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**Differences in students' perspectives on diversity and social distance**

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## Differences in students' perspectives on diversity and social distance

### Abstract

This mixed-methods study explored factors influencing students' perspectives on diversity and perceptions of social distance related to social justice, equity, and prejudice. An undergraduate cohort at a Predominantly-White Southwest university responded to an online survey and qualitative results indicated that students most frequently witnessed religious prejudice, in comparison to also witnessing prejudice against diverse sexual orientations and racial/ethnic groups. Quantitative results corroborated, with students who reported *least prejudiced*, rated highest witnessed prejudice towards others and those who reported *most prejudiced*, rated lowest witnessed prejudice. Accordingly, the more perceived privilege and self-prejudice students reported, the less they witnessed prejudice. Moreover, perceptions of diverse friendships and social distance towards one's peers accounted for the largest factors predicting social distance towards others of different race/ethnic groups.

### Introduction

How people conceptualize diversity in a globalized world is changing. Historically, diversity in America has been based on an underlying, socially-constructed premise that equates diversity with race and ethnicity, particularly as a "Black and White" issue (Feagin, 2001).

However, focusing exclusively on race and ethnicity marginalizes the voices and experiences of other traditionally-underrepresented persons in academia, such as students with disabilities, non-traditional students, women, and those who identify as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, or questioning (GLBTQ) (Adams, Blumenfeld, Casteñeda, Hackman, Peters, & Zuniga, 2000).

The current generation of students called the Millennials (born in or after 1982), are the most demographically distinct generation to date, with distinctly different ways of viewing diversity from previous generations (Cook Francis & Ousley, 2007). As student populations become more diverse in their characteristics, attitudes, and perspectives, institutions must provide social justice education and programming to a broader spectrum of students than ever before (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Gaither, 2005).

Higher education plays an integral role in our globalized society by investing in diversity and encouraging students to lessen social distance and successfully engage with diverse individuals and groups. As Gurin (2005) argued, a diverse university community has benefits for all students in breaking patterns of segregation and stratification. Students learn better in an environment with diverse perspectives and are better prepared for our pluralistic, democratic society (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2004; Gurin, 2005; Tatum, 1997). Further, diverse peers in the learning environment can improve intergroup relations and mutual understanding (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, Andreas, Lyons, Carney Strange, Krehbiel, & MacKay, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1998). When campus leaders understand that the interplay of experience and other salient influences shape students' perspectives regarding diversity, they are better able to promote responsive curricula and programming that emphasize critical and global thinking among their students and faculty (Levine-Donnerstein, Broussard, & Willett, 2006), promoting a supportive climate for students of marginalized groups and equity for all students.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Student identities and perspectives regarding diversity are socially constructed, with multiple facets, and are shaped by issues of privilege and power (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). Students from different cultural backgrounds and experiences perceive diversity differently and may have different levels of satisfaction with educational programming specifically focused on diversity (Park, 2009).

An individual's development of social attitudes, racial/ethnic and gender biases, and social distance is a continual, cumulative, social process, influenced by one's cultural and multicultural background, in addition to the nature of contact and one's interactions with others (Bogardus, 1928; Levine-Donnerstein, Biely, & Champion, 1998; Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

Individuals learn positive or negative biases during childhood through adolescence from parents, siblings, peers, and others, until they develop their own through interactions at home, college, religion, work, and travel (Bogardus, 1928, 1938; Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Bogardus proposed that if one's experiences are positive and later interactions are similar then, a "favorable" bias towards others exists (Bogardus, 1928, p. 107). Postsecondary education potentially creates optimal environments for positive interactions that influence individuals' racial/ethnic attitudes and whether this remains after graduation, is unclear (Bogardus, 1938).

Bogardus' Social Distance Scale (1933), rated people's perceptions of different racial, ethnic, religious, and nationality groups, ranging from the least intimate, *not allow in my country*, to the most intimate, *marrying a person*. The lower the social distance rating, the more intimate people rated their interactions with *others* from diverse groups. Social contact promoted positive, tolerant attitudes, and less social distance (Allport, 1954; Bogardus, 1958; Ames, Moriwaki, & Basu, 1968; Ellison & Powers, 1994; Levine-Donnerstein, 2001), as well as more social distance, prejudice, and stereotypes, (Bogardus, 1928, 1938, 1959; Allport, 1954; Tajfel, 1982; Levine-Donnerstein, 2005).

A *postmodern* view of diversity encompasses a broad conceptualization that posits that diversity is a plurality of voices representing all groups (Tierney, 1993), defined by race/ethnicity, nationality, geography, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, socio-economics, educational attainment, and political views. Postmodernism asserts that diversity is fluid, without boundaries, bringing groups out of the margins (Bloland, 1995). This perspective was born of the Civil Rights movement and normed through the media, but diluted and distanced from social justice, as illustrated by the children's programming Millennials were exposed to in the 1980s and 90s. Sesame Street, for example, has focused on socio-emotional development for

over three decades, emphasizing interpersonal skills through global awareness and respect for differing views (Sesame Street Caregivers, PBS, 2007).

Students have been exposed to such politically correct messages throughout their formative years, and these values have become ingrained in their ideologies. However, for the most part, students have not critically examined these values nor have their unconscious biases been challenged (Ousley, Cook Francis, Antonellis, & Basij, 2007). Thus these ingrained values do not always translate to students' commitment to social justice in the campus community.

Postmodernism hides attitudes under a blanket acceptance of all, allowing individuals a positive self-image and view of society, but discouraging them from recognizing deep-seated biases and systems of oppression that are harmful to different groups.

Although equity and social justice benefit society as a whole (Gurin, 2005), students may see diversity on an individual level either as something that benefits them personally (for example, in the form of scholarships for underrepresented students), or, if they come from a culture of privilege, as a threat to the status quo (i.e., preference for applicants of certain racial categorizations over White applicants). Students may value merit-based programs that reward academic skills rather than student characteristics that enrich the educational environment. Meritocracy in higher education, as positioned by Trow (1992), captures the salience of the assimilationist thought posited by Chavez (1991).

Assimilation is a *color-blind* approach that implies that race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, nationality, and class are irrelevant to a person's identity. The logic persists that merit is also color-blind; focusing on the merit of an individual's work and developing policies and programs based on merit will achieve diversity. Individuals with a meritocratic perspective may focus on achievement rather than on issues such as race or gender, with a

structural/functionalist view of diversity that assesses current social systems as effective; they will likely not recognize the inequity of power and privilege. They may adopt language supportive of diversity in public settings, while keeping beliefs about merit private; in short, speaking in politically correct terms but not embracing the overall message. They may virtually or symbolically adopt this language to show acceptance, but not actually change their belief system (Birnbaum, 2000).

In an academic community, important reasons persist for both meritocratic and postmodern viewpoints, which are not mutually exclusive, to coexist of a sociocultural-educational environment. When students must compete for resources—whether it be for money, grades, attention from faculty and staff members, or job opportunities—an emphasis on merit-based rewards seems reasonable; whether there is equitable access to routes to achievement is not a consideration. Alternatively, when students feel they are singled out for rewards as tokens of their constituency, and treated with hostility as a result, faith in merit as the basis for rewards alleviates this pressure. However, Bogardus (1928; 1958) found that as resources decline in a society, greater social distance and negatively biased attitudes and behaviors occur, within that society.

The postmodernist de-emphasis on social justice issues is dependent upon a lack of awareness of systematic institutional prejudice. The social stigma against prejudice forces individuals' negative attitudes about different groups underground (van Dijk, 1992), creating an appearance of institutional openness to diversity (Birnbaum, 2000). This institutional denial of prejudice tends to result in the blame for any witnessed manifestations of prejudice being placed on the individual, rather than on systematic biases. The prejudice, however, is manifested and reinforced via biased language (van Dijk, 1992). If students hold a postmodern view of diversity,

they may recognize that prejudice is communicated through language, but do not recognize that this is the mechanism for its propagation, nor that it is an indicator of deep underlying ideologies in society related to privilege and power.

In comparison, the *critical postmodern (CPM)* view of diversity articulates the specific and relative importance of each element that defines diversity (Tierney, 1993). The CPM perspective involves a critical consciousness of the interrelations between individuals and an examination of how language, such as racial/ethnic categorizations, perpetuates oppressive behaviors (Tappan & Brown, 1996). A CPM perspective, though perhaps revealing a more biased side of individuals and communities that can be painful to acknowledge, allows these threats to social justice to be confronted and, ideally, overcome.

The current generation of students brings a more inclusive way of thinking about diversity beyond the elements of race/ethnicity and gender and this mixed-methods study explored factors that influence students' perspectives on diversity and perceptions of social distance related to social justice, equity, and prejudice. The researchers examined the following research question: What are Millennial students' perceptions and attitudes towards diversity, social distance, and prejudice? This paper seeks to report results from a student cohort at a research-intensive, Predominantly-White university in the Southwest, with the intent of corroborating the findings of their previous research on this population of students.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The research team intentionally, over-sampled students of color, recruiting from all undergraduate students self-identified as ethnic minorities in the University's student database. A random group, which included half of the students who self-identified as White ( $n = 15,000$ ),

comprised the largest portion of the sample. A total of 1,503 participants responded (i.e., a 10% response rate), which corresponds to the national trend of low response rates for online surveys with undergraduates, whom are oversaturated with research requests (Rea & Parker, 1992).

The current study represents all participants (n = 1,459) who self-identified as either White (n = 929, 63.7%), or as one of the university's defined ethnic groups (n = 319, 21.9%): 12.5% Latino (n = 182), 5.8% Asian Pacific Islander (n = 85), 2.5% African American (n = 36), and 1.1% Native American (n = 16). This study does not include students classified as: Biracial/Multiracial (n = 149, 10.2%); *Other* (students identified as an ethnic background outside the scope of those listed above, n = 16, 1.1%), or *Unknown* (students resisting to provide an ethnic classification (i.e., those identifying as *American*, *human*, etc., n = 46, 3.2%). Given that the sample was predominantly White and a majority of female participants (61.3%) responded to the online survey, it is not representative of the overall undergraduate University population. Thus generalizability of these results is limited to this cohort group. However, the subset of students who chose to participate may represent those students who seek to share their perceptions and value discussions about diversity.

### **Instrumentation**

The researchers developed an online survey based on a theoretical and conceptual framework cited in the literature and discussed in the paper's introduction. A majority of items were tested in two large pilot studies at this large Research I, Southwest University. They are designed to capture undergraduates' perspectives on social justice and diversity, in addition to undergraduates' perceptions of social distance from people of different racial/ethnic groups, which stemmed from theory and past research, (Bogardus, 1933; Levine-Donnerstein, Biely, Champion, Trombetta, Chapman, & Lenton, 1997, 2000; Ousley, Cook Francis, Antonellis, &

Basij, 2007, Ousley, Levine-Donnerstein, & Antonellis, 2008). Nine-point Likert scales comprised the greatest number of items in the instrument, with a set of open-ended questions developed for the purpose of corroborating key quantitative results, discussed below.

This study is a part of an ongoing five-year project, which is why the researchers examined reliability measures on two key parts of a more extensive instrument. Thus a coefficient alpha of .74 represents the majority of items ( $n= 76$ ), in the full instrument (coefficient alpha of .75), with a coefficient alpha of .66, for the following two main scales. The Progressive scale encompasses underlying concepts of equity, access, and support for diverse groups. Higher scores on this scale represent a stronger orientation toward a social justice mindset and recognition of inequity in existing social structures. The Conservative scale encompasses underlying concepts of meritocracy, diversity as conflict, and diversity as a non-issue. Higher scores on this scale represent a tendency to support existing social structures and a color-blind approach to resource distribution.

The reliability measures for the scales demonstrated the instrument's substantial item reliability, although tests for normality showed that the scales were not normally distributed and did not meet the assumptions of performing parametric tests. Nonparametric tests were selected for analysis with these scales, because they were more appropriate for this type of data. After obtaining significant results on the scales, the researchers further performed post hoc analyses, by dividing them into three meaningful levels, low, medium, and high, based on the proportion of individuals comprising an approximate third of each distribution (see Results and Discussion).

### **Procedure**

The researchers conducted preliminary analyses to determine whether gender and racial/ethnic differences existed. Past findings among the authors and in the literature indicated

that racial/ethnic and gender differences in social contact research showed mixed outcomes, with Whites more and less prejudice than Non-Whites (Mills, Daly, Longmore, & Kilbride, 1995; Hoxter & Lester, 1995; Levine-Donnerstein, Biely, & Champion, 1998; Levine-Donnerstein, 2005) and women more and less socially distant than men (Bogardus, 1928, 1959; Qualls, Cox, & Schehr, 1992; Mills, Daly, Longmore, & Kilbride, 1995; Hoxter & Lester, 1995; Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, 2001, 2005).

Predicted differences in gender and ethnicity among White students and students of color (i.e., African Americans, Asian Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and Native Americans) were significant for the following Kruskal-Wallis tests on the Progressive and Conservative scales. Students of color rated diversity higher (i.e., were more *open* to diversity and less focused on merit): (1) Progressive:  $H(1, n = 1188) = 80.149, p < .05$  and (2) Conservative:  $H(1, n = 1174) = 4.129, p < .05$ . On both scales, females rated diversity higher (i.e., more *open* to diversity and less focused on merit): (1) Progressive:  $H(1, n = 1391) = 43.466, p < .05$  and (2) Conservative:  $H(1, n = 1379) = 18.725, p < .05$ .

Based on these results, the researchers disaggregated the cohort into four combined gender-ethnic groups for greater depth in understanding where differences lie among the scales, within groups, and between groups. These combined gender-ethnic groups are White females ( $n = 676, 54.2\%$ ), female students of color ( $n = 218, 17.5\%$ ), White males ( $n = 253, 20.3\%$ ), and male students of color ( $n = 101, 8.1\%$ ). The groups showed differences among the two scales: (1) Progressive:  $H(3, n = 1183) = 119.414, p < .05$  and (2) Conservative:  $H(3, n = 1169) = 21.586, p < .05$ .

## **Results and Discussion**

Items capturing students' perceptions of their social justice, social distance, prejudice, and the extent to which they witnessed prejudice, were analyzed via Chi Square, Kruskal-Wallis, multiple regression, and a qualitative analysis of open-ended responses, which corroborated with the quantitative results.

A significant difference regarding students' perceptions of prejudice towards people from different race and ethnicity groups was found among the gender-ethnic groups,  $X^2(6, n = 1140) = 18.459, p = .005$ . White males tended to stand out in perceiving themselves as more prejudiced towards people from different race and ethnicity groups, split almost evenly between being neutral and high (35.3% high, 36.2% medium, 28.6% low), compared to White females who tended to be neutral (26.0% high, 45.6% medium, 28.4% low) and both male and female students of color who tended to be neutral to low (28.6% high, 31.9% medium, 39.6% low), (29.4% high, 35.1% medium, 35.6% low), respectively.

Also, significant difference was found among these four combined groups regarding witnessing prejudice,  $X^2(6, n = 1119) = 15.972, p = .014$ . White males tended to notice prejudice the least with more neutral to low responses (28.8% high, 33.8% medium, 37.4% low), White females tended to be neutral (27.6% high, 43.6% medium, 28.8% low), and both male and female students of color tended to notice prejudice the most (40.0% high, 38.9% medium, 21.1% low), (31.1% high, 42.6% medium, 28.8% low), respectively. Thus students who tended to report higher perceptions of prejudice towards diverse ethnic or religious groups indicated a negative correlation in witnessing prejudice, indicating that the more prejudiced a person is, the less he or she will notice or observe prejudice. Through a lens of privilege and power, this result makes sense, because those students experiencing the most privilege and power in higher education

would tend to notice prejudice less, since they would be least affected by it, and most invested in maintaining the status quo.

