

INCOMING COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S PERCEPTIONS
OF RACIAL, RELIGIOUS, AND SEXUAL
ORIENTATION GROUPS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College and universities currently have the most diverse student population in our nation's history and by the year 2020, the projection is that almost 50% of the student population will be students of color (Meacham, McClellan, Pearse, and Greene, 2003). As cultural diversity on college campuses continues to increase, concepts of diversity and multiculturalism will remain significant and critical features of private and public institutions of higher education. Hurtado (2004) states that diversity is central not only to the learning process but also to the civic mission of the institution of higher education. Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) believe that the increasing diversity on campuses will likely challenge the idea that any single research approach will be adequate to accurately portray the impact of college life on students.

Despite opportunities for students to associate with people who have cultural histories different from their own, diversity and multiculturalism are not always embraced. Rules, laws, and the passage of time have not eliminated ingrained perceptions and lack of compassion some students harbor for a particular group of people. Perceptions students have of specific groups, as well as student perceptions of the cultural climate on campuses, vary widely. Levine and Cureton (1998) allege that multiculturalism continues to be the most unresolved issue on college campuses today.

Unresolved issues involving campus diversity are issues that are likely influenced by student perceptions of outgroups, groups in which the student is not a member. Willoughly (2004) reports that “every minute a college student somewhere sees or hears racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise biased words or images” (p. 1). Expression of unresolved issues can escalate from words of misunderstanding to become overt crimes of hate and bias. Cruel incidents of hate and bias affect hundreds of college students each year and leave many students feeling victimized and defenseless. Hurtado (1992) reports that research shows that overt racial friction cannot be assumed to be unrelated hostile incidents, but are indicators of unresolved racial issues on campus and in society. Unfortunately, colleges may have limited resources to consult that adequately promote a campus atmosphere of understanding, respect, appreciation, acceptance, value, and support of cultural diversity.

Whether students are enrolled in large comprehensive universities or are attending smaller, more segregated colleges, *all* students experience diversity. For instance, despite the homogeneity of race and gender at Spelman College, an historically black college for women, their current president acknowledges much diversity on the campus, e.g., religious, ethnic, geographic (Tatum, 2004). Cultural diversity encompasses more than race (Terrell, 1992). Cultural diversity includes, but is not limited to, people of various ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, generations, religions, physical abilities, and geographic areas.

Diversity on campus is crucial for preparing young people to work in a world whose occupants represent a wide range of diversity, difference, and distinction. JoAnn deArmas Wallas, Dean of International Programs Office at Juniata College in

Pennsylvania aptly phrased the importance of diversity education in this statement, “Being around people who look, think, act and believe differently from you is what education is all about. If you haven’t questioned your assumptions, you’re not educated, you’re just trained” (Wallas, n.d., Juniata College web site). Beverly Tatum of Spelman College shares a similar sentiment. She writes that “colleges, of all the institutions in our country, have some of the greatest responsibility to challenge misconceptions and explore differences –and to help our students develop their capacity to connect across them” (Tatum, p.B2). Nevertheless, for the most part, campuses have not maximized student opportunities for cross-racial interactions (Chang, 2002).

Whitt, Edison, Pascerella, Terenzini, and Nora. (2001) discuss how student perceptions of peers are one of the most important institutional elements for fostering openness to diversity, which includes assessing the extent to which students hold ethnocentric attitudes. A president at a large state university in Pennsylvania commented that every year thousands of students come to campus bringing with them biases and prejudices they grew up with (Schemo, 2001). Although diversity on university campuses is experienced and perceived differently by different ethnic groups, researchers (Phillips Morrow, Burris-Kitchen, and Der-Karabetian, 2000) have found that little is known about perceptions students have of each other and that students’ voices have not received in-depth attention.

Population and Perception Trends on Campus

Students attending large comprehensive universities across the United States have multiple opportunities to interact with individuals who represent an array of diversities,

e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and disability. On the Oklahoma State University campus, for example, the office of Institutional Research and Information Management, Information Technology Division (1994, 2004) report that the percent of undergraduate American Indians, Hispanic, Asians, and African American students increased from 13% to 16% between 1994 and 2004 even though the international student population decreased due to U.S. government regulation following *September 11*. Undergraduate women and men are now almost equally represented on the OSU campus. Non-traditional (older and/or returning) students are familiar members in undergraduate classes. Due to policies that protect minority groups, campus participation by handicapped students appears to increase and gay, lesbian, and bisexual students are more open about their homosexual identity. Finally, because OSU is a public institution, students with diverse religious backgrounds continue to be represented.

Although opportunities to associate with individuals from diverse backgrounds have been possible, student bias and consequential discrimination have been recognized and recorded on the OSU campus for decades. In 1989, graduate students completing a campus questionnaire/instrument shared their perceptions about discrimination on the OSU campus (Buchanon, 1989). Written comments from graduate students indicated that although discrimination was not visible (but rather was subtle, passive, and covert), discrimination thrived on the OSU campus, Discrimination was viewed as personal insults rather than as outright discrimination and, in essence, subtleties disguised discriminatory practices. Offenders were believed to be unaware of their prejudice and the more educated the offender was, the better the offender could hide discriminatory practices.

Since 1993, OSU's Division of Student Affairs in collaboration with the office of University Assessment has administered the College Student Survey (CSS). Although the CSS survey includes minimal student assessment of cultural/diversity topics, data obtained offers some insight into broad trends of student perceptions about diversity. For this study data from the CSS survey were examined and compared two ways. First, changes in perceptions by different groups of incoming freshmen from 1993 to 2003 (chronological data) were analyzed. Secondly, changes in one group of students as freshmen in 1996 and 1997 and in a later follow-up survey in 2001 (longitudinal data) were tracked. Both approaches are summarized in Table I-1.

Chronological data (Davis and Bowers, 1999; OSU Division of Student Affairs, 2003; OSU Student Affairs, 2001) from different incoming freshmen groups indicate that over the ten-year span from 1993 to 2002, more freshmen at Oklahoma State University perceived *racial discrimination in America as no longer a major problem*. Fewer freshmen rated their *understanding of others* as above average and the number of freshmen who consider the *promotion of racial understanding* an "essential" or "very important" life goal declined. A minute, increasing change was reported for the role *colleges should assume in prohibiting racist/sexist speech on campus*. The belief that *realistically little can be done individually to bring about change in society* showed a slight, but declining change.

Longitudinal data from students assessed as freshmen and then reassessed after experiencing college life at OSU for four plus years reveal changes in perceptions that were different from changes observed from data of the chronological freshmen groups reported above. Fewer students, after four years of college life than the same students as

freshmen, *perceived racial discrimination in America as no longer a major problem*, a smaller percentage *frequently socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group*, and less *believed colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus*. On the other hand, a larger percentage of students considered the *promotion of racial understanding an “essential” or “very important” life goal*. A slight increase in the percent of students self-rating their *understanding of others* as above average was reported. Fewer students indicated that *an individual could realistically do little to bring about change in society*.

Table I-1. OSU College Students' Perceptions of Various Racial/Diversity Topics from 1993 to 2002*

Racial/Diversity Statement	Percent of Students Who Agree With the Statement			
	1993 Freshmen	2002 Freshmen (arrow shows direction of change from 1993)	1996 or 1997 Freshmen	2001 Freshmen, 4+ years later (arrow show direction of change from '96-'97 freshmen)
Views on Social Issues:				
“Racial discrimination is no longer a problem in America”	15	30 ↑	19	16 ↓
“Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus”	56.5	~58 ↑	65	48 ↓
“Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about change in our society”	27	26↓	26	23 ↓
Activity during past year:				
“Frequently socialized with someone of another racial/ethnic group”	N/A in '93 & '94; 58.3 in '95	60.6 N/A	59	37 ↓
Self-Rating above average:				
“Understanding of others”	71.5	63 ↓	67	69 ↑
Life goals considered <i>essential</i> or <i>very important</i> : “Promote racial understanding”				
	33.3	21 ↓	22.4	27 ↑

*Compiled from Davis and Bowers, 1999; OSU Division of Student Affairs, 2003; OSU Student Affairs, 2001.

Need for the Study

Oklahoma State University (OSU) has experienced blatant incidents of racial and cultural insensitivity and bias. In recent years, an Indian tepee was desecrated during a Native American heritage celebration. During the fall 2002 semester, a trio of students at a fraternity costume party mocked the occurrence of slavery and lynching (Editorial Board, 2002). Later in the same school year, chalking on campus sidewalks reflected homophobic attitudes of some students who believe that homosexuals are going to burn in hell. Although these events were visible evidence of negative perceptions, other negative messages conveyed may be subtle, unintentional, or unnoticed by the majority culture. Fultz (2002), a staff writer for the campus newspaper, addressed the topic of diversity on the OSU campus and exposed the need on the campus to create more opportunities for cultural awareness.

Bias and discrimination on college campuses result, in part, from perceptions students have of themselves, of others, and of the environment in which they are learning and functioning. A previous study (Layman, 1975) addressed the relationship between students' perceptions of the OSU campus environment and students' persistence (retention) in college. The campus environment in this study included numerous and complex interactions that students currently experience daily on college campuses. Although seven scales were used to collect data, no scales addressed students' perceptions of diverse groups. The Academic Outreach program coordinator for the College of Arts and Sciences at OSU commented about the power of perceptions and that he believes discrimination is one outcome of personal perceptions (Bost, 2003). As a crucial step for institutions wishing to create comfortable, diverse learning environments

for its students, Hurtado, Carter, and Kardia (1998) promote the practice of assessing the campus climate for diversity prior to formalizing institutional plans.

Statement of Problem

A current challenge facing Oklahoma State University and numerous other public institutions of higher education is how to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students. How OSU meets the needs of all students on campus influences the perceptions incoming freshmen have about how favorably or unfavorably the university climate accepts and values diversity. Although the diversity of the student population at OSU is expanding, the student population does not necessarily proportionally reflect the diversity of either Oklahoma or the nation. Likewise, students selected for leadership roles and students recognized for various achievements do not automatically represent the diverse student population on campus. Critical to the issue of equality of representation is the question of how well the university demonstrates and portrays the value of racial, ethnic, and social/cultural diversity.

Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen, (1998) report that most researchers believe student peer groups are crucially responsible for student socialization on campus. Student peer groups, ingroups, influence students' attitudes and behaviors through the norms they communicate to their ingroup. Because student perceptions affect their behaviors toward others (ingroup and outgroup members), it is crucial for universities to be aware of students' perceptions of various groups of people.

