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How Students View Diversity in Their Education: A Qualitative Examination

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Abstract

In this study, we examined students’ open responses to questions regarding their opinions about diversity on their college campus. Here, we report on responses about age, religion, and political views in the classroom and outside the classroom.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>In the Classroom</th>
<th>Outside the Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topic of Question</td>
<td>Effect on Life After College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Views</td>
<td>Political Views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Effect on Life After College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Responses Coded as*</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European American</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-European American</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* + = positive, - = negative, N = neutral, M = mixed, D = disagreement among coders

Introduction
How is diversity valued on college campuses?
- Educators and Administrators value it based on the initiatives they enact and courses offered
- Does that valuation also apply to students?

In this presentation we focus on how students view three types of diversity:
- in the classroom
- outside the classroom
- and how both will affect their life after college

How do students view diversity related to age, religion, and political views?

Other types of diversity (e.g., race & sex/gender) yielded less candid responses, although they are reflected in the life after college responses about diversity in general.

Participants
- 102 General Psychology students at a small university in the Southwest
- Most participants (66%) were of European descent
- Most participants were male (68%)

Questionnaire
- Participants completed a single questionnaire that asked for basic demographic information and for responses to open-ended questions about diversity and their education

Coding
- the 1st, 3rd, and 4th authors rated all responses about diversity as positive, negative, neutral, or mixed
- Due to the low number of coders, any item without agreement from all coders was categorized as “disagreement among coders”

Methods

Results
Students reported a range of positive, neutral, and negative reactions to diversity
Specifics breakdowns of responses are in the above table

Discussion
This research provides insight into how students view and perceive the diversity around them in the university environment. It highlights the different perspectives of those with different cultural identities. The most intriguing result is the consistent view that exposure to diversity is a neutral experience.

One clear limitation is that this study was described as a study on diversity when students were invited to volunteer. The higher than normal rate of non-European American participants may be due to that, and there is a high likelihood that there is a difference between those who chose to participate in this study and those who chose other options. Additionally, the less useful responses to items about gender and race likely represent either immature views of diversity and/or higher levels of guarded attitudes about those topics.