A significant Kruskal-Wallis statistic showed a difference among the four combined gender and ethnic groups regarding their ratings of the extent to which diversity had a significant effect in their lives,  $H(3, n = 1239) = 112.388, p < .01$ . Ethnicity appears central to this question, with male and female students of color showing the highest mean ranks (746.40, 821.71), respectively. White females also showed a higher mean rank (567.89) than White males (533.55). The result of the Kruskal-Wallis test measuring the extent to which diversity does not influence a student in a significant manner, corroborates with this finding,  $H(3, n = 1244) = 56.216, p < .01$ , and White males showed the highest mean rank (720.21), followed by White females (640.49), male students of color (547.86), and female students of color (487.80), with the lowest mean rank. These results indicate that those students with more privilege on the basis of ethnicity see diversity as having less impact on their lives than those students who have less privilege.

Although significant differences were not found in Kruskal-Wallis test measuring the extent to which people often are hired because of their race rather than their skills, the item is still of interest,  $H(3, n = 1242) = 5.605, p = .132$ . Females had a lower mean rank than males regardless of ethnicity (606.95, White females and 605.06, female students of color, respectively). Males, regardless of ethnicity, had the highest ranked mean (658.23, White males and 661.98, male students of color, respectively). This demonstrates that males agreed with this statement the most, which may indicate that they fear being penalized, because of their racial/ethnic identities—White males because of *reverse discrimination* and male students of color because of negative stereotypes against ethnic minorities whom are male—and value being

judged on the basis of merit. The researchers conducted a post-hoc Chi Square test on gender as a group, to further explore this variable. A significant result between males and females occurred, independent of race/ethnicity,  $X^2 (1, n = 1242) = 5.592, p = .018$ . Males had a higher mean rank (659.30) and females had a lower mean rank (606.49).

A significant difference existed among gender-ethnic groups regarding the extent to which *different university standards are acceptable to create equity for students who did not have equal opportunities in high school*, ( $H (3, n = 1239) = 46.580, p < .01$ ). Analogous to items related to whether diversity significantly affects one's life, a difference existed among the gender-ethnic groups, with White males having the lowest ranked mean (551.42) and female students of color having the highest ranked mean (743.91). Additionally, White females had the second lowest ranked mean (592.27) and male students of color had the second highest ranked mean (711.26). This showed that students of color tend to agree more strongly that different standards are acceptable and may feel that this would benefit them more, whereas, White students might feel this statement is a threat to the status quo.

The survey item, the extent to which *diversity is needed to increase access to higher education for students of color*, followed the same pattern, with female students of color having the highest ranked mean (812.16), in comparison to male students of color (775.09), White females (589.08), and White males having the lowest ranked mean (478.66),  $H (3, n = 1240) = 127.735, p = < .01$ . Again, it seems as though students of color are strongly in favor of this, whereas, White students, particularly White males, might perceive this as a threat to the status quo.

In a pattern nearly opposite from the above two analyses, the results for the item: *University admission policies should be based on students' academic skills*, demonstrated that

White male students had the highest ranked mean, indicating the strongest support (671.53).

White females represented the next highest ranked mean in support of this item (640.66), with female students of color (539.91) and male students of color (508.60) far lower in their rankings on admission policies based on academic skills,  $H(3, n = 1236) = 31.416, p < .01$ . This corroborates with the idea that White students would be in favor of merit and value the status quo.

Following analyses of questions regarding the degree to which students perceived themselves as prejudiced and the degree to which they had witnessed prejudice, researchers coded the open-ended question: *If applicable, please describe the prejudice you have personally witnessed on campus*. Of the 1,503 students who completed the survey, 432 students chose to respond to this qualitative question.

#### Types of Witnessed Prejudice by Manifestor

Responses were coded for the type of prejudice observed (on the basis of religious beliefs, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and other characteristics) and, if specified, by the *manifestor* (i.e., the individual observed manifesting the prejudice (students: professionals affiliated with the campus community such as professors, teaching assistants, or staff; and people not affiliated with the campus community, who were primarily speakers visiting campus to share their beliefs in a free-speech forum). When it was not clear who was observed making a prejudiced comment or engaging in prejudiced behavior, responses were coded as General/Not Specified. Presumably, when respondents did not specify a manifestor, they were speaking about the student body as opposed to faculty or visitors, as this is their peer population and they may assume the reader takes it as a given. However, because the manifestor is not specified in these cases, the researchers could only group these in a General category.