A chain of episodes emanate from students' perceptions. Perceptions influence behaviors which affect the campus climate that enhances or diminishes student

satisfaction with self, others, and campus. College recruitment, academic and social fulfillment, and retention (persistence) on campus, in turn, are either improved or weakened depending on students' perceptions of the campus.

Because minimal research focuses on students' perceptions of individuals from cultural backgrounds different from their own, college personnel and campus leaders can easily overlook faulty and negative perceptions students bring to campus. If unfounded perceptions are not properly addressed, opportunities for promoting a positive campus climate and for enhancing student satisfaction of the college experience are compromised. Douglas (1998) examined students' perceptions of campus environments as well as factors influencing students' perceptions and recommends the continuation of support for programs which promote minority student recruitment and retention.

Consequently, this study is relevant to all administrators, faculty, staff, and students who plan and implement student programs. The central issue meriting further exploration in this research focuses on student perceptions of diverse student populations.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Several theoretical models contribute to understanding the perceptions college students have of individuals who are culturally different from them. Obviously the contextual environment for studying student perceptions is the college campus. The impact of the campus's climate for diversity is viewed as a critical factor in how students perceive themselves and others.

The conceptual model designed for this study reflects the researcher's application of four theories that impact student perceptions in a campus environment. The model is

illustrated in Figure I-1 and presents the theories on two levels. The first level situates the student in the college environment and addresses how perceptions fit into and impact the campus climate for diversity. The second level addresses how perceptions operate on an individual basis and how perceptions function within and between groups. The three theories on the second level contribute to the understanding of how students develop perceptions of others and how students' perceptions may be expressed.

Main sources used to explicate each theory, a working description of each theory and additional features of each theory are included in the boxes. Lastly, language and/or behaviors relating to the theories and applicable to this study are acknowledged.

The research of Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen, (1998) level one of the conceptual illustration, provides a theoretical basis for understanding students' perceptions as they relate to the campus climate for diversity. One component of the internal, institutional, dimension influencing the campus climate is the psychological climate of perceptions between and among groups of students. The psychological climate can impact how well students adjust to college life, the student's sense of attachment to or alienation from the institution, the grades students achieve, and whether or not students persist at that college.

Features of Social Identity Theory discussed by Hinton (2000) presents the social group sense of who we are and how we view other people. Individuals are members of ingroups and outgroups. Individuals who feel secure with their ingroup identity may more easily associate with outgroups than will individuals who feel less comfortable with their ingroup identity. Ingroups that overestimate their own value and devalue an

outgroup may reflect ingroup favoritism through prejudice and discrimination of the outgroup. In essence, social identity influences how we view other groups.

Social Cognition Theory based on work by Fiske (1993) and discussed in Hinton (2000) describes what we use to organize information to make sense of other people. Basically, we select distinctive and relevant structures, e.g., *reliability* and *dependability*, from characteristics, e.g., *always on time* and *always prepared*, and we substitute those structures, e.g., *reliability* and *dependability*, for original characteristics. Thus, the process of organizing information leads to the use of abbreviated structures or labels that help us identify people. These structures or labels used for another person affect how we relate to the person.

Attention Theory as presented by Franken (2001) and Hinton (2000), clarifies how we use the structures we develop to process incoming information so that we can see the world, including people, as predictable and consistent. Because our attention is limited, incoming information is processed two ways, controlled processing and automatic processing. Controlled processing requires conscious processing of information and depends on such factors as the difficulty of the task, the need for time to process, and the need for flexibility. Automatic processing is unconscious, doesn't use up capacity needed for conscious processing, is quick, and inflexible. Generalizations and stereotypes are structures we use to process information when relevant personal knowledge is absent to help in processing incoming information. For instance, if an older appearing person walks into a room using a cane and those already in the room have neither personal information about that person nor time to visit with that person, those in

the room might quickly perceive and describe that person with labels associated with being old regardless of whether or not those labels fit the person.

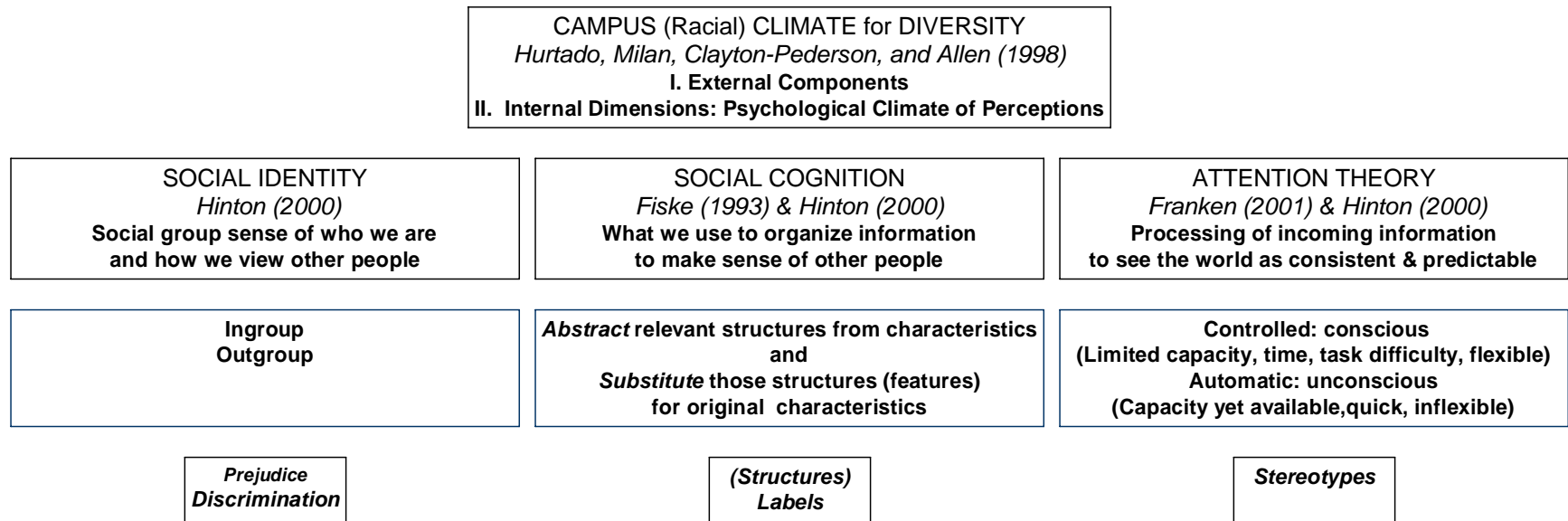


Figure I-1. Conceptual Framework for Studying Incoming College Freshmen's Perceptions of Racial, Religious, and Sexual Orientation Groups

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. The research was designed to identify factors or sources of information that influence student perceptions, perceptions that affect student behaviors toward people with whom students may or may not regularly associate. The study deliberately obtained self-reported perceptions to reveal student vocabulary and personal language backgrounds. The research questions addressed in this study follow.

- 1) What language descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) do incoming college freshmen use to portray their perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?
- 2) What perceptions do incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?
- 3) Do perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups vary by freshmen's gender, parents' income, hometown population, self perception as a reader, reading habits as measured by frequency of leisure reading and extent of association with the groups?
- 4) How frequently do incoming college freshmen associate with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?
- 5) What prevents incoming college freshmen from associating with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?
- 6) What sources of information influence incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

The researcher assumed that incoming freshmen students would have more positive perceptions than negative perceptions of groups with whom they had had personal association. Language freshmen would use to describe groups was expected to include more descriptive words than stereotypical labels for groups with whom freshmen had had personal association. Negative descriptors were expected to reflect more stereotypical language and probably would be used for groups with whom incoming freshmen had had little association. It was anticipated that peers, personal association, and family would have the greatest impact on both negative and positive perceptions incoming freshmen had of groups. Perceptions of those groups with whom the freshmen had had minimal or no contact, on the other hand, were projected to be influenced by media, movies, and the internet.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for use in this study:

Culture refers to beliefs, values, traditions, ways of behaving, and language of social group such as religious, ethnic, and racial (Miville, 1992).

Descriptors are words, phrases, or labels that an individual uses to describe an object, person, or group, e.g., insightful, cool as a cucumber, hippie.

Discrimination can be viewed as actions intended to preserve own group characteristics and favored position at the expense of another group (Jones cited in Dovidio and Gaertner, Eds., 1986). Discrimination may also be selective and unjustified negative behavior toward members of a specific group (Dovidio and Gaertner, Eds., 1986).

Diversity expresses ‘otherness,’ or human qualities different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet are qualities present in other individuals and groups (IDS 151 Diversity Seminar, 1999). Differences may be based on ethnicity, race, religion, language, geographical region, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and exceptionalities.

Ethnic group/ethnicity refers to a specific social group that shares a unique cultural heritage, e.g., customs, beliefs, language. People can be from the same race, White, but from different ethnic groups, e.g., German, Italian (Miville, 1992).

Exemplar signifies “a typical member of a category” (Hinton, 2000. p. 177).

Group designates a category of diversity such as but not limited to race, religion, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status.

Ingroup refers to “a group of which the perceiver (the person making a judgment [sic]) is a member” (Hinton, 2000, p.177).

Modern racism is, in part, the belief that “discrimination is something of the past” (McConahay as cited in Sydell and Nelson, 2000).

Multicultural indicates multiple and diverse cultural identities such as nationality, ethnicity, race, social class, gender, and religion.

Outgroup refers to “a group of which the perceiver (the person making a judgment [sic]) is not a member” (Hinton, 2000, p. 178).

Perceptions are the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings students have about persons, situations, and events (Schunk and Meece,).

Prejudice refers to a fallible generalization acquired from a group

characterization (stereotype) and applied to an individual member of the group regardless of the initial accuracy of the group stereotype or the applicability of the group characterization to the individual of interest (Jones cited in Dovidio and Gaertner, Eds., 1986).

Race is increasingly recognized as a social, cultural, and political construct that has no scientific basis (Cameron and Wycoff cited in Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000); but for this study, race refers to a subgroup of people having common physical or genetic characteristics e.g., Black, Native American, Caucasian (Miville, 1992).

Racism can be viewed as similar to prejudice but having more emphasis placed on geographical considerations and including discrimination (Jones cited in Dovidio and Gaertner, Eds., 1986).

Schemas apply to those structures that help us organize our information about an object, person or event (Hinton, 2000). One's teacher schema is the organized knowledge about teachers and includes characteristics of teachers and expectations of how teachers will behave in certain circumstances.

Social cognition is an approach to social psychology focusing on cognitive explanations of social experiences and exploring the nature of cognitive processing. In social cognition, schemas are used to explain how and why social perceivers interpret the world as they do (Hinton, 2000).

Social identity is the sense of identity gained through being a member of a social group (Hinton, 2000).

Stereotype refers to a cognitive structure that includes the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some group of people (Dovidio and Gaertner, Eds., 1986).

Subgroup is a specific group within a larger category of diversity such as Jewish within the religious group, Middle Eastern within the racial group, or lesbian within the sexual orientation group.

Significance of the Study

Colleges and universities are responsible for providing an education that enables students to attain personal dreams and to serve the society in which they will lead (Levine & Cureton, 1998). At the same time, campuses are described by Hurtado et al. as “complex social systems defined by the relationships between the people, bureaucratic procedures, structural arrangements, institutional goals and values, traditions, and larger socio-historical environments” (1998, p. 296).

This study attempts to provide documentation that will help the university look systematically at perceptions students hold about their peers. More accurate information about the student population through this self-examination can help the university better understand its own institutional context. Policies and practices designed to foster an accepting and inclusive campus climate can be grounded in findings provided by this research.

The researcher hopes that any action plan developed by the university would recognize factors that influence perceptions, unwarranted stereotyping, and biases held by students. Policies and practices would hopefully address misunderstandings students have about each other and would encourage interaction with those of different backgrounds. Culturally relevant interventions have the possibility of promoting academic, social, psychological, and physical well-being as well as, improving students' satisfaction with college and increasing student persistence (retention).

Assumptions

This study was founded on the following assumptions:

Incoming college freshmen's perceptions and behaviors, social and academic, are influenced by complex interactions among the students, the institutional environment, and interpersonal experiences of the students.

Incoming college freshmen will vary in the amount of previous association with outgroup members and, as a group, freshmen will be less positive than upper classmen in their perceptions about outgroups.

Incoming college freshmen's perceptions about outgroups will vary among students from different social/cultural groups.

Limitations of the Study

This study has the following limitations:

The cultural population of the Oklahoma State University campus may be different from a consumer of this study and therefore findings do not generalize to other campuses.

The instrument is a self-report instrument. Actual behaviors, including spoken language, were not observed.

The population participating in this study were incoming college freshmen who may have had minimal experience of campus life, thus the findings may not represent upperclassmen and other classifications of students.

Organization of the Study

This study is arranged in five chapters. Chapter I presents a brief introduction of background information pertaining to the study, trends at Oklahoma State University, need for the study, purpose of the study, statement of the problem to be examined, conceptual framework for contextualizing the study, definition of terms, significance of the study, and the assumptions and limitations of the study.

Chapter II provides a review of the literature related to research dealing with college students' perceptions of diverse groups of people. Four theoretical frameworks are presented: (a) the conceptual lens for understanding the diverse cultural dimensions of the campus environment, (b) a social identity view for providing a background of how people gain a sense of who they are, (c) a social cognitive viewpoint for explaining the complex process of perception formation, and (d) an attention theory for understanding how structures are used for processing information. Chapter III delineates methods used in the study including a description of participants and the instructional setting, a

discussion of how the instrument was developed and used, and a review of research procedures employed. Chapter IV contains statistical analysis of the data collected and Chapter V summarizes findings and discusses conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research in the area of student perceptions of diverse groups of people.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Diversity on college campuses has increased in recent years because of demographic trends as well as opportunities provided by the implementation of landmark court decisions that challenged past discriminatory admissions policies (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000). Despite the increased cultural integration of students on campuses, Levine and Cureton (2001) maintain that tension on campus regarding diversity and difference runs high across college life and that few, if any, campuses have made an impact in addressing the topic.

Little (2002) speaks of the durability of a multicultural campus and the opportunities students have on these campuses to reach a better understanding of one another. Research by Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) demonstrates that differences in students' cultural experiences on campus must be acknowledged and understood by campus personnel who try to initiate, develop, and implement ethnically and culturally responsive events. Colleges and universities have the choice to advocate for greater democratic participation and social equality for all students and to develop campus climates that welcome students with diverse cultural histories.

The purpose of this chapter is not only to review literature relevant to the campus cultural climate, but also to examine literature related to perceptions that individuals use

to make sense of the world. This discourse presents four theoretical models that each contribute a salient perspective to the study.

Theoretical Framework for Campus Climate

A conceptual handle for understanding the complex environment of a campus climate is offered by Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1998). They maintain that vital to the conceptualization of a campus climate for diversity is the idea that students are educated in different and distinct racial environments. Furthermore, they believe that interrelated elements, external forces and internal (institutional) forces, dynamically shape the racial context in higher education.

Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1998) identify two components of external forces, (a) governmental policy, programs, and initiatives and (b) sociohistorical events and issues in the larger society. They identify four forces, resulting from educational programs and practices, which shape the internal context. The four forces include the institution's historical legacy of including or excluding various racial/ethnic groups, the institution's numerical representation of diverse racial/ethnic groups, the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes occurring between and among groups, and the behavioral climate that is characterized by intergroup relations. Hurtado et al. believe that the institutional climate for diversity is a product of these elements.

The psychological dimension of a campus racial climate involves, among other views, perceptions of discrimination or racial conflict and attitudes toward those from racial/ethnic backgrounds other than one's own (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen 1998). Other researchers, Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000), report that racially

and ethnically diverse students view campus life differently and may have different perceptions of diversity (Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto, 1998). Biasco, Goodwin, and Vitale (2001) found perceptual differences among races about the existence of racial discrimination on campus.

