping students to include themselves in the openness to diversity process in which they are

required to be active actors. In order to more accurately mirror current students' realities, the ODC scale should integrate the self-oriented statements to the already existing others-oriented statements.

### **Research Method**

Most research conducted on the topic of openness to diversity use or is inspired by the ODC scale. The Openness to Diversity and Challenge (ODC) scale was created by Pascarella and colleagues in 1996 for the National Survey of Student Learning. The scale included eight items concerned with students' openness to diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, and values as well as individuals' willingness and enjoyment of having their ideas challenged by different values and perspectives. Enrollment in diversity related courses, discussing controversial topics that challenged students' perspectives, interactions with diverse peers, a positive campus climate, climate for diversity, and living on campus were all associated with students' increased ODC at the end of the first year of college (Pascarella et al., 1996).

As such, openness to diversity is often measured using a 5-point Likert scale including statements such as: (a) I believe contact with individuals whose backgrounds (race, national origin, sexual orientation) differ from my own is an essential part of my college education; (b) I enjoy taking courses that challenge my beliefs and values; (c) I most enjoy the courses that make me think about things from a different perspective; (d) I believe that learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of my college education; (e) I enjoy having discussions with people whose ideas and values are different from my own; (f) I enjoy talking with people who have values different from mine because it helps me better understand myself and values; and (g) I agree that the real value of a college education lies in being introduced to different values. (Bowman, 2014; Pascarella et al., 1996).

Admittedly, the use of scales through structured questionnaires has several advantages such as quantifying responses, designing trends, comparing results and creating databases. Nevertheless, students might tend to positively rate statements that relate more closely to what is socially accepted mainly when it comes to openness to others and tolerance.

Consequently, and in order to avoid SDB, the method chosen for this research was a case study based on direct observation and narratives. Direct observation is one of the six major sources of evidence described by Yin (1994). This method is deemed appropriate to be applied to the phenomenon we aimed at analyzing because the case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding a phenomenon within its natural setting. In addition, it is argued that students' habits of learning are still overwhelmingly skewed towards passive acquisition of knowledge from authority sources rather than from collaborative inquiry activities (Stahl,

2011). In order to counter this state of facts, our teaching method was an invitation to freely speak about any culture.

Sciame-Giesecke et al. (2009), investigated how faculty members implement multicultural course transformation in their classrooms to prepare college students to live and work in a diverse world. Adding diversity course content was raised by the vast majority of faculty as a tool for implementing multicultural course transformation. Our case study describes a teaching method that engages students in the learning process and obtains genuine responses from them.

Although case studies have been criticized by some as lacking scientific rigor, reliability and generalizability, they provide a holistic view of certain events and capture life in organizations (Noor, 2008). They facilitate exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. The case study presented here contributes to the field research needed on openness to diversity. As defined by Yin (2003), the research method employed in this case study was qualitative and descriptive and drew on direct observation and narratives. It is recognized that one case study “cannot provide a test of the propositions but it can serve to provide vivid examples of the theoretical constructs included in the propositions” (Shamir et al., 1994, p. 26). Therefore, using a case study approach enables to explore a new perspective of openness to diversity.

The case study presented here was conducted in two phases. The first phase was purely observational. We observed students’ behavior when asked to choose any ethnic community they would like to study. This phase led us to the evidence that the vast majority of students chose their own communities rather than explore an alien culture. The second phase of our research was the analysis of students’ narratives contained in their assignments. This phase enabled us to understand the reasons why such choices were made and enlightened our understanding of how contemporary students’ experience openness to diversity.

The use of narratives was fundamental in helping to understand the importance of symmetry to contemporary students. By being the mainstream forum for storytelling, social media constitutes an essential part of students’ lives. It is the forum where they can freely share stories about themselves and become real stars thanks to “likers” and followers. The vast majority of posts on social media are from people talking about themselves, their pets, their children, their job search, their graduations, their frustrations, and their selfies.

It is people, not events that attract the attention of contemporary students. This is also why reality shows are successful. There is no plot in these shows (Walker & Lombrozo, 2016); only people living their “normal lives” are portrayed so that the audience feels like being part of them from the inside.



By being immersed in this environment, students tend to exist thanks to this mirror effect: they post (share) and those posts are liked and reshared; they see a post and immediately like and reshare it too. If it is not a two-way conversation it is a failure. Their “celebrity” is measured by the number of likes, reshares and followers immediately after they post. They constantly check their social media accounts in order to track their own celebrity and acceptance by their virtual community.

The virtual community is the one without boundaries, shared by people from around the world brought together by the simple recency of stories (Wexler, 2006) and the immediacy of others’ reactions to those stories. Contemporary students don’t understand one-way communication. They need to be actors in the stories thanks to what they share with others.

### **The case study**

Situating learning in a real-world task ensures that learning is personally interesting and provides students with opportunities to think at the level of sophistication that they are likely to encounter in the real world (Erstad, 2011). This was the main goal of the assignments described here.

Unlike previous studies, our study started with an intriguing situation. In a required International Marketing course, students were asked to choose a country as a target market for a new product. As the class was composed of graduate students with different cultural backgrounds it was assumed that thanks to their natural openness to diversity, they would seize the opportunity to explore countries they were unfamiliar with. However, the opposite outcome was obtained and the vast majority of students chose their home country to work on, what could be seen as a lack of openness to diversity. This evidence made us wonder if being immersed in a multicultural environment was enough for students to be open to diversity as stated in most of previous publications.

Intrigued by this evidence, we decided to proceed with a research based on direct observation and narratives aiming at creating a case study to be later used for pedagogical purposes. This observation prompted our research question: how do contemporary students actually experience openness to diversity?

To do so, we proceeded with the observation of two other graduate courses in a major university in the United States. The Business School ranked in the top 5% of all schools for ethnic diversity in the country because not only are many races represented at the school, but there is a significant number of students in each group. As a matter of fact, the ethnic breakdown is Hispanic: 32.6%, White: 29.6%, Asian: 21.4%, African American: 7.9%, and Non-Resident Alien: 4.8%.

Our first observation involved a group of 24 graduate students enrolled in an elective Multicultural Marketing course in 2019. Students belonged to different ethnic communities - White: 40,2%, Hispanic: 21,7%,

Asian: 17,4%, African American: 8,7% , and other: 12%. These students were given an individual assignment which was to select an ethnic community and study the marketing strategy for an existing product addressing the chosen community in order to come up with marketing recommendations for how to increase penetration of that product in that same community. Any chosen community was welcome as they were not chosen out of a list. We expected that motivated by openness to diversity and cultural curiosity, most students would seize the opportunity to explore an alien community.

The second observation was conducted with the same course in 2020 and counted 22 graduate students. Students belonged to different ethnic communities - Asian: 33,4 %, Hispanic: 23,1%, African American: 14,5%, White: 14,3%, and other: 14,7%. Their assignment required to choose a product sold in two different ethnic communities and advise if the company should design a specific marketing strategy for each community or if one same marketing strategy could bring both communities together. As an individual assignment, each student was free to choose any two communities they would like to study and here again no lists of communities were suggested.

With a one year gap, the two groups of students having accomplished similar assignments for the same course were studied and the outcomes proved to be very similar. The 46 students having attended the elective Multicultural Marketing course in 2019 and 2020 were all multicultural or at least bicultural and more than 10 different cultures were represented in the classroom each year. Moreover, as MBA students, they were engaged in active professional lives either working for companies or running their own businesses. Therefore, they were exposed to cultural diversity in their professional settings as well. Some had already constituted families and among those some with partners from cultures other than their own.

In addition to the teaching of theoretical concepts in this course, multiculturalism was taught and illustrated through intensive interactions and discussions about topics linked to multicultural marketing such as the use of diversity in advertising, product adaptations to specific communities, diversity and inclusion in events, and so forth, throughout the semester. Thus, students' critical thinking and reflection about the importance and pertinence of openness to diversity was highly stimulated.

## **Findings**

Taking into account the multicultural features involved in this research thanks to the students' background, the high level of multiculturalism not only on campus but also in the classroom, and keeping in mind the ODC scale statements, one would have expected higher rates of exploration of alien cultures from the graduate students in their individual

assignments. Another factor contributing to these expectations was that those students willingly enrolled in the elective Multicultural Marketing course which could preclude a genuine interest in learning about other cultures. In addition, as these were individual assignments, each student was totally free to choose to study any community without being under the pressure of compromising with team members' choices. Surprisingly and opposed to our expectations, most students chose to work with the communities they belonged to.

In the 2019 group, 78% of the students choose their own community to analyze. In the 2020 group of students, 71% of them chose their own community to compare to an alien one while bicultural students chose the two communities they belonged to. Students having chosen only alien ethnicities in both classes were represented by five white students out of a class of 24 in 2019 and two students out of a class of 22 in 2020; one from Asia and one from the Middle East.

It is indeed intriguing that students with such a multicultural background, evolving in highly multicultural settings, and attending an elective Multicultural Marketing course are still so strongly tied to their own communities when it comes to a course assignment. Even more intriguing was the fact that these results contradicted findings from previous research having used the ODC scale.

At first glance and based on observation only, students' choices led us to assume that being immersed in a multicultural campus is not enough to develop openness to diversity and that openness to diversity is a needed however not sufficient condition to acquire cultural curiosity.

We knew that thanks to their multicultural background, students took cultural differences for granted. In other words, to them it was obvious that all cultures are different and that we can't know about all of them which, by the way, is not a hampering block to working together.

We also considered the fact that because this was a course assignment and that a grade was at stake, students would feel safer when working with a culture they are well familiar with, without taking the risk of venturing in unknown waters. As a matter of fact, it is easier to speak about what is well known.

It was only at the second phase of our study that we realized that, although plausible, our assumptions were observer-relative, that is, our expectations were influenced by previous research where openness to diversity was defined only as openness to people from other cultures. Indeed, when reading the narratives contained in the students' assignments we gathered that their understanding of openness to diversity and ours were misaligned because they were not rooted in the same beliefs. While previous research and the ODC scale were exclusively others-oriented, our students showed that openness to diversity is also about sharing, and thus, self-

oriented as well. By explaining their own cultural background, they were opening the door to a conversation about other cultures and their own.

As a matter of fact, in both cases, students were more focused on sharing about their own respective cultures with their classmates rather than exploring new cultures. They would willingly share, teach and explain their cultural history, rituals and examples with pride of their community during the sessions. Their way of opening to diversity was sharing their knowledge and belonging to their respective communities aimed at having others understand and appreciate them as well. These results were opposed to our preliminary expectations as we assumed that the main motivation for students enrolling in an elective course about multiculturalism would be cultural curiosity, that is, the willingness to learn about other cultures and thus seize the opportunity to explore the unknown.

### **Symmetry between self and others orientation**

Seizing the opportunity they were given to choose any culture they would like to study, students explained, in their reports, the reasons having led them to choose the cultures they would describe in their assignments.

We took, out of their narratives, a symmetry that stems from an apparent paradoxical behavior which is simultaneously self-centered and communitarian. Social media has reinforced such symmetry in the sense that contributors post about themselves to share their feelings and routines aiming at finding others who feel like them so that they will follow up with comments, likes and reshares. When opening themselves to others, they are looking for a mirror effect whereby symmetry will make them feel as part of a (virtual) community. Contemporary students build themselves and create their own realities (Arntz & al., 2005) in relation to others they know virtually thanks to the proliferation of narratives in social media and reality shows.

This group identification leads to an increase of curiosity about others at the same time as students remain self-oriented. Thus, sharing becomes a key aspect of their lives and subsequently of their learning process. As explained by Hood (2012), self is the product of relationships and interactions with others. By being dependent on each other, the social bonds and relationships that used to take time and effort to form are now undergoing a revolution as people put themselves online; technology shapes society. The speed and ease at which alliances and relationships can be formed is resulting in the new self in the online social world.

### **Towards a contemporary ODC scale**

Our findings led us to see the definition of ODC as well as its scale from a refreshing perspective: the students' symmetrical perspective. Clearly, the ODC scale is oriented to others, what prompts the following

question: does the ODC scale measure openness to diversity or openness to others?

Because the concept and its subsequent scale were created a long time ago, they don't integrate the pivotal role of diversity and inclusion both in companies and in universities today.

We argue that, under the influence of social media, by sharing their own culture with classmates from other cultures, students were engaging in openness to diversity by enticing others to better understand their own cultures and thus increase awareness about cultural differences. This approach to multiculturalism would contribute to fighting stereotyping by the fact that now those students would have met peers from different ethnicities and heard straight from the source about other cultures.

Students with immigrant ascendants are proud of their cultural roots and want to share them with their classmates. This trend became a mainstream topic in current multicultural conversations for having been reinforced by companies providing genealogy with much success and acceptance, such as Ancestry. In doing so, people realize that everyone has multiple cultural roots what helps them to feel closer to people who otherwise were seen as totally strangers and unrelated to them.

The following verbatims from students illustrate the importance of sharing in openness to diversity:

“It is important to me to explain my culture so that others can better understand me”

“I want to be able to speak freely about my culture”

“I want people to know about my culture without stereotypes”

“I want to introduce my family’s culture to others”

“Sharing about my culture is my way of making new friends “

“When I tell people about my culture, we realize that we have plenty of things in common that we didn’t know before”

“Sharing the food of my home country with my classmates helps them understand when I am homesick”

Based on our findings, we suggest the updated ODC scale in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Symmetrical ODC Scale**

<b>Symmetrical ODC Scale</b>	
<b>Others-oriented</b>	<b>Self-oriented</b>
I believe contact with individuals whose backgrounds (race, national origin, sexual orientation) differ from my own is an essential part of my college education	I believe contact with individuals whose backgrounds (race, national origin, sexual orientation) differ from my own is an essential part of college education because I can share my culture with them

I enjoy taking courses that challenge my beliefs and values	I enjoy taking courses that challenge my classmates beliefs about my cultural values
I most enjoy the courses that make me think about things from a different perspective	I most enjoy the courses that make me think and freely share about things from my own perspective
I believe that learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of my college education	I believe that learning about people from different cultures and sharing about my own culture are very important parts of my college education
I enjoy having discussions with people whose ideas and values are different from my own	I enjoy explaining to others why my ideas and values are different from theirs
I enjoy talking with people who have values different from mine because it helps me better understand myself and values	I enjoy talking with people who have values different from mine because it gives me the opportunity to explain myself and my values
I agree that the real value of a college education lies in being introduced to different values	I agree that the real value of a college education lies in being introduced to and sharing different values

### **Testing the symmetric ODC scale**

We started the present article critiquing the use of scales in the measurement of Openness to Diversity because we assumed that it led to SDB. However, in an attempt to comply with Pascharella & Colleagues' (1996) mainstream measurement method still prevailing today, we suggested an update based on our case study's findings, which integrates the self-oriented side to the others-oriented scale.

Next, we decided to test our own symmetric scale aiming at verifying its relevance. The purpose of such empirical application was twofold: contribute to the longevity of the original ODC scale thanks to the update if our findings would prove it reliable, and verify its potential SDB influence.

To do so, the symmetric ODC scale was presented as a 5-point Likert scale composed of 14 questions: 7 of them from the original ODC scale created by Pascharella and Colleagues in 1996 and the symmetric 7 questions integrating the sharing and self-oriented side of openness to diversity. The sample for testing the symmetric scale was composed of 56 graduate business students.

## **Findings**

Although 75% of the respondents Strongly Agree (SA) that contact with people from different backgrounds is an essential part of their education, only 25% Agree (A) that they enjoy taking courses that challenge their beliefs and values. These figures go down to 50% (SA) and 25% (A) in the symmetric scale while the rate of Neither Agree nor Disagree (NAOD) inexistent in the traditional scale goes up to 25% on the symmetric side. The answers to the first symmetric question preclude the impact of SDB when using such a scale. Students were reluctant to admit that they would take the opportunity of being among people from different backgrounds to share about their own cultures.

All respondents agreed that they enjoy taking courses that make them think from a different perspective or different from their own perspective, while 75% (SA) and 25% (A) that learning from different cultures as well as sharing their own culture is a very important part of their education.

In the other-oriented side of the scale, 75% of the respondents strongly agree and 25% agree that they enjoy talking with people with different values because it helps them to better understand themselves and their own values, but only 25% (SA) that they enjoy explaining to others why their ideas and values are different from theirs. The remaining 75% neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Finally, 50% (NAOD) that the real value of their education lies in being introduced to different values, while 25% (SA) and 25% (A). On the self-oriented side of the scale, 50% (SA) that the real value of their education is being introduced to and sharing different values, while 50% neither agree nor disagree with that statement.

## **Analysis**

One of the main outcomes taken away from the set of answers obtained in this study is that figures of NAOD went up in questions relating to students' sharing about their own cultures. Once the survey was completed, students were asked about how they had experienced the survey. Some students said that some questions were intrusive and some others said that it would sound pretentious to speak about their own cultures. These findings confirm our assumption that using scales with direct questions does introduce the SDB, as stated in the first part of this paper. As a matter of fact, when left free to choose any culture to study, students lean towards their own cultures and share their values and beliefs very spontaneously during the sessions. However, when questioned about their willingness to speak about themselves and share about their own cultures, they seem to feel uncomfortable and tend to answer neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

The NAOD option in the scale is relevant in this case, because people can NAOD with statements coming from others but not when it comes to their own statements. In other words, how can anyone not know if they want to share about their culture? Thus, the high response rates to this option disclose a politically correct answer to what would sound too self-oriented.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The overarching aim of this study was to observe the impact of multiculturalism in the classroom on graduate students' openness to diversity. Our method was consistent with prior research outcomes, namely with the one conducted by the Wabash National Study involving the analysis of 207 intercultural experiences from 161 college students on six campuses which described how students experience intercultural learning: (a) intercultural learning occurred when students directly encountered others' experiences; (b) feeling safe enough to explore cultural differences was a key dimension of intercultural learning; and (c) students used a variety of approaches that led to intercultural learning (from simply listening or watching to exploring how one's personal identity related to intercultural understanding). All three factors were represented in the Multicultural Marketing course in both years.

Previous research conducted with students to measure openness to diversity was of critical importance to the understanding and development of multiculturalism in higher education. However, most of the previous studies were conducted with undergraduate students and used structured questionnaires with scales leading to increased likelihood of SDB. We believe that it is safe to state that SDB did not play a role in our results because students were not asked to give or rate their opinion about openness to diversity. They worked on one among several assignments required for the same course enabling an analysis based on direct observation and narratives.

This study underscores the importance of going beyond creating multicultural environments for having students open to diversity. One of our main conclusions is that a multicultural environment is a required yet not sufficient condition for students to be open to diversity and that the definition of the concept itself should be revisited and updated in order to fit in the contemporary trends and needs of D&I both in educational and professional settings.

More specifically, our findings lead us to understand that ODC would be better defined as a two-way path to others. It can be both self and others' oriented the main goal being sharing knowledge and explanations about different cultures. The research presented here was ignited by an unexpected and intriguing situation having emerged in a classroom. Although no external variables were controlled, the results are relevant in



the sense that they lay down the path for further research to explore the reasons why this phenomenon exists. Further research should test the symmetrical ODC scale in adding the self-oriented side to the others-oriented openness to diversity.

Our main contribution to the field consisted of proposing an update of the mainstream ODC scale created by Pascharella and colleagues in 1996. We hope that the symmetry of the scale in integrating self-oriented statements is a fundamental step in the search for accuracy when measuring openness to diversity among contemporary students.

By suggesting a symmetric scale we aimed at integrating the new trends about multiculturalism and thus of openness to diversity to the existing ODC scale. We compared these results to those obtained with the direct observation phase of our research and confirmed that the use of scales about this topic leads to SBD. Today, it is important to show that we are open to others rather than being self-oriented, while the observation of behaviors in the classroom and on social media provides evidence of the opposite mindset. A very good example would be the current rise of cancel culture. More and more people allow themselves to “cancel“ people whose opinions differ from theirs. This is the opposite of openness to others and to the acceptance of diversity in backgrounds and opinions.

Our research was limited to a sample of graduate students in the same business school. We believe that our findings can lead the way to more robust analysis of the most appropriate methods not only to measure but also to integrate openness to diversity in curricula in order to have students better prepared to perform in multicultural settings.

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