Students could provide responses that fell into multiple coding categories, resulting in 494 references coded according to the above scheme, and 114 references coded as *other*. Examples of references coded as *other* are comments regarding reverse discrimination, comments that identified prejudice outside the coding scheme (e.g., prejudice on the basis of age or weight), and comments that were nebulous, identifying that prejudice was observed but not providing sufficient information for the reference to be coded within this scheme (e.g., stating only that the prejudice was *verbal* or *comments against people who are different*, etc.).

Religion was the most prominent type of prejudice; 34% of student responses referenced prejudice on the basis of religion. Prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation was referenced by 23% of respondents, while prejudice on the basis of race and gender were each referenced by 18% and 17% of respondents, respectively. Less than 8% of respondents identified prejudice on the basis of disability. Prejudice on the basis of other characteristics, such as age, weight, and language, were each referenced by less than 1% of respondents.

Table A (in the Appendix) provides a cross-tabulation of the coded data by type of prejudice identified and by the manifestor observed engaging in the prejudiced speech or behavior. The table provides counts of coded instances, the percent of each type of prejudice by identified group, and ranks of the percentages from high to low (1 to 5) for each row.

For those coded instances in which a student or student group was identified as engaging in prejudice, prejudice on the basis of religion was the most frequently cited observation, followed by prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation. Disability was identified the least often. Similar patterns were found for those not-affiliated with the campus community and for those instances in which it was unclear who was engaging in prejudice. Students observing prejudice from people not affiliated with the campus community centered around several religious

individuals/groups who speak in a common area dedicated to free speech. Students noted that in the course of expressing religious beliefs, these campus visitors often made comments that were demeaning to women, ethnic minorities, people identifying as GLBTQ, and people who had different religious beliefs than the speaker. One visiting speaker struck such a chord with students that they organized a silent protest, dressed as angels in a demonstration reminiscent of a protest done in the 1990's at the funeral of a young man killed for being gay. According to a poll in the campus newspaper, 31% of students stated that this controversial speaker offended them, and 31% also stated that although they were offended, they respected his right to speak. Only 8% of students polled said that they shared the speaker's views (Mitchell, 2009).

For professionals affiliated with the university, the pattern was slightly different, with religion most frequently cited, followed by gender. Regarding perceived prejudice against religious beliefs, the most frequently cited example was professors making statements belittling religious beliefs in the classroom. The majority of instances regarding gender were students observing comments or behavior from faculty that appeared sexist against female students, such as comments from faculty in engineering classes that females were less intelligent than males or expected to do worse academically than males. Comments against ethnic minorities, people identifying as GLBTQ or people with disabilities were less common from professionals affiliated with the university.

These findings corroborate with the quantitative findings for this study. Prejudice that would be considered less socially acceptable, such as comments against people with disabilities, were observed less often by students, than those on the border of being considered socially acceptable or free speech. It is not surprising that prejudice on the basis of race/ethnicity is observed less frequently than prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation. While there is a strong

social stigma associated with the label of *racist*, in many subcultures of the campus community it still is *socially-acceptable* to be prejudiced, on the basis of sexual orientation (for instance, among some religious groups). Prejudiced speech related to different religious beliefs may be perceived as exercising one's right to free speech, with the idea that there is no law against this and that *everyone is entitled to their own beliefs*

### Manifestations of Prejudice

Students' responses also were coded by how the prejudice was manifested (as an action, such as crossing the street when a certain kind of person approaches; as a perception, such as an *intolerant ideology* communicated by the manifestor, though often in a manner unspecified by the respondent; or in words as verbal or written text), and by the level at which students identified prejudice as being manifested (i.e., on the level of the individual (anomalous instances), on the level of the institution (systematic prejudice), or both). Coding categories were not mutually exclusive, thus students could describe, for example, prejudice that was verbal as well as prejudice manifested as an action. Percentages provided below are based on the number of students who provided substantial responses to this question (n=432).

Unsurprisingly, students reported witnessing prejudice in the form of verbal or written words nearly twice as often as they reported witnessing prejudice in the form of actions. Prejudice manifested as snide comments, racial slurs, inappropriate jokes, and biased texts were cited by 63% of students; blatant actions such as pointing, laughing, spitting, and avoidance were cited by 36% of students. Witnessed "perceptions" of manifestors were referenced by 14% of respondents. The strong institutional stigma against racism would tend to subvert the more blatant prejudicial activities (van Dijk, 1992), in line with the lower incidence of "actions" reported by students.

It also is unsurprising that students' responses were far more likely to identify individual manifestors and instances (34% of responses), than to identify systematic institutional biases (24%). Only 9% of respondents indicated that it is both. When prejudice is present within a community but systematically denied, any witnessed manifestations tend to be perceived by the dominant group as anomalous events enacted by anomalous individuals. However, though students may not recognize it, as such (and in fact, references to "standard jeering" and "regular old gay bashing" would imply that many students do not), the high incidence of manifestations of prejudice in text and, especially, talk are actually a means of propagating and reinforcing these prejudices (van Dijk, 1992).

Based on the theoretical and conceptual framework and piloted research on social distance and prejudice, the researchers focused on two multiple regression models. Factors predicting students' perceptions of social distance towards people of different race/ethnic groups extended former findings on diversity, with their perceptions of diverse friendships ( $\beta = .18$ ) and overall social distance towards peers ( $\beta = .16$ ) accounting for the largest explained variation, together with whether a person's ethnicity influences them when they meet ( $\beta = .11$ ), the importance of diversity to an enriched educational experience ( $\beta = .10$ ), and the extent to which a university should provide services to ethnicities ( $\beta = .09$ ),  $F(5, 1211) = 37.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $MSE = 2.29$ ,  $R = .37$ ,  $R^2_{Adjusted} = .13$ . This model corroborates with former findings (Levine-Donnerstein, 2005; 2001) in that students' perceptions of interaction with diverse friends and the influence of a person's ethnic identity strongly relate to perceptions of social distance.

The researchers examined the second model, after findings from their qualitative analyses discussed above, showed that students reported witnessing prejudice based on religion to the greatest extent. The highest factors predicting students witnessing religion-based prejudice were

whether one had a meaningful conversation with persons of different religious belief in the past year ( $\beta = .43$ ) and one's witnessing racial/ethnic prejudice ( $\beta = .21$ ), along with one's perceived interaction with people of different religions ( $\beta = -.06$ ), and one's perceptions of prejudice towards people of different religions ( $\beta = -.05$ ),  $F(4, 1100) = 71.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $MSE = 2.89$ ,  $R = .46$ ,  $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .20$ .

### **Limitations of the Study**

Findings from the preliminary analyses, indicate a need for further research regarding the nature of prejudice, who commits a prejudice act, when is it witnessed, who witnesses it, and to whom it occurs—specifically, prejudice that is directed toward people's religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or race/ethnic identity. The generalizability of the findings is limited, because the study focused on one Southwest institution, with an overrepresented sample predominantly comprised of female and White students. In addition, multiple regression analyses were conducted with factors measured on nine-point Likert scales and although their underlying distributions were continuous, future models will comprise true continuous factors. Thus the researchers currently are gathering data to corroborate these results. They also intend to retest their findings particularly, because of the unexpected qualitative findings on students witnessing greater occurrences of sexual orientation and religion-based prejudice, than predicted racial and ethnic prejudice.

### **Conclusion**

Differences in undergraduates' perceptions of social distance, self-prejudice, and witnessing prejudice, in addition to their perspectives on social justice and equity, suggest that each gender-ethnic group (i.e., White females, White males, male students of color, and female students of color) is distinct in its perspectives on diversity. Female students, the largest

respondent group, were more open to diversity than males and students of color were more open to diversity than White students. Overall, students appeared *torn* about issues of merit-based opportunities for students versus diversity-related gains for *others*; however, most students supported equity, unless they happened to be White.