Regardless of one racial/ethnic/cultural background, perceptions of one's college experience are crucial. Research reported by Hurtado et al. (1998). has shown that student perceptions influence grades, feelings of attachment or sense of alienation, academic and psychological adjustment, academic and social experiences, and persistence (retention) in college. Cabrera, Nora, Terezini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999) write about how student's exposure to prejudice and intolerance on campus lessens the student's commitment to the institution and weakens the student's decision to persist. Retention rates have also been addressed by Chenoweth (1999). Astin (1993a) indicates that enhancing the college's emphasis on diversity may increase student retention rate.

The behavioral dimension of an institution's climate according to Hurtado et al. (1998) consists of the social interaction between and within student groups of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Student involvement in diversity had a positive effect on cultural awareness and commitment to promoting undergraduate racial understanding (Astin, 1993b). Perceptions of why ethnic groups cluster is viewed differently by white students who interpret the clustering as racial segregation than by minority students who view the clustering as cultural support within a larger unsupportive environment (Loo and Robison, cited in Hurtado et al., 2000).

Absence of interracial socialization also influences students' views toward others (Hurtado et al., 1998). An unpublished study by Chang (cited in Hurtado et al., 1998) indicates that interracial socialization is one factor that has a positive effect on student persistence (retention), overall satisfaction with college, and intellectual and social self-concepts.

In view of their campus climate framework, Hurtado et al. (1998) contend that more college campuses need informational resources to help them address psychological and behavioral dimensions of the campus climate. Likewise, assessing their climate for diversity will also assist college institutions in better understanding their own campus context. With available information and campus assessment data, college institutions can subsequently design actions plans to significantly improve the quality of campus experiences for undergraduates.

Theoretical Framework for Social Identity

According to Hinton (2000), social groups serve a major role of providing people with a sense of who they are. Association with a particular group is called social identity and influences how someone views other groups. Group membership may be based on salient (relevant) categories such as *psychology major* or distinctiveness such as *gender*. Two types of social groups are recognized, the ingroup being a group in which the perceiver belongs and the outgroup, a group in which the perceiver is not a member.

Prejudice is believed to be an intergroup process (Hinton, 2000). Hinton discusses Tajfel's proposal that three important cognitive processes are involved in prejudice. Categorization is the first process. In grouping and classifying people on

some characteristic such as 'honest,' perceivers tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and underrate the differences within groups. Thus, stereotype "introduces simplicity and order where there is complexity and nearly random variation" (Tajfel cited in Hinton, 2000, p. 109). Assimilation is the second cognitive process and involves learning about the group in which one is a member and becoming aware of the group's relative position in society. The search for coherence is the third cognitive process and entails finding explanations for one's social circumstances.

Hinton (2000) discusses group membership as associated with self-esteem. If a person belongs to a favored group, membership will reflect positively on the individual's social identity. The person/perceiver is a member of the ingroup and it is in the perceiver's (self) interest to view that ingroup more favorably and distinct from other groups (outgroups). People in other groups (outgroups), likewise, have the same tendency to perceive their group favorably at the expense of other groups. The social competition of perceiving one's own group superior to others gives rise to prejudice. Social identity theory asserts that through categorization and grouping, both cognitive processes, ingroup members develop a stereotypical view of the outgroup members by perceiving outgroup members in terms of their outgroup identity. Furthermore, because the ingroup seeks to maintain a relatively high social identity, the stereotype of outgroup members will likely be negative.

Social identity theory focuses on the relationship between group membership and identity. Not all social relations are based on group identity, but many are. People enhance their social identity by perceiving the group they belong to in a positive way. People are conscious of their group membership and, consequently, the cognitive process

of social categorization combined with the motivational desire for a positive social identity leads to ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination. Social identity theory maintains that if a person is unable to achieve positive social identity through current group membership, that person may attempt to become a member of groups where a more positive social identity can be achieved.

Theoretical Framework for Social Cognition

Perceptions play an important role in the way individuals interpret the world. Schunk and Meece (1992) include thoughts, beliefs, and feelings relating to persons, situations, and events in their description of perceptions. They explain that perceptions represent a complex process and are influenced by a variety of factors. Psychologists use the term cognition to refer to the processes of thinking, perceiving, and organizing that allow an individual to conceptualize the nature of the self and of the external world (Franken, 2001). These cognitive processes give rise to beliefs, attitudes, values, and categories to which individuals attach labels. Labels that an individual uses often provide clues to the way the individual perceives and interprets an event, situation, or person.

Social cognition is an approach to systemically thinking about conceptual ideas. Because of social cognition's emphasis on processing information, social cognition provides a basis for analysis of motivational and affective factors in human cognition (Divine, Hamilton, Ostrom, 1994). Distinct features of social cognition outlined by Divine, Hamilton, and Ostrom are:

1. Focuses on the direct investigation of cognitive underpinnings of the social phenomena being studied,

2. Adopts an information-processing model to understand social phenomena,
3. Assumes communality across various content domains in psychology,
4. Is an approach, rather than a content area.

When social cognition is analyzed in studies relating to stereotyping, Hamilton, Stroessner, and Driscoll (1994) maintain that information processing mechanisms are seen as mediators between information available in the stimulus world and the manifestations of that information. Manifestations may be observed as perceptions of others and as interpersonal behavior. While focusing on the issue of processing group-relevant information, analysis is enriched by investigating how affect, emotion, and motivation influence attention, encoding, and retrieval.

According to (Fiske, 1993) people attempt to make sense of others in order to inform and direct their own actions and interactions. The pragmatic approach to social perception and social cognition presented by Fiske recognizes three recurring themes that are addressed in literature. First, perceivers must be accurate enough for their current purposes. Second, perceivers must create informative and workable structures for interpreting information. Third, the process perceivers use in social perception must be sensitive to the perceiver's goals, sets, motive, and needs.

The pragmatic approach acknowledges that accuracy is not an absolute but is dependent on one's purpose. In other words, the accuracy of the perceiver depends on a balance between some judgment and some standards. The standards can be the perceiver's or some one else's standards. Judgments pragmatically are accurate if they are useful. Utility may be related to reaching some goal or to the attainment of some type

of subjective satisfaction. Nevertheless, because people are not perfect in their perceptions, they use expectancies and data to form impressions.

To discuss the tendency of expectancy effects to diminish over time, Friske (1993) refers to Raudenbush who reasons that acquaintance has the potential to both improve impression accuracy and weaken expectancies. Furthermore, Friske describes how person memory research supports the patterns of expectancy-congruent and expectancy-incongruent information for a relatively well-adapted social perceiver. The advantage of incongruency occurs primarily at encoding when perceivers are motivated to understand the incongruency or when expectations are weak. Weak expectations alert the perceiver to possible cognitive threats at an early stage in important situations. The advantage of congruency on the other hand, is in retrieval and responding to information or when expectations are strong. Strong expectations allow the perceiver to maintain and use well-supported structures, structures which are especially useful if the perceiver is unmotivated by immediate needs to be careful.

Social cognition theory applied to person perception views traits, stereotypes, and stories as structures people use to make sense of other people. As people abstract relevant and essential structures, people then substitute the structure for the original characters of other people. Familiarity and simplicity of the trait, stereotype, or story structures make the structures workable for everyday happenings. Although different psychologists rely on various models to categorize traits, Friske (1993) refers to traits as semantic concepts influencing how information is both processed and used. Interpersonal traits seem to be the structure most valuable to people in daily interactions. Trait adjectives appear to help people predict others' behaviors.

Stereotypes, also referred to as person types, are believed to operate more efficiently and have more meaningful associations as well as more visual features and distinctive characteristics than trait categories which are more abstract (Anderson, Klatzky, and Murray, 1990). Models which Friske (1993) discusses and that categorize stereotypes focus on the pragmatic implications for perceivers, such as making sense of their social world or as offering explanations, given available information, motivation, or social norms. Categories offer meaning for social perceivers and are useful to perceivers for distinguishing among people, interpreting information, and evaluating others.

Concrete representations theories contrast category theories. Creating stories or narratives are thought to be useful when perceivers are faced with surprising combinations of concepts for which they do not have convenient structures (Friske, 1993). Stories enable perceivers to create links between puzzling pieces of information.

Person perception and social cognition researchers may consider the perceiver's purposes and motivation when studying perceptions. Some motivations prompt fast decisions and actions whereas other motivations make perceivers more concerned with feeling or appearing accurate (Friske, 1993). Friske believes that people can exert a surprising amount of control over the process of forming impressions. People can individuate and be more accuracy oriented or they can categorize if so motivated. When social environments increase the costs (outcome dependency, subordinate status, and accountability) of inaccurate social perceptions, social perceivers might sense a need to be more accurate, attentive, detailed, complex, and effortful. Each of these factors can, though, augment the overuse of misleading or irrelevant information. Other conditions in the social environment can increase the cost of remaining open and undecided. In these

situations, information search is limited, information inconsistencies are either ignored or seen as confirming, and spontaneous judgments are warranted. Researchers have indicated that some factors which prompt such instantaneous decisions are time pressure, cognitive busyness, anxiety, and threats of self-esteem. Fiske purports that although a surprising amount of social cognition and perception occurs automatically, people control many of their strategies as a result of the distribution of their attention and in relation to their goals.

The concept of stereotypes is addressed by Hinton (2000) who explains that people, as human beings, need to simplify and categorize the social world in order to understand and interact with it. The process of simplification is neither faulty nor correct, but merely the way human cognition operates.

Stereotypes can be considered a form of heuristic thinking that may result in pragmatic solutions to problems or may result in illusory correlations and illogical reasoning (Hinton, 2000). As a form of heuristic thinking, stereotypes may be activated automatically and processed quickly and efficiently. If the perceiver is motivated to pay attention to individuating information that is incongruent with an activated stereotype, the perceiver may not view other people in a stereotypical way. Hilton and von Hippel (1996) who studied the formation, maintenance, application and change of stereotypes, claim that probably the most important outcome of stereotyping occurs when unfair and negative group stereotypes are applied to individual members of the group. Hilton and von Hippel conclude that stereotypes serve different functions depending on the context of the situation in which the stereotypes are used.

Theoretical Framework for Attention

According to attention theory, people see the world as consistent and predictable because they have developed structures for processing all incoming information (Franken, 2002). Although attention is not completely under a person's control and attention is limited, what people learn is largely regulated by attention. Attention consists of three interrelated processes: (a) attending which is the need to focus on a source of information in order to analyze that information, (b) selective attention which entails selectively processing only part of all incoming information, and (c) perception, meaning, and understanding, which involves grasping the underlying organizational properties of a situation or vast amount of information.

Franken (2000) asserts that once a person's cognitive structures for processing information are formed, the structures are very resistant to change. People trust their cognitive structures even when the structures no longer conform to the world. It takes a great amount of change in the environment before people alter ideas.

Other studies of attention contributed to the view that people have two discrete forms of mental processing (Hinton, 2000). The first form Hinton discusses is referred to as controlled or conscious attention and resulted from Broadbent's limited capacity processing system. Features of the controlled form include limited capacity for attention, time for processing required, and task difficulty affects processing. Because the form involves conscious awareness and is flexible, it takes effort but can deal with novel problems. Pragmatically, controlled attention might be regarded as one's thinking ability and is a thoughtful, conscious, and intentional process.

Automatic processing is the second form of attention processing. Automatic processing does not use up a person's processing capacity, is unconscious, inflexible, and operates quickly (Hinton, 2000). Because it operates outside one's conscious control, it is also unintentional. It relies on highly practiced techniques and can be performed at the same time one is performing a task using controlled attention. The two-process model has been applied to social cognition studies that concern stereotyping, which is one way people express their perceptions of others.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This chapter describes the study's participants, research setting where the study took place, instrument used to collect data, and procedures used for data collection. Research questions with corresponding methods of data analyses are also presented.

Participants

Five hundred sixty-eight (N=568) fall semester college freshmen participated in this study. Incoming college freshmen were selected because they represented a group of students who may have had the least association with individuals who are racially, ethnically, religiously, and/or otherwise culturally different from themselves. Nora and Cabrera (1996) indicate that the freshmen year has been consistently found to be the most crucial year in the academic life of college students. In this study, incoming college freshmen may be referred to as participants, college freshmen or freshmen students.

Of the 568 college freshmen surveyed, responses from 538 (94.7%) of these freshmen were included for analysis. Based on age, student classification, and completeness of information provided by the participant, criteria necessary for a participant's responses to be included for analysis were: 1) Participant was at least 18 years old and classified as a freshman; 2) Demographic data, requested in Part I of the instrument was completed; 3) Two descriptors for at least one subgroup were provided in

Part II; 4) Descriptors in Part II were self-coded as positive, neutral, or negative for Part III; and 5) Scales presenting factors that influence perceptions in Part V were completed.

If participants marked two or more numbers on any Likert-type scale or if descriptors were self-rated with more than one symbol or with unclear symbols, the data was discarded rather than risking being misinterpreted. Therefore, 30 protocols or 5.3% of the data were discarded due to incomplete, missing, or unclear responses.

Participants in this study represented about 11.5% of the 4,649 fall 2003 semester freshmen students enrolled on the university's campus. According to data from the Institutional Research and Information Management, Information Technology Division (2003) of the university, the racial/ethnic composition of freshmen students at the institution for the fall 2003 semester was as follows: Caucasians, 81%; International, 3%; Native American, 8%; African Americans, 4%; Hispanic, 2%; and Asians, 1%. Gender representation for the same group of freshmen students was approximately 51% female and about 49% male. Ninety-four percent of the 3429 *new* freshmen students were 18 or 19 years of age and three fourths of the new freshmen had residential life contracts which classified them as on-campus residents. The average reading subscore on the ACT for the freshmen was 25.1, which was above the national average of 21.2 for 2003 high school seniors.

Demographic details of the 538 freshmen students are summarized in Table III-1 and Table III-2. Demographic data not used as independent variables in this study are presented separately from demographic data used as independent variables. Participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 34 with most participants being 18/19 years old. Approximately 57% of the participants were female and 43% male. Three percent were full-time employed, 27% part-time employed, and 71% were non-employed. Most

Table III-1. Demographic Data of College Freshmen in this Study

	Frequency	Percent
Race	(missing 2)	
African American	28	5.2
American Indian	25	5.7
Asian	11	2.1
Hispanic	8	1.5
Pacific Islander	1	0.2
Caucasian	414	77.2
Mixed	49	9.14
Religion Preference	(missing 7)	
Atheist	4	0.8
Baptist	201	37.9
Eastern Orthodox	1	0.2
Episcopal	4	0.8
Jewish	1	0.2
LDS (Mormon)	2	0.4
Lutheran	23	4.3
Methodist	75	14.1
Presbyterian	19	3.6
Roman Catholic	58	10.9
United Church of Christ	16	3.0
Other Christian	77	14.5
None	50	9.4
High School Graduation Class Size	(missing 7)	
50 or fewer students	71	13.4
51-150 students	108	20.3
151-250 students	65	12.3
251-400 students	89	16.8
401-600 students	107	20.2
601-700 students	45	8.5
901 or more students	46	8.7
Probable Majors	(missing 3)	
Agriculture Science and National Resources	84	15.7
Arts and Science	48	9.0
Business Administration	94	17.6
Education	173	32.6
Engineering	65	12.2
Human Environmental Sciences	46	8.6
Undecided	25	4.7
Residency (*on campus)	(missing 1)	
With parents or relatives	43	8.0
Private home, apartment, or room	47	8.8
University dorm or suite*	392	73.0
Campus Apartment*	10	1.9
Fraternity or Sorority*	44	8.2
Other	1	0.2
Employment Status	(missing 1)	
Full time	14	2.6
Part time	144	26.8
Not employed	379	70.6

students, 73%, lived in university dormitories or suites. