

# Changes in Acceptance of Diversity through Volunteering with Youth with Disabilities

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## Introduction:

- The medical, functional, and social model have been utilized to provide a framework for understanding disability (Drum, Krahn & Bersani, 2009).
- The social model states that disability occurs because of the limitations and restrictions of society and the environment. Whereas the medical and functional model are based on the belief that disability is based on the individual's impairment (Drum, et al. 2009).
- The minority group model, a subset of the social model, focuses on the similarities between racial minority groups and individuals with disabilities (Krahé & Altwasser, 2006).
- Since, individual's with disabilities are the largest minority group in the U.S., it is important to examine ways to reduce adversity within society.
- Research is needed to examine the influence of interacting with individuals with disabilities on acceptance of diversity toward minority groups.



## Methods:

**Participants:** 89 student volunteers

### Instruments:

- Weekly:** Questionnaire based on:
  - Participant's perception of their own experience during a service learning program
  - Participant's perception of support from their activity leader
  - Participant's perception of the youth with a disability's behavior

**2) Pre and Post:** Miville-Guzman Universality Diversity Scale (Short Form)

#### Subscales:

- Diversity of Contact** –students' interest in participating in diverse social and cultural activities.
- Relativistic Appreciation**- the extent to which students value the impact of diversity on self-understanding and personal growth.
- Comfort with Differences**- students' degree of comfort with diverse individuals

## Results:

- All relevant variables were analyzed by descriptive statistics. Table 1 summarizes the mean scores of participant's acceptance of diversity scores.
- Four separate multiple regressions revealed that a participant's perception of their own experience and their perception of the youth with a disability's behavior significantly predicted their change in acceptance of diversity.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

	DC		RA		CD		DV	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pre-Score	2.33	.64	2.00	.52	1.70	1.68	2.01	.46
Post-Score	2.19	.68	1.9	.56	.59	.55	1.93	.46
Δ	-.15	.62	-.08	.50	-.03	.57	-.09	.46

Notes: Diversity of Contact= DC; Relativistic Appreciation = RA; Comfort with Differences= CD; Overall Diversity= DV. Scores are based on a 6 point scale, with 1 representing the highest acceptance of diversity. Change in scores (Δ) were computed by subtracting the post score from the pre score; therefore a negative Δ represents a positive difference.



**Table 2: Results of Multiple Regression**

	Variable	Beta	95% CI	t	R
Diversity of Contact	POE	.50	.05,.85	2.24*	.25
	PSAL	.02	-.28,.33	.18	
	PYB	-.50	-.74,-.06	-2.31*	
Relativistic Appreciation	POE	.48	.35, .16	2.16*	.26
	PSAL	-.20	-.21, .12	-1.72	
	PYB	-.37	-.24, .14	-1.71	
Comfort with Differences	POE	.56	.11, .84	2.56*	.30
	PSAL	-.20	-.53, .04	-1.73	
	PYB	-.47	-.66, -.04	-2.21*	
Overall Diversity	POE	.62	.13, .72	2.86*	.31
	PSAL	-.15	-.37, .08	-1.33	
	PYB	-.55	-.58, -.08	-2.58*	

Notes: Perception of own experience = POE; Perception of support from activity leader = PSAL; Participant's perception of the youth with a disability's behavior = PYB; \* = <.05

## Discussion:

- Service learning programs have the potential to provide the opportunity for individuals to interact with youth with disabilities, and may therefore influence an individual's acceptance of diversity.
- This study found that a participant's perception of their own experience positively influenced their change in diversity of contact, relativistic appreciation, comfort with differences, and overall acceptance of diversity. This finding can be explained by the Intergroup Contact Theory, which states that quality experiences positively influence an individual's acceptance of diversity (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).
- Unexpected findings are that there was a negative relationship between the participant's perception of their own experience, diversity of contact, comfort with differences, and overall diversity.
- Past research has shown a positive relationship between behavior and attitude (Weiss, Cappadocia, MacMullin, Vieceil, & Lunsky, 2012). However, more research is needed on the influence of youth's behavior and an individual's acceptance.
- Future research should examine the influence of an individual's perception of a quality experience in order to help influence their acceptance of diversity.

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## Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to identify the potential factors influencing acceptance of diversity, within the context of a service learning program.



## Research Questions:

- Does a participant's perception of their own experience influence their acceptance of diversity?
- Does the participant's perception of the support they receive from their activity leader influence their acceptance of diversity?
- Does a participant's perception of the youth with a disability's behavior influence their acceptance of diversity?