White male students, especially, stood out on every measure analyzed in this study. Furthermore, this trend was apparent in White males' perceptions and opinions regarding equitable resource distribution and affirmative action—salient issues in today's institutions of higher education and in the current political arena—as measures limiting affirmative action were on the ballot for election year 2008 (Schmidt, 2007; Park, 2009). These results also showed that when White males view social structures as equitable, they are less inclined to see a need for diversity. In conjunction with the finding, White males tended *not* to report witnessing prejudice—that is, for the most part, they did not observe manifestations of social inequity, which is evident why this gender-ethnic group tended not to perceive a need for affirmative action. Instead, they regarded the *playing field* as equal and did not perceive an inherent value in diversity.

As expected, students of color were more likely to report witnessing and experiencing prejudice than White students (Levine-Donnerstein, 2005)—primarily because, this group remains representative of the least privileged students in the college environment, particularly, male students of color. Not only are male students of color members of the racial minority, but they also are the minority-minority group, now that more females than males matriculate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Thus minority males may experience more prejudice and be more sensitive to and aware of subtle instances of prejudice and discrimination.

Moreover, factors predicting students' perceptions of social distance towards people of different race/ethnic groups extended former findings on diversity, in that students' perceptions of diverse friendships and their overall social distance towards peers, accounted for the largest indicators of racial/ethnic social distance. Most telling is that the lowest predictive indicator was *the extent to which a university should provide services to ethnicities*. Gender or race/ethnic identities did not factor into this prediction, which supports findings in the literature that difference among ethnicities and gender groups were found both salient and not salient (e.g., Bogardus, 1928, 1959; Mills, Daly, Longmore, & Kilbride, 1995; Qualls, Cox, & Schehr, 1992; Hoxter & Lester, 1995; Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, 2001, 2005).

Qualitative findings surprisingly showed that students most frequently witnessed religious prejudice, in comparison to witnessing prejudice against diverse sexual orientations and racial/ethnic groups. This led to quantitative analyses and results, which found that the highest factors predicting students witnessing religion-based prejudice were whether one had a meaningful conversation with others of different religious beliefs and one's witnessing racial/ethnic prejudice, as well. The least predictive factor was one's perceptions of prejudice towards people of different religions, which corroborated with the outcomes of the tests of difference among gender-ethnic groups—students reporting more self-prejudice also reported witnessing less prejudice—thus a majority of students were less sensitive and aware of this factor.

Students of different race/ethnic and gender identities approach social distance, social justice, prejudice and diversity in very different ways. Campus curricula and programs focused on diversity, such as messaging, community cultural events, and other educational opportunities internal and external to the classroom, must be aware of and sensitive to these different

perspectives, in order to create effective results among their socio-culturally-unique students. In a continual climate of economic and socio-educational change, leaders in higher education charge their academic communities with going beyond traditional programs and curriculum to mitigate conscious and unconscious biases on their campuses. Thus social justice education that begins with the knowledge that students are varied in their awareness and acceptance of social justice issues related to diversity, and continues within both the curricula and meaningful informal and formal campus programs, are an essential component of students' sociocultural development in a global academic community.

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## Appendix

Table A: Qualitative Analysis

<b>From/Type</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>GLBTQ</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Total/ Percent of Total</b>
<b>Students</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>% of Row</b>	<b>28.2%</b>	<b>18.3%</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>25.4%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>14.4%</b>
<b>Rank High-Low</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>General/ Not Specified</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>% of Row</b>	<b>23.7%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>56.5%</b>
<b>Rank High-Low</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Affiliated Professionals</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>% of Row</b>	<b>39.1%</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
<b>Rank High-Low</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Non-Affiliated Visitors</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>% of Row</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>
<b>Rank High-Low</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Total/ Percent of Total</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>494</b>
	<b>33.8%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>22.9%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	