

Differences in Students' Perspectives on Diversity and Social Distance



**THE
MILLENNIAL PROJECT**
diversity and the millennial student

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Conceptual Framework

- **A diverse university community breaks patterns of segregation and stratification (Gurin, 2005)**
- **Results in increased critical thinking skills and better preparation for our pluralistic, democratic society (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2004)**
- **Intergroup relations and understanding improved (Hu & Kuh, 2003)**
- **Perspectives on diversity are socially constructed, with multiple facets, shaped by privilege and power (Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003)**



Conceptual Framework

- **Postmodernism: diversity is a plurality of voices representing all groups (Tierney, 1993)**
- **Merit may be valued over diversity, resulting in virtual acceptance of programming for diversity but not a change in thinking (Trow, 1992; Birnbaum, 2000)**
- **Social stigma against prejudice forces individual's negative attitudes about different groups underground (van Dijk, 1992)**
- **Critical Postmodernism articulates each element of diversity (Tierney, 1993) and involves critical consciousness of interrelations and an examination of how language perpetuates oppression (Tappan & Brown, 1996)**



Conceptual Framework

- **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)**
- **As resources decline in a society, greater social distance and negatively biased attitudes and behaviors occur (Bogardus 1928; 1958)**
- **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)**



Methods

Mixed Methodology: Online Survey, Focus Groups, Documentary

Survey Sampling Strategy

Over-sampled students of color (100% of known, self-reported, ethnic minority students), 50% random sample of White students

Contacted 15,000 full-time, classified undergraduates enrolled in Spring 2008

Response Rate Survey: $N = 1,503$ (10%)

63.7% White, 21.9% Known Ethnic Minorities, 10.2% Multi-Ethnic, 4.2% Unknown or Not Reported

Limitations: small sample, self-selection, may represent those interested in politically-charged topics/issues



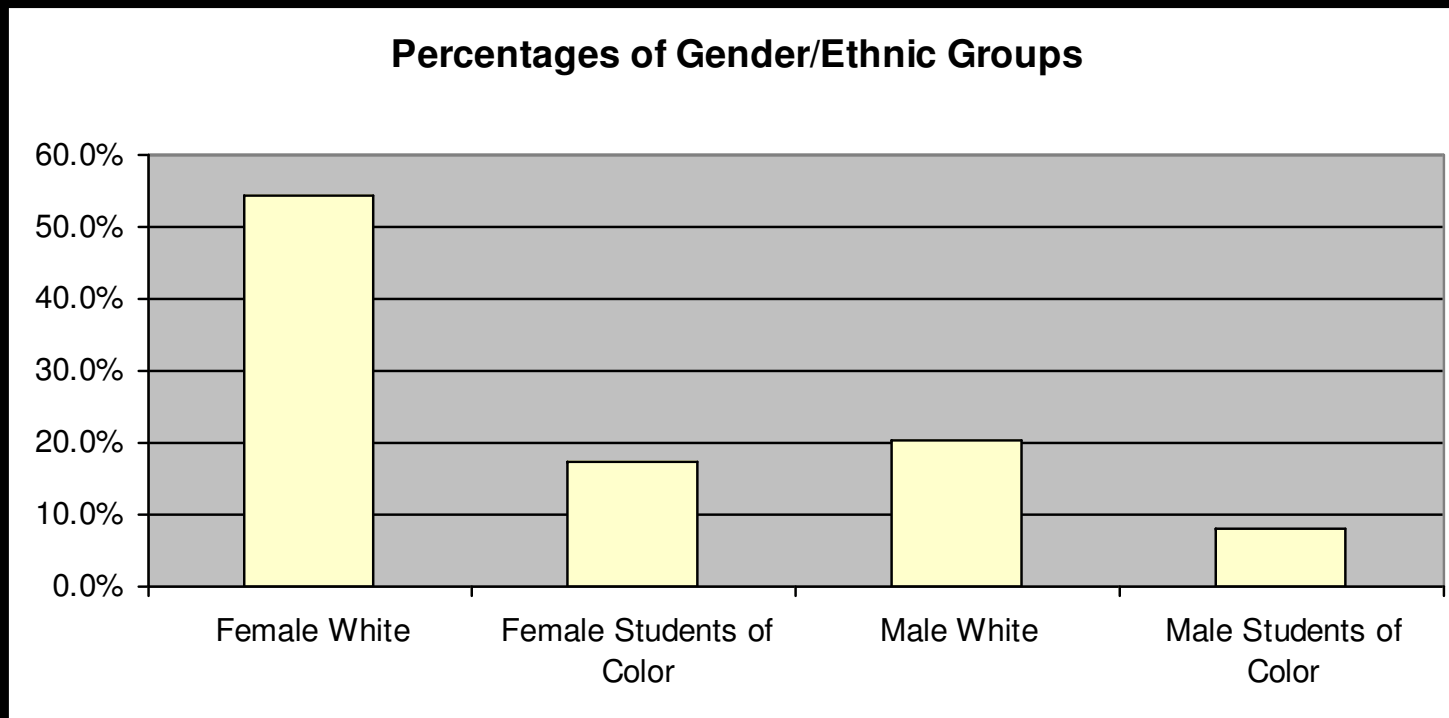
Sample Characteristics

- **61.3% Female**
- **88.7% English First Language**
- **11.4% with Disabilities**
- **7.8% LGBTQ**
- **30.7% Parental Education below Four-year Degree**
- **11.8% First Generation (Neither Parent Attended College)**



Sample Characteristics

- 54.2% White Females
- 17.5% Female Students of Color
- 20.3% White Males
- 8.1% Male Students of Color



Reliability Measures for Social Distance and Social Justice Variables

- A coefficient alpha of .74 ($n = 76$) represents all items used in this part of a five-year study.
- This coefficient demonstrated the instrument's substantial item reliability, although tests for normality showed that the scales were not normally distributed and do not meet the assumptions of performing parametric tests. Instead, nonparametric tests were used in the majority of the analyses.



Results: Kruskal-Wallis

- ***Diversity has a significant effect on my life***, $H(3, n = 1239) = 112.388, p < .01$: 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).
- ***Diversity does not influence me in a significant manner***, $H(3, n = 1244) = 56.216, p < .01$: 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.



Results: Kruskal-Wallis

- *People are often hired because of their race rather than their skills*, Kruskal-Wallis not significant, $H(3, n = 1242) = 5.605, p = .132$. 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).
- Post Hoc Chi Square test by gender, which was significant $\chi^2(1, n = 1242) = 5.592, p = .018$: Males had a higher mean rank (659.30) and females had a lower mean rank (606.49).



Results: Kruskal-Wallis

Different university standards are acceptable to create equity for students who did not have equal opportunities in high school, $H(3, n = 1239) = 46.580, p < .01$: White males had the lowest ranked mean (551.42) and female students of color had 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).



Results: Kruskal-Wallis

University admission policies should be based on students' academic skills, $H(3, n = 1236) = 31.416$, $p < .01$: 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.



Results: Chi Square

Students' perceptions of self-prejudice towards race and ethnicity, $\chi^2(6, n = 1140) = 18.459, p = .005$: 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.



Results: Chi Square

- Witnessing prejudice, $\chi^2(6, n = 1119) = 15.972, p = .014$: 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.
- The more prejudiced you perceive yourself to be, the less you notice or observe prejudice.



Qualitative Analysis: Prejudice Witnessed

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



Results: Multiple Regression

Students perceived witnessing religion-based prejudice as the type of prejudice most witnessed and this was predicted by the following factors $F(4, 1100) = 71.69, p < .05, MSE = 2.89, R = .46, R^2_{Adjusted} = .20$:

- Whether one had a meaningful conversation with persons of different religious belief in the past year ($\beta = .43$)
- One's witnessing racial/ethnic prejudice ($\beta = .21$)
- One's perceived interaction with people of different religions ($\beta = -.06$)
- One's perceptions of prejudice towards people of different religions ($\beta = -.05$)



Results: Multiple Regression

Students perceived social distance towards people of different race/ethnic groups as predicted in the following model $F(5, 1211) = 37.28, p < .05, MSE = 2.29, R = .37, R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .13$:

- Their perceptions of diverse friendships ($\beta = .18$)
- Overall social distance towards peers ($\beta = .16$)
- Whether a person's ethnicity influences them when they meet ($\beta = .11$)
- The importance of diversity to an enriched educational experience ($\beta = .10$)
- The extent to which a university should provide services to ethnicities ($\beta = .09$)



Implications for Higher Education

- Higher education is preparing students to function equitably in a diverse, globalized world. Preparing students to do so requires challenging them to acknowledge and address their unconscious biases so they approach each diverse individual in their world with equal respect.
- Students are varied in their awareness and acceptance of social justice issues: while White males seem to be conscious of their biases but unable to address them, White females seem to not notice their biases. Students of color seem to be able to recognize bias and how it affects them and others. Thus, the role of higher education through curricula and programs should be to help students see that:
 - We ALL have biases, and hiding them does not make them go away;
 - Bias affects behavior and people even if it goes unacknowledged;
 - Mechanisms for hiding bias propagates it;
 - The only way to build equity is to acknowledge and confront our inner biases, to discuss them honestly with people of differing viewpoints, and to situate ourselves within the broader context of society.



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