

The Influence of Multicultural Personality on Attitude Towards Religious Diversity Among Youth

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The present study examined relationship between multicultural personality and attitude towards religious diversity. Sample included 236 post-graduate students enrolled at a university in India. Survey method was utilized wherein Multicultural Personality Questionnaire measuring components of cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility and social initiative was used. An adapted version of Subscale 2 of the Quick Discrimination Index was developed to measure Attitude towards Religious Diversity. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients revealed significant, positive relationships between the five components of multicultural personality and attitude towards religious diversity. A multiple regression revealed that open-mindedness and flexibility significantly predicted 11% of variance in positive attitude towards religious diversity. This study concluded that people who were accepting of and curious about differing groups, their distinct cultural norms and values; and were ready to shift from one strategy to another when interacting with people of different cultures, were likely to favour religious diversity and welcome the same in interpersonal interactions.

Keywords: Multicultural, Personality, Religion, Diversity, Attitude, Youth.

Outbreaks of religious violence in pluralistic India have been rampant. In 2014, the Ministry of Home Affairs reported that over sixty six thousand riots had occurred in India in just a span of one year. This figure accounted for the twelve hundred communal* riots occurring in the country. Although, this incidence of riots was lesser than that for 2013, there was a ten percent increase in its incidence since 2004. The ministry also reported that over three hundred offences occurring in 2014, instigated enmity between different groups on basis of religion, race and place of birth (National Crime Records Bureau, 2015). In fact, most number of people arrested for such offences were in the age group of 18 to 30 years, that is, the youth.

Youth studying in colleges and universities are directly or indirectly exposed to forces of fundamentalism and communalism (Engineer & Nerurkar, 1996). Widespread religious prejudices

explain the occurrence of communal incidents (see Murthi, 2009). Hawkins et al. (2000) have reported that being prejudiced and exposed to violence makes one more likely to use violence. Prejudice also results in discrimination and further violence (see Thornicroft et al., 2007). However, attitudes of children towards people of different religion are considerably influenced by their family, kin, caste or society (Gupta, 2008; Patel & Nath, 2013); as they grow up and enter university education, they are capable of critically examining, rejecting or even changing some of the communal ideas that they are exposed to (see Tripathi, 2005).

One way to prevent the youth from becoming communal; that is, being exclusively attached to their own religious community and being hostile towards other religious communities; is to train them in the spirit of inter-religious harmony and multiculturalism. Young people are likely to be

In India, the term 'communal' is exclusively used to refer to the problem of hatred and violence among different religious groups as a result of fascist ideologies and erroneous judgements about each other.

more open to receive new thoughts and ideas that are secular in nature. University students adjust better in cultures different than their own, when they are open to diversity and have a multicultural personality (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac & Elsayed, 2012).

In India, there is a lack of research exploring youth's attitude towards religious diversity and there is negligible enquiry about its association with personality domains. Such information may help practitioners devise strategies that can benefit youth by teaching them life skills of how to live harmoniously with those who are culturally different. By 2020, India is set to become the youngest country in the world. It is important to build knowledge about aspects of human nature that are likely to be associated with greater level of acceptance and openness towards people of different religions. The present study investigated domains of a multicultural personality among university students and their relationship with attitudes towards religious diversity.

Diversity refers to a wide range of variations among individuals in a society on the basis of language, caste, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability and physical features, stemming from their culturally derived differences. Within a single nation, such as India, cultural diversity refers to a collectivity of groups with varying beliefs, traditions, patterns of behaviours and values. Religious diversity refers to a variety of differences in orientations to life, beliefs about God, rituals and practices, patterns of living and livelihood across different religions. It includes religious communities entertaining and living by their own different systems of beliefs and practices.

In India, religious diversity stems from and is reinforced by the plurality of the long-established religious communities. Each religious group has its own extensive history and way of life, which it wishes to conserve and pass on. In the present study, favourable attitude towards religious diversity was defined as having a more personal and affective comfort; that is, being comfortable with the feelings one is likely to experience; when interacting with individuals from religions different than one's own.

Pro-diversity attitudes are built through developing the ideal of multiculturalism in society (Kymlicka, 2012). A multicultural society is characterized by acceptance and support towards co-existence of people from different cultures in the same society (Berry & Kalin, 1995), equal participation of all members of society regardless of their group membership and intergroup hierarchy, as well as dominant group's acceptance that they also need to change to reciprocate accommodation made by non-dominant group members (Berry & Sam, 2013, 2014). A multicultural society is one, in which other-group and own-group cultures are valued and the major political and social institutions are developed to tie all cultures together (Berry, 1984). Failing to recognize and appreciate group similarities and differences inhibits harmonious interactions between people of different backgrounds (Wolsko, Park & Judd, 2000). Given the communal scenario in India, it becomes important to investigate aspects of multiculturalism that can give answers to questions of prejudice and discrimination and help build favourable attitudes towards religious diversity.

Researchers have studied cultural diversity in context of personality psychology (Van Der Zee, Atsma & Brodbeck, 2004). A number of psychologists have investigated human personality domains that impact one's interaction in diverse settings and multicultural communities (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Herfst, Van Oudenhoven, & Timmerman, 2008; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004). One such domain is the multicultural personality characterized by individuals who are emotionally stable and secure about their cultural identity. They welcome diversity and are proactive to learn from and interact with culturally different people (Ponterotto, 2006). They are able to be empathetic, negotiate and cope with multiple roles and cultural contexts. Multicultural personality dimensions are a narrow cluster of personality traits that have been conceptualized based on the broad personality model of Big Five (McCrae & Costa, 1999).

Multicultural personality includes components of cultural empathy, openmindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Cultural empathy refers to the ability to empathize with feelings, thoughts, behaviours of individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Open-mindedness refers to being open to the unprejudiced attitude towards different groups, their cultural norms and values. Emotional stability refers to the tendency to remain calm in stressful situations instead of having strong emotional reactions in stressful circumstances. Social initiative is the tendency to approach social situations in an active way and take initiatives. Flexibility refers to the tendency to regard new and unknown situations as a challenge and to adjust one's behavior towards new and unknown situations (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001).

Students taking greater social initiative, being emotionally stable, open-minded and culturally empathetic are known to adjust better in the university (Kagnici, 2012). People who are culturally empathetic and tend to take greater social initiative are likely to be more emotionally intelligent (Ponterotto, Ruckdeschel, Joseph, Tennebaum & Bruno, 2011). Emotional Stability and Flexibility have been found to predict social adjustment among expatriates (Van Oudenhoven, Mol & Van der Zee, 2003). Ponterotto, Mendelowitz & Collabolletta (2008) have highlighted the utility of developing multicultural personality among students to help them cope, adapt and thrive in culturally diverse environments. It is a significant predictor of socio-psychological adaptation (Leong, 2007) and psychosocial wellbeing (Brummett, Wade, Ponterotto, Thombs & Lewis, 2007) and its impact has been studied on work outcomes in contexts of diversity (Van Der Zee, Atsma & Brodbeck, 2004). Although, multicultural personality has been studied in the context of adjustment and openness to diversity (Yakunina et al., 2012) of international students, its significance in promoting favourable attitudes towards religious

diversity in India has so far not been tested. The objective of the present study was to test the association between multicultural personality and attitudes towards religious diversity.

Problem & Hypotheses

In the framework of historic diversity and periodic communal clashes in India, where the most convicted population is the youth, it becomes important to investigate personality factors that are likely to impact youth's interaction and attitudes towards people belonging to other religions. Even with rigorous research work in the past decade on multicultural personality, its relevance and application in the Indian social milieu remains to be tested. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine whether the five dimensions of the multicultural personality namely cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility were related to youth's attitudes towards religious diversity in India. Specifically this study hypothesized that domains of multicultural personality (cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and flexibility) would positively predict favourable attitudes towards religious diversity among university students.

Method

Participants

For the present study, it was found that for five predictor variables, at a power level of 0.80, with medium effect sizes and alpha of 0.01, the sample size required would be 126 people (Cohen, 1992, p. 158). The present study included 236 post-graduate university students from a cosmopolitan city of India. These students had completed their graduation studies and were studying mainstream masters' programmes at an English medium university in Mumbai. All students were able-bodied. Youth who were pursuing professional courses such as management or medicine degrees or those not pursuing postgraduate studies; those who were drop-outs or disabled were excluded from the sample in the present investigation. The sample consisted of 71% females and 28%

males with an age range of 20 to 39 years, with a mean age of 21.64 years (standard deviation of 5.9 years). Participants included 73% Hindus, 8% Muslims, 0.4% Sikhs, 10% Christians, 4% Buddhists, 3% Jains and 0.4% from other religious communities.

Tools

Multicultural Personality Questionnaire.

The 91-item, five-point (1 = totally not applicable to 5 = completely applicable) Likert-type, self-report Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001) was used. The scale consisted of five factors: Cultural Empathy (18 items; sample item: "pays attention to the emotions of others"), Open-Mindedness (18 items; sample item: "is intrigued by differences"), Social Initiative (17 items; sample item: "easily approaches other people"), Emotional Stability (20 items; sample item: "gets upset easily" [reverse-scored]), and Flexibility (18 items; sample item: "works mostly according to a strict scheme" [reverse-scored]).

MPQ is available in Dutch, Italian, and English languages. The five-factor MPQ structure is supported in exploratory factor analyses and confirmatory factor analyses (Van der Zee et al., 2013). Ponterotto (2008) found strong support for construct and criterion validity as well as internal consistency for five factors of MPQ. The coefficient alphas for the five MPQ factors were: Cultural Empathy was .83, Open-Mindedness was .84, Emotional Stability was .86, Social Initiative was .89, and Flexibility was .74.

Attitudes towards Religious Diversity.

The authors adapted Subscale 2 (Affective Attitudes Towards More Personal Contact (Closeness) with Racial Diversity) of the Quick Discrimination Index (Ponterotto, Potere & Johansen, 2002) to measure individuals' attitude towards religious diversity. The Quick Discrimination Index (QDI) is a 30 item scale assessing prejudicial attitudes directed towards racial minority groups and women. Its subscale 2 consisting of seven items was adapted in the present study to measure Attitude towards

Religious Diversity. It is a five point Likert-type scale with a score range of 7 to 35.

In the process of adaptation, the word 'race' was substituted with the word 'religion'. The adapted scale investigated individuals' personal comfort with interreligious interaction (for example, "I would feel O.K. about my son or daughter dating someone from a different religious community"). High scores on this scale indicated one's positive attitudes towards those from different religious communities. The internal consistency of the adapted version was $\alpha = 0.56$. On deleting the 5th item of the adapted subscale of QDI, internal consistency was raised to 0.6. The final six item scale is included in the Appendix.

Procedure

Post graduate students of a university in Mumbai, India, were approached for participation in the research wherein they were informed about the purpose, level of risk (if any) and confidentiality of the research. Based on this, the consent of interested students was taken.

The data collection for these participants was completed by administering the tools simultaneously to all the participants in small groups of 20-30 people. They were provided with adequate time to complete both the measures. The responses on the measures were scored using the standardized method given by the respective authors. Upon the completion of the questionnaires, participants were debriefed about the nature and purpose of the study. To analyze the data, bivariate correlations and multiple regression were used. The results and discussion are presented here.

Results and Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between multicultural personality and positive attitudes towards religious diversity. The prominent finding of this study was that the MPQ factors, open-mindedness and flexibility contributed to a significant part of variance in scores on attitudes towards religious diversity.

The preliminary data analysis included calculating the scale descriptive of each

Table 1. Matrix of bivariate correlations between Attitude towards Religious Diversity and the Factors of Multicultural Personality along with Means and Standard Deviations (n = 236)

VARIABLES	Attitude towards Religious Diversity M = 24.77 (4.57)	Cultural Empathy M = 64.77 (8.63)	Open-Mindedness M = 63.15 (8.24)	Emotional Stability M = 61.83 (9.39)	Flexibility M = 56.25 (6.67)	Social Initiative M = 55.19 (8.16)
Attitude towards Religious Diversity	1.00					
Cultural Empathy	0.22**	1.00				
Open-Mindedness	0.30**	0.59**	1.00			
Emotional Stability	0.17**	0.06	0.25**	1.00		
Flexibility	0.22**	0.06	0.27**	0.28**	1.00	
Social Initiative	0.12**	0.32**	0.43**	0.38**	0.25**	1.00

Note: M = Mean, Standard Deviations are written in parentheses** p< 0.01

measure and the multicollinearity between the five factors of MPQ. The means and standard deviations as presented in Table 1 indicate that all distributions of MPQ factors had similar spread scores. The Tolerance and Variable Inflation Factors (VIF) across the five variables were examined to test for multicollinearity among the predictor variables, that is, the scores on the five subscales of MPQ.

If multicollinearity among predictors is present, it becomes difficult to gauge the individual contribution of each predictor in the model. Tolerance statistics ranged from .55 to .86, and VIFs ranged from 1.17 to 1.83; these values were all well within the normal range (Mertler&Vannatta, 2005) and confirmed that the predictors were measuring different things.

A matrix of bivariate correlations across the five factors of MPQ as well as the scale measuring attitude towards religious diversity is presented in Table 1.

The correlations between the MPQ factors were moderately significant ranging from a low correlation of $r = 0.3$ to a moderate correlation of $r = 0.6$ except for Cultural Empathy, which was not found to be correlated with Emotional Stability and Flexibility. Open mindedness and Cultural Empathy were found to have the highest

correlation, which can be expected due to the theoretical relatedness of the construct (Van Oudenhoven, Mol & Van der Zee, 2003). All the five MPQ factors, namely Cultural Empathy (0.22, $p < 0.01$), Open-mindedness (0.3, $p < 0.01$), Emotional Stability (0.17, $p < 0.01$), Flexibility (0.22, $p < 0.01$) and Social Initiative (0.12, $p < 0.01$) had low but, significant correlations with the scale measuring Attitudes towards Religious Diversity. According to Cohen's (1988) effect size criteria, the majority of correlations fell in the medium effect size range.

For the present study, simultaneous multiple regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility and social initiative for predicting positive attitudes towards religious diversity. In simpler terms, this study attempted to test the extent to which people capable of understanding other people's feelings, thoughts and emotions (cultural empathy); persons interested and curious about other cultures (open-mindedness); persons who are not easily upset, do not fear failure, are usually calm and confident (emotionally stability); persons who seek challenges and enjoy new experiences (flexibility); persons who take initiative in making conversations, establishing new relationships and are comfortable in social

settings (social initiative); are likely to favour religious diversity.

When the combination of multicultural personality variables were used to predict attitudes towards religious diversity, F value was significant ($F = 6.56$). Beta Co-efficients are presented in Table 2.

Out of the five factors of multicultural personality, two factors significantly predicted a positive attitude towards religious diversity among youth. Open-mindedness ($\beta = 0.2$, $p < 0.01$) and Flexibility ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$) emerged as the only significant predictors of positive attitude towards religious diversity when all five predictors are included. Cultural empathy was seen to predict positive attitude towards religious diversity. However, this result was not significant. Similarly, emotional stability and social initiative did not emerge as significant predictors of favourable attitude towards religious diversity. Thus, results of this study partly supported the hypothesis that multicultural personality would positively predict favourable attitude towards religious diversity.

Table 2. Standardized Beta Coefficients of Predictors of Attitude towards Religious Diversity (n = 236)

Predictors	Standardized Beta Coefficients
Cultural Empathy	0.98
Open-Mindedness	0.21**
Emotional Stability	0.09
Flexibility	0.15**
Social Initiative	-0.07

** $p < 0.01$

Open-mindedness is known to be related to Openness to Experience of the Big Five Taxonomy (Leone, Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, Perugini&Ercolani, 2005). Openness to experience has been associated with beliefs about and attitude towards diversity (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003) and the same has been found in this study as well. Open-

mindedness positively predicted attitudes towards religious diversity among youth.

Individuals who are open minded are curious and interested to know and understand different cultural perspectives rather than be inclined to develop negative stereotypes regarding the different cultural groups (Van der Zee, Atsma&Brodbeck, 2004). People with high levels of openness to experience have more positive attitudes towards minority members (Flynn, 2005). People who are open-minded and culturally empathetic tend to evaluate intercultural situations as an opportunity and respond to them more positively (Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven& De Grijis (2004). Open-mindedness has also been found crucial for intercultural effectiveness (Herfst et al, 2008). The ability to welcome a wide variety of perspectives and ideas, as seen in an open-minded individual, plays an important role in improving democracy (Meadows, 2006). Openness to experience encourages democratic attitudes towards family, education and freedom of speech (Markovik, 2010).

In the present study, it was found that those who were open-minded, that is, interested in and curious about other cultures; fascinated by other people's opinions and sought contact with people of different backgrounds; looked for new ways to solve their problems, attain their goal and try out various approaches and were open to new ideas, were likely to favour religious diversity and welcome it in interpersonal interactions.

Another significant predictor of attitude towards religious diversity found in the present study was flexibility. In diverse settings where people need to shift from one strategy to another, when interacting with people of different religions, flexibility can help them when familiar ways of handling situations may no longer work. Instead of viewing new and unknown situations as a threat, flexible people generally tend to perceive them as a challenge (Van der Zee, Atsma & Brodbeck, 2004). Barbu (1998) has emphasized that one needs to be flexible in one's attitude, feeling, ideas and action in order

to understand, cooperate and freely engage with those who are culturally different than oneself.

In the present study, persons who were flexible; that is, liked surprises and adventure, were comfortable with not knowing what will happen next, were able to function in unfamiliar settings, did not have fixed habits, were in need for change, sought challenges, didn't look for regularity in life were comfortable in different cultures; were likely to hold a more favourable attitude towards people of religions different than their own.

Adjusted R Square value of 0.11 indicates that 11% variance in attitudes towards religious diversity was explained by the model. According to Cohen, this is a small effect. Thus, findings of the present study highlight the extent to which being open and accepting of culturally different people in society and also optimizing intergroup interactions by choosing a flexible approach is likely to help youth to function in diverse settings and thus, contribute towards building inter-religious harmony. While previous research studies support the association of multicultural personality with openness to diversity (Yakunina et al., 2012; Kagnici, 2012), the present study extends them further by highlighting the relevance of multicultural personality in context of religious diversity as well.

It is important to note that although open-mindedness and flexibility significantly predicted favourable attitudes towards religious diversity, in the current study when other personality domains were kept constant, the strength of this relationship was low (β range between 0.1 and 0.2). The strength of the beta value suggests that apart from the five multicultural personality domains incorporated in the model, there are other factors that could explain the variance in attitudes towards religious diversity. In addition, the internal reliability of the adapted tool for Attitude towards Religious Diversity ($\alpha=.6$) was relatively low. This could be attributed to the short length of the tool, which measured different aspects of social interactions, including peer, family and intimate relationships. Hence, results

of this study should be interpreted with caution. Further studies may be conducted to ascertain the influence of cultural empathy, emotional stability and social initiative on attitudes towards religious diversity. Future studies may benefit from including more robust tools and multiple factors that are likely to impact the relationship between multicultural personality and attitude towards religious diversity.

Conclusion

The present study found that open-mindedness and flexibility were crucial determinants of favourable attitudes towards religious diversity among youth. These findings highlight the person specific variables that can perhaps be enhanced to achieve democratic and constitutional values of fraternity and national integration through building positive attitudes towards religious diversity.

This research has implications of developing a multicultural outlook, ideology and personality among people by psycho-educating them and starting number of programs such as cross-cultural training programs and capacity building programs for youth to enhance the open-mindedness and flexibility of youth in communally-sensitive areas. Teacher and student training workshops may be organized to improve multicultural competencies of identifying cultural pressures among students, enhance their ability to communicate with minimum culturally demeaning or sexist remarks, and learn ways to combat bias, prejudice and stereotyping in educational settings. As a preventive measure, university students who score low on multicultural traits like open-mindedness and flexibility may be provided outreach programs, as they may need assistance in managing their intergroup relations. Group discussion and interactive activities could help students develop an open and understanding attitude towards people of different religions.

A general limitation of this study is the use of convenience sampling, which may have resulted in recruiting participants who were not entirely representative of the larger population among

youth. In addition, the questionnaires used in this study were based on self-report, multiple choice format, which could have created the possibility of distortion and errors. Future research needs to conduct analyses using different assessment formats like objective behavioural measures. Future research could employ experimental and longitudinal methods in order to fully substantiate the cause-effect relationships implied by the findings of present study, as well as include other potential mediators that may explain the relations between multicultural personality and attitudes towards religious diversity.

This research attempt is important as very little work is happening in the area of finding remedies to religious prejudice and discrimination in India particularly by measuring multicultural personality. We hope that along with multicultural personality and religious diversity, this study will stimulate psychologists and other social scientists to investigate, various other counteracting forces of violence, prejudice and discrimination.

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Appendix: Attitudes towards Religious Diversity Scale

Sr. No.	Statement
1	I feel I could develop an intimate relationship with someone from a different religious community
2	My friendship network is religious community – wise very mixed
3	I would feel O.K. about my son or daughter dating someone from a different religious community
4*	Most of my close friends are from my own religious community
5	If I were to adopt a child, I would be happy to adopt a child of any religious community
6*	I think it is better if people marry within their own religious community

Note: Items with asterisk * are reverse-scored.