

Perception of Similarities and Differences Among Ethnic Groups at the University of Guam

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Introduction

Recent research by both social psychologists and cultural anthropologists has dealt with the analysis of social choice and social distance among members of different groups. In the development of theory in this area, disagreements about the important variables are common. In studying Negro-White interaction Rokeach and Mezei (1966) maintain that the difference in beliefs held by Negroes and Whites is the main factor in social choice. The major dissenter is Triandis (1961, 1967) whose data show that the principle factor is the difference in race. Both writers, however, point out the possibility of different results due to different social settings, such as the deep American South versus the industrialized North.

The present study attempts to provide data concerning the important factors in social choice. The research site and social setting was the University of Guam where members of eleven distinct ethnic groups provided data concerning their perceptions of each other. This multiple group study provides different data than that normally found in intergroup studies, since most studies usually investigate only two groups, such as the classic work of Sherif *et al.* (1961). The present work resembles Campbell and Levine (1961, see also Campbell, 1967) in that it studies the interaction experience of many different groups, and since it represents a collaboration between a social psychologist and a cultural anthropologist. Finally, the social setting of the present research is different from those reported previously (with the exception of Brislin, 1968), and thus provides additional data called for by all of the above researchers.

Research Site, Sample, and Method

The University of Guam is the only American institution of higher learning in the Western Pacific. Consequently, it draws students from many cultural areas, such as Guam, the United States, Japan, the Philippines, and Micronesia, specifically, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. In choosing specific subjects for interviewing, the students were divided into three groups, those from Guam (Guamanians), the United States (Statesiders), and Trust Territory. "Statesiders" is a term used on Guam which refers to persons from the continental United States. Trust Territory students come from the Marshalls, Caroline, and the northern

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Marianas Islands. The present sample included subjects from the following Trust Territory island groups: Kusaie, the Marshalls, Palau, Ponape, Saipan, and Truk.

The sample of Guamanians and Statesiders consisted of every third name on the student roster. Trust Territory students were over selected in order to insure representation of subjects from each of the above six island groups.

An attitude survey inquiring into intergroup relations was designed and administered individually to subjects. Three of the questions on the survey asked if students at the university perceived certain ethnic groups as similar or different, and in what ways. The students were given a matrix like that pictured in Table 1 and were asked whether they thought that people who came from two places were similar or different. The subjects were to put one of the following letters in the box corresponding to the two places: S for similar, D for different, X if they did not know. After they completed the matrix, they were asked to describe in what ways the people whom they reported as similar were similar to one another, and were also asked to describe how the people whom they reported as different were different from one another.

Results

The following three matrices present the results of the question concerning similarities and differences. In the first, Guamanians (population 24) are the respondents. In the second, Statesiders (population 28) respond and in the third students from the Trust Territory (population 45). In all cases the first number (after the letter S) in the vertical row refers to the percentage of students perceiving the groups as similar. The second number (after the letter D) is the percentage of students perceiving the groups as different, and the third number (after the letter X) refers to the percentage of students who responded that they do not know. In some cases the percentages total more than 100% due to rounding.

The student was instructed to respond to the two areas whose horizontal and vertical rows meet. For instance, the box in the upper left hand corner asks about Guamanians and Trukese; the box to its right asks about Guamanians and Statesiders, and so forth. These data are reported to invite further analysis as well as to support our interpretation regarding perceptions of similarities and differences.

The results gathered from the two questions, "In what ways are the people you said are different, different from one another?" and "In what ways are the people you said are similar, similar to one another?" are presented in Tables 4 and 5. The answers compiled in this table were the most frequently given. Other reasons, which were given by less than 10% of any one group, include dress, intelligence, upbringing, education, personality, and desire. The people responding to these questions are listed at the left side of the tables, and the reasons are along the horizontal row. The percentages of people giving the various reasons for similarities and differences are in the boxes. People could give as many reasons as they wished.

Table 1. Guamanians (population 24) responding. S is similar, D is different, X is "don't know."

	Truk	States	Saipan	Ponape	Phillipines	Palau	Marshalls	Kusaie	Japan	Hawaii
Guam	S 4%	42	88	4	29	8	8	0	17	50
	D 67%	58	13	58	58	71	71	42	58	42
	X 29%	0	0	38	13	21	21	58	25	8
Hawaii	S 4%	88	4	4	33	4	8	4	38	
	D 71%	13	75	63	58	67	63	42	50	
	X 25%	0	21	33	8	29	29	54	13	
Japan	S 21%	17	46	21	17	17	17	17		
	D 54%	71	42	58	75	54	54	38		
	X 25%	13	13	21	8	29	29	46		
Kusaie	S 38%	4	4	38	4	42	46			
	D 17%	50	42	13	42	8	8			
	X 46%	46	54	50	54	50	46			
Marshalls	S 79%	13	29	79	29	92				
	D 0%	71	58	4	63	0				
	X 21%	17	13	17	8	8				
Palau	S 75%	0	21	71	8					
	D 17%	75	71	21	75					
	X 8%	25	8	8	17					
Phillipines	S 4%	17	13	8						
	D 75%	71	75	71						
	X 21%	13	13	21						
Ponape	S 83%	0	13							
	D 0%	67	67							
	X 17%	33	21							
Saipan	S 8%	8								
	D 67%	79								
	X 25%	13								
States	S 4%									
	D 79%									
	X 17%									
Truk										

Table 2. Statesiders (population 28) responding. S is similar, D is different, X is “don’t know.”

		Truk	States	Saipan	Ponape	Phillipines	Palau	Marshalls	Kusaie	Japan	Hawaii
Guam	S	18%	7	71	14	18	18	7	7	4	11
	D	68%	93	21	71	71	79	68	46	86	79
	X	14%	0	7	14	11	4	25	46	11	11
Hawaii	S	7%	46	7	11	7	7	11	7	18	
	D	86%	46	86	75	86	89	68	50	64	
	X	7%	7	7	14	7	4	21	43	18	
Japan	S	7%	14	7	7	14	11	7	7		
	D	75%	79	79	75	79	75	71	50		
	X	18%	7	14	18	7	14	21	43		
Kusaie	S	25%	7	14	32	4	25	25			
	D	14%	43	25	4	36	14	18			
	X	61%	50	61	64	61	61	57			
Marshalls	S	46%	4	25	50	4	46				
	D	25%	71	50	25	71	25				
	X	29%	25	25	25	25	29				
Palau	S	57%	4	25	50	11					
	D	32%	79	57	29	75					
	X	11%	18	18	21	14					
Phillipines	S	7%	4	11	4						
	D	82%	79	82	82						
	X	11%	18	7	14						
Ponape	S	64%	4	25							
	D	11%	71	54							
	X	25%	25	21							
Saipan	S	25%	7								
	D	61%	86								
	X	14%	7								
States	S	4%									
	D	89%									
	X	7%									
Truk											

Table 3. Students from the Trust Territory (population 45) responding. S is similar, D is different, X is "don't know."

	Truk	States	Saipan	Ponape	Phillipines	Palau	Marshalls	Kusaie	Japan	Hawaii
Guam	S 18%	22	85	16	51	18	18	16	7	31
	D 78%	58	13	80	40	78	78	80	73	42
	X 4%	20	2	4	9	4	4	4	20	27
Hawaii	S 11%	67	13	9	22	13	13	11	36	
	D 67%	24	76	85	56	82	78	78	44	
	X 22%	9	11	7	22	4	9	11	20	
Japan	S 7%	13	16	7	16	16	11	7		
	D 73%	67	67	80	58	71	73	78		
	X 20%	20	18	13	27	13	16	16		
Kusaie	S 60%	2	18	71	9	33	51			
	D 24%	91	69	22	85	58	40			
	X 16%	7	13	7	7	9	9			
Marshalls	S 53%	2	18	49	7	33				
	D 40%	91	71	36	85	60				
	X 7%	7	11	16	9	7				
Palau	S 42%	4	27	33	16					
	D 53%	91	67	60	67					
	X 4%	4	7	7	18					
Phillipines	S 13%	16	29	18						
	D 67%	71	60	73						
	X 20%	13	11	9						
Ponape	S 71%	2	27							
	D 24%	91	64							
	X 4%	7	9							
Saipan	S 29%	7								
	D 62%	87								
	X 9%	7								
States	S 2%									
	D 93%									
	X 4%									
Truk										

Table 4. Reasons why the ethnic groups are different.

Respondents	Reasons*					
	Culture	Language	Physical Characteristics	Religion	Behavior	Attitudes
Guamanians	67%	79%	33%	21%	29%	4%
Statesiders	68%	29%	32%	18%	11%	25%
Trust Territory Residents	82%	49%	36%	13%	18%	4%

* will total more than 100% because of multiple answers

Table 5. Reasons why the ethnic groups are similar

Respondents	Reasons				
	Culture	Language	Physical Characteristics	Religion	Behavior
Guamanians	42%	50%	25%	21%	17%
Statesiders	50%	18%	14%	7%	4%
Trust Territory Residents	67%	51%	27%	16%	4%

Discussion

The key to our interpretation of these results is based on the reasons "culture" and "language" being given (in free responses) as reasons for similarities and differences much more than "physical characteristics." In the previously mentioned Triandis (1967) work, race was the major variable influencing social distance. But the groups under study were Negro and White, and thus race and culture were inseparable for these subjects. Of course, "race" is an ambiguous term which may subsume differences in beliefs, physical characteristics, culture, language, and other variables.

At the University of Guam a given student has a chance to see and hear at least ten other ethnic groups from several areas, many belonging to the same "race," and thus the student sees a variety of physical characteristics, cultural practices, and languages. For our students, "race" becomes separated into subparts. And students report perceptions based upon culture and language, two subparts of "race." In this study there is an increase in the range of the variable "culture within race." This increase is one advantage of the cross-cultural method (Whiting, 1968).

This finding seems to reconcile Rokeach and Triandis. It is proposed that culture is the intervening and important variable in social choice among different groups. In responding to "race," Triandis's subjects could have meant "culture" since culture for his subjects may have been subsumed under "race." In responding to "beliefs," Rokeach's subjects could have meant "culture" since culture is a system of beliefs. But unless a given subject can perceive different cultures among peoples of the same race, as on Guam, he may be unable to actually verbalize the anthropological term as a free response. It is felt that Rokeach was closest to

the correct solution with his belief hypothesis, since culture is a system of shared beliefs.

That "language" was also seen as an important variable in the perception of both similarities and differences does not detract from our argument, since language reflects culture. According to Greenberg (1965), "language as a highly complex body of learned behavior forms a part of the cultural heritage of the community which uses it. Indeed it has a central role as the fundamental vehicle of transmission of other cultural traits within and across social groups."

Two results from Tables 1, 2, and 3 help support our argument. Trust Territory students should be more sensitive to similarities among themselves than Guamanians and Statesiders, as well as to differences among themselves. Trust Territory students interact with each other more than with other groups, share a common dormitory, and often learn each other's language (see Brislin, 1967, 1968 for supporting data). They have also lived together under one government. Tables 1, 2, and 3 show that the more the known cultural similarities and differences, as in the similarity among Kusaie, Ponape, and Truk or the difference between Palau and the Marshalls, the more sensitive the Trust Territory students are to perceiving them so. Guamanians, more knowledgeable about Micronesia than visiting statesiders, are the next most sensitive to these similarities and differences. Note that both Trust Territory and Guamanian students perceive Guam and Saipan as more similar than Statesiders, probably basing this on the common language, Chamorro.

Trust Territory students also show more knowledge about Kusaie, as reflected by their few "don't know" responses to the inquiries about Kusaien similarities and differences, as opposed to the many "don't know" responses of Guamanians and Statesiders. Kusaiens represent a small percentage of the University of Guam population, and thus were not readily perceivable by any people other than their fellow Micronesians. Again, Guamanians come second in this comparison.

Summary and Conclusions

Subjects at the University of Guam completed a questionnaire concerning the similarities and differences of eleven ethnic groups with whom they had contact. "Culture" was the major reason given for ethnic group similarities and differences. This finding was interpreted as reconciling Triandis's and Rokeach's data on race versus shared belief as the main determinant of social choice. Race includes culture, and culture is a system of beliefs. Subjects, as at the University of Guam, who have seen many ethnic groups, can verbalize "culture" as a determiner of social choice, the social choice here being a statement of perceived similarity or difference.

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