

Respect Begins with Knowledge:
Assessing Diversity-Awareness among College-aged Students

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Abstract

Research and present polls indicate that educational institutions and workplaces are becoming more diverse in gender, ethnicity, and nationality (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Burns, Barton, & Kerby, 2012). As the demographics in the United States change, the global economy expands, and the new concept of “tossed salad” America emerges, Americans will experience new dimensions of diversity (Ingram, 2001). The current study utilized the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (1999) to assess the relationship between diversity-awareness and each of the following variables: gender, socioeconomic status, nationality, ethnicity, and college major with a sample of 100 undergraduate students from a private midwestern university. Although results did not totally support the entire hypotheses, some significant results were found.

Keywords: diversity-awareness, socioeconomic status,

From a scientific standpoint, diversity is a necessity in continuing life; a larger more diverse genetic pool is most likely to be able to withstand various elements that threaten extinction of said life (National Gardening Association, 1999). Also, diversity is essential in other realms of humanity; for instance, psychological research depends upon a variance of responses because researchers aim to identify common themes among groups of people who vary in nearly every aspect. In fact, an article about the data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau showed how the ethnic make-up of America is consistently changing (Funderburg, 2013). Furthermore, from 2000 to 2010, the number of those who identified as more than one race rose from 6.8 million to 9 million; additionally, analysts have projected that if the current trends persist, then the average American will be of mixed race(s) by 2050 (Cheney-Rice, 2014).

The presenting problem is that many universities, are not representative of the diverse society in which we live. Multiple factors, such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic status, are what helps make humans diverse (Sussman, 2008). For instance, Morse (2014) collected data based off enrollment information from various institutions across the nation on campus ethnic diversity; the methodology for measuring diversity was created by Meyer and McIntosh (1992). The index assessed the likelihood of a student encountering other students of a different ethnic group and was on a scale of zero to one, where one indicates that the initial student will not run into another with the same ethnicity. The average index for 125 midwestern colleges and universities included in this survey was .33; in other words, for every 10 people an individual will meet, only three will be different. Considering that the United States of America is populated by approximately 318.9 million people, 77% of which are white, 17.1% Hispanic or Latino, 13.2% are black or African American, 5.3% are Asian, and 2.9% identify as multiracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), this 33% chance adequately represents the composition of the

nation. However, one fact to keep in mind is that within the 125 midwestern universities and colleges many are those located in Chicago, which is an area that has attracted over one million immigrants since 2000 (ICIRR, 2011), and therefore boosts the diversity statistic. Furthermore, the diversity of the midwest region is very different from the metropolitan areas, such as Chicago, Saint Louis, Minnesota, and Detroit (Cai, Gunter, Juday, Juelfs-Swanson, Lombard, Muldoon, Rorem, & Sen, 2010). If these numbers are compared to Morse's statistics of campus ethnic diversity, then it is clear to see that the oppressed (minority) groups are underrepresented in these schools throughout the region.

Gender is yet another aspect of diversity; the latest U.S. census reported that 50.8 % of the population identifies as female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Also, Borzelleca (2012) stated that trends in male-female enrollment of higher education institutions have shown the amount of females outnumbering that of males since the 1970s. According to Hays, Kearney, and Cogburn (2009), 57.5 % of B.A. degrees and 58.9 % of M.A. degrees were earned by women nearly a decade ago. Furthermore, the social constructs that are currently in play might suggest that this fact is indeed non-fiction. It has been observed that despite the women/men college graduation rate of three to two, higher positions in the workforce are typically occupied by men (Warrell, 2013). Multiple factors are currently being debated about why such an occurrence happens; however, understanding and acknowledging those validated reasons are essential to a better and fairer workplace.

Another aspect of diversity involves nationality, which is defined as the place of national origin, such as membership through birth, ownership, allegiance, or naturalization (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015); this term is often associated with ethnicity but the two are not the interchangeable. Nationality is the relationship between the individual and a political state

whereas ethnicity is the identification to a specific cultural or racial group (Softschools.com, 2015). Moreover, the United States was first inhabited by multiple native groups, such as the Sioux, Apache, and Navajo tribes; however, it has become more diverse today because of immigration (Perez & Hirschman, 2009). From the start of colonial times, travel to this land was unrestricted until 1882 when certain characteristics and then behavioral issues were taken into consideration before a group of people's passage was granted (Ewing, 2012). Also, statistics show that 40.7 million inhabitants of the United States are foreign-born; this number having increased 31 % from 2000 to 2012 (CAP Immigration Team, 2014). As families travel to the United States, their children are likely to attend college; however, nativism has played a role in society and it unfortunately shows in the statistics of college enrollment information. Furthermore, the average percentage of international students at midwestern colleges analyzed by U.S. News and World Report (2015) was only 4 %.

Lastly, socioeconomic status (SES), which is recognized as the social standing or class of an individual or group and is often measured by the combination of education, income, and occupation, is related to diversity (American Psychological Association, 2015). Low SES correlates with low education and poverty; because of the lack of financial resources, attending colleges for low SES individuals is extremely difficult. A low income is but one factor for low-income students, many lack knowledgeable guidance to help with financial aid, preparation for college coursework and environment, and search for the best fitting school (The Executive Office of the President, 2014). An American slogan states that this country is one where if a person works hard, then s/he will have that chance to get ahead; becoming aware of the obstacles that low-SES individuals face and eliminating those challenges is one way to achieve this goal.

Definitions

Defining diversity can be a challenge; Merriam-Webster (2015) explained it as “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements... the inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization”. For the sake of the current study, the aspects of diversity focused on are ethnicity, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic status. Other facets could include: religious beliefs, age, sexual orientation, and ability (Ingram, 2001). Since the 1980s, diversity has been slowly integrated into governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, elementary and secondary schools, and college campuses (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2011; McCormick, 2007; Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown, & Bart, 2005). Diversity is a huge contribution to education specifically because of the varied backgrounds; this diversity forces an individual to work, think, collaborate, and strategize with several viewpoints which has an effect on the development or strengthening of that individual’s cultural competency (Mosley-Howard, Witte, & Wang, 2011).

Awareness is again a term that can take on multiple definitions; within the current study, three key factors focused on to best determine the various aspects of how diversity might be experienced. The three factors are diversity of contact (social and cultural), relativistic appreciation, which is described as the extent to which students value the impact of diversity on self-understanding and personal growth, and comfort with differences, specifically those experiences of talking with and perceptions of others (Miville, et al., 1999).

Diversity-awareness is more about embracing the dimensions of diversity within every individual than simple tolerance (University of Oregon, 1999). An extension of this term is cultural competence, which is defined as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, &

Isaacs, 1989). Together these conscious cognitive processes can help to achieve what educational institutions desire, which as Mosley-Howard, Witte, and Wang described, is to merge “students own self-awareness, with the perspectives of others, and a more global and diverse view of the lived human experience” (2011, p. 66).

Importance

In likeness to Jung’s thoughts on archetypal representation, an awareness of and appreciation for the differences and commonalities between and among cultures is important for effective human interaction and one’s own mental health (Miville, et al., 1999). Results from a questionnaire about diversity shows that students favor having more ethnic diversity in the classrooms as a way of learning new perspectives (Wang, Castro, & Cunningham, 2014). As an outcome to attitudes like the one prior, many colleges and universities have adopted diversity language into its mission statements; however, Iverson (2008) stated that many are not adequately focused on the inherent benefits of diversity and instead too fixated on the market-driven themes. Moreover, because of globalization and the changing composition of this nation’s population, diversity in the workplace is inevitable; a demand to appropriately prepare the individual workers is needed in order to keep businesses and organizations efficient (Mataatmadia & Dyson, 2005).

Implications

Through one study, Chang reported that students who socialized with someone of a different ethnicity or discussed racial issues, then their academic development, satisfaction with college, level of cultural awareness, and commitment to promoting racial understanding would increase (as cited in Chang & Astin, 1997). As stated previously, some questionnaires show that students want more diversity in the classroom (Wang, Castro, & Cunningham, 2014). On the other hand,

another study revealed that students felt that ethnicity was “not important to them and that it was only the ignorance on the part of the others that contributed to race being an issue” (Kiser & Scobey, 2010, p. 296). Despite the currently held opinions of those who were interviewed (Kiser & Scobey, 2010), attitudes and perceptions in either way might influence a person’s behaviors. Furthermore, Kordesh and Spanierman (2013) state that positive role models are critical in helping other students understand the insidiousness of racism, the importance of diversity, and the dominant culture’s recognition of such topics.

A call for educators and higher education staff to be these persons for whom undergraduate students can have high respect for and learn from has been made by multiple researchers (Keller, 2001; Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Furthermore, if institutions implement this demand, then it may be better prepared to adequately expose dominant culture students to white guilt, cognitive dissonance, and critical self-reflection in order to pursue an enhanced idea surrounding the importance and appreciation of diversity and social justice. Also, Allport theory can help to explain how mere compositional diversity is not solely sufficient for reducing prejudice; therefore, not only are these ideal knowledgeable others needed but an intentional learning experience that integrates the various cultural viewpoints is needed as well (Gottfredson, Panter, Daye, Allen, Wightman, & Deo, 2008).

Research

The current study aimed to assess the diversity awareness among college-aged students at a midwest university. The researcher hypothesized that if college students belong to the oppressed groups in today’s society or are pursuing a social science or liberal arts degree (as opposed to a physical science or business degree), then they will be more aware of diversity, which includes ethnicity, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic status. Those who do not belong in the

oppressed groups are specifically white, American, middle-class or above, males. The independent variables included self-reported ethnicity, gender, nationality, SES, and major. The dependent variable was the student's diversity awareness, which was measured by an adapted version of the Universal-Diverse orientation short form of Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale (Fuertes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 2000).

Method

Participants

One hundred fifty undergraduate students from a midwestern university participated in a study by voluntarily taking a self-reported survey. Demographics collected by this survey included nationality, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and major. The majority of participants identified as American in nationality (82%) and the remaining 18% identified as African, Asian, Central American, European, or multiracial. Many identified as white (60%), 22% as black and the remaining 18% reported female (53%). Furthermore, 53% were female, 47% were male, nearly half identified as belonging to the middle class (47%), 23% reported lower class, 26% upper class and 4% did not know. Equal amounts of social science and business majors (28%) were indicated as well as 26% as Physical Science majors; seventeen percent reported one of the following humanities, education, or fine arts, and one participant did not respond to this question. The ethical standards of the American Psychological Association were maintained throughout the process of data collection and data analysis in this study (American Psychological Association, 2010).

Materials and Procedures

In the present study, the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale –Short form (M-GUDS-S) (Fuertes, et al., 2000) was used with the addition of similar questions to the survey; for

instance, “I often feel irritated by persons of a different ethnicity” was replicated and the word ethnicity was replaced with nationality, gender, and socioeconomic status, each question being a new and separate question. Moreover, the researcher created questions about the demographics and included them within the 23-item survey. The M-GDUS-S assessed diversity awareness through topics on culture, ethnicity, country, and racial background; the 15-item questionnaire was divided into three sub-categories of diversity awareness, which are diversity of contact (“I go to events that feature music or food from other countries”), relativistic appreciation (“persons with disabilities can teach me things I could not learn elsewhere”), and comfort with differences (“getting to know someone of another ethnicity is generally an uncomfortable experience for me”). For each of the previous items, participants indicated their agreeance or disagreeance level on a 6-point Likert scale, where one was strongly disagree and six was strongly agree.

Nationality categories contained little variety and were therefore disregarded for data analysis. Furthermore, those who indicated that they were of any ethnicity other than white or black were too few and were discarded for analysis. In addition, the SES option of the survey inquired the more specific level within each of the classes; for instance, if one chose lower class, then s/he needed to indicate whether it was the lower portion of the lower class, the middle portion, or upper portion of the lower class. Because many students identified within the middle-class, the researcher separated the lower-middle to be included in the lower class, the upper-middle to be included in the upper class, and the middle-middle remained as the middle class.

Results

In the present report, all of the descriptive data is in the methods section with the measures. Furthermore, scores were averaged for diversity awareness and each of the subcategories using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences; overall diversity awareness, $M=107.2$, $SD=12.9$

where the maximum (most diverse) is 133, relativistic appreciation, $M=24.0$, $SD=3.5$ when the maximum was 30, diversity of contact, $M=19.0$, $SD=4.5$ where the maximum was 28, and comfort with differences, $M=64.0$, $SD=9.4$ when the maximum was 78. An one-way analysis of variance statistical test was performed to measure the average of the means among black and white individuals and their SES; diversity of contact (Table 1.3), $f(2.93)=2.076$, $p=.131$, which means that there was no significance between the different socioeconomic statuses. Relativistic appreciation (Table 2.2), $f(2.93)=7.178$, $p=.001$, which means there is a significant difference between the classes; lower class $M=26.3$ and the middle and upper $M=23.4$ and 23.0 respectively. Also, comfort with differences (Table 1.4), $f(2.93)=3.674$, $p=.029$, which indicates a significant difference, specifically between lower class and upper, $M=67.9$ and 60.8 respectively. Lastly, the ANOVA of diversity awareness (Table 1.1), $f(2.93)=6.934$, $p=.002$, which shows significance between the lower class $M=114.8$, and middle and upper classes, $M=106.1$, and 102.0 .

An independent sample T-test was performed to analyze the effect gender had on diversity awareness and each of the subscales. Results for diversity awareness, $t(97)=1.181$, $p=.241$, $M_m(\text{male})=105.5$ and $M_f(\text{female})=108.6$; comfort with differences, $t(98)=.137$, $p=.891$, $M_m=63.8$ and $M_f=64.1$; and diversity of contact, $t(97)=1.460$, $p=.147$, $M_m=18.3$ and $M_f=19.6$ were all insignificant. On the other hand results for the relativistic appreciation were significant with a $t(97)=2.632$, $p=.01$, $M_m=23.0$ and $M_f=24.9$. Also, an independent sample T-test was performed assessing the differences among the black and white individuals and no results were significant. In addition, another ANOVA was performed among the majors and no results were significant.

Table 1.1

Table 1.2

Scheffe		Sig.
Lower Class	Middle Class	.023
	Upper Class	.002

Table 1.3

Scheffe		Sig.
Lower Class	Middle Class	.005
	Upper Class	.004

Table 1.4

Scheffe		Sig.
Lower Class	Middle Class	.206
	Upper Class	.187

Scheffe		Sig.
Lower Class	Middle Class	.265
	Upper Class	.029

Discussion

The hypotheses tested in the current study stated that if college students belong to the oppressed groups in today's society or are pursuing a social science or liberal arts degree (as opposed to a physical science or business degree), then they will be more aware of diversity, which includes ethnicity, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic status. In part, this hypothesis was supported because of the significant results that showed among SES and the gender statistical analyses. The results show that differences in awareness tend to be more about a divided socioeconomic class rather than about ethnicity and although various factors can play a role in a person's comfort with diversity, appreciation for it, and interaction with others who are different, SES seems to be the most influential. Those of lower SES groups have a higher diversity awareness.

In addition, the fact that the diversity of contact is not significant, and more specifically the difference among the means, further supports the hypothesis in way that those of middle and upper are able to afford to go out and do more, such as vacation in another country or go to

international food restaurants. Lower classes, because of the lack of money, are not able to go out and intertwine with others, unless it is because of their job. Furthermore, the M-GUDS-S is a relatively new scale and therefore little to no studies have been conducted that test its validity and consistency. One topic to be mentioned is the self-recognition of SES. The researcher intentionally measured this demographic as a self-perception and did not include income range numbers. In doing so, the true attitudes and feeling of the participants might have been captured.

Limitations

Possible limitations of this current study involve the low numbers of representation for most of the independent variables when analyzing the results. For instance, the number of black participants, each major, and the lower and upper class all fell below the normal population of differences, $n=30$. Future research would include a larger sample size and possibly an emphasis on the three diversity awareness aspects within the realm of a college campus.

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