



Social Distance and Diversity

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What are the tolerance levels of college students from a predominately white society towards people of different ethnicities, races, religions, and sexual orientation?
- What factors can influence the tolerance levels?

ABSTRACT:

Human diversity plays a role in today's society. The United States is a country made up of millions of people with different ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences. The beliefs we have regarding diversity are given to us by our families and society. They are then given to the future generations and then the cycle restarts. It is important to understand how diversity impacts each society.

Being prejudice towards an individual does not mean disliking them because of the way they behave. It is not liking an entire group (race, ethnic, religious, or sexual orientation).

Since World War II, society has made attempts to diminish prejudices towards individuals. Attempts such as the Civil Rights Movement have brought an end to the segregation of races in everyday society. Even though these efforts have been applied to society, is there still an underlying prejudice?

There are several factors that we believe can influence someone's viewpoint about diversity. Such influences include an individual's parents, religion, peers, and the amount of contact he or she has with diversity. Are these influences contributing to the tolerance levels of CSU students? Should students marry outside of their race? Or would students only go as far as being a friend? Knowing how comfortable CSU students are with diversity and what factors influence them can help to make campus more accepting.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

• In looking at ways to measure the views of diversity, the most commonly used method is the Bogardus Social Distance Scale. This scale measures the levels in which an individual would interact with diversity in specified relationships.

• In a study done by Milton Kleg and Kaoru Yamamoto in 1993 revealed that western and northern Europeans were the most welcomed groups and the least tolerated groups were Middle Easterners, Asians, and African-Americans.

• Muir and Muir used the social distance scale in 1988 to measure social distance between White and Black middle school children. They found that White children related to Blacks by developing an adult viewpoint. This included civil acceptance and social rejection. However, the majority of the Black children were accepting (both publicly and socially) of the White children

• In 1986 a study was done by Brinkerhoff and Mackie using the social distance scale with various religions. This study revealed that Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and Conservative Christians were the least accepted religions and Protestants and Catholics were the most accepted.

METHOD:

- We created a survey using the Bogardus Social Distance scale.
- The survey consisted of three sections: demographics, social distance, and experience.
- Participants were asked to give a social distance rating to 24 groups that included races, ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientation.



BREAKDOWN OF SAMPLE:

- Total participants: (n=104)
- Gender: Male: 45 (43.3%), Female: 59 (56.7%)
- Mean age = 22.11 years
- Participants from all 8 colleges at CSU
- Ethnic/Racial groups:
 - White 85 (81.7%), African American 6 (5.8%), Hispanic 4 (3.8%), Mexican 3 (2.9%), Multiracial 1 (1.0%), Asian 3 (2.9%), Arab 1 (1.0%), Cuban 1 (1.0%)
- Religions participants identified with:
 - None 45 (43.3%), Christian 54 (51.9%), Jewish 3 (2.9%), Muslim 2 (1.9%)

FINDINGS:

- The 5 groups with the highest level of bias: Transgender (2.52*), AIDS (2.47), HIV + (2.36), Gay man (2.14), and Mormon (2.14).
- The 5 groups with the lowest level of bias (other than White American): European (1.29), Multiracial (1.32), Native American (1.48), African American (1.49), and Poor (1.49).
- As contact with diverse groups increases, biased attitudes are reduced.
- People who have traveled abroad are less biased.
- Women are more tolerant than men in general. This is especially true when looking at the GLBT** community.
- Students who have parents who are tolerant of the GLBT community, tend to be more tolerant of diversity.
- Students who identified their religion as Jewish are the least biased (1.36). Those who identified as Christian are the most biased (1.87). Students who did not identify with a religious group were in the middle (1.68).



References:

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*Average score on social distance scale.

** Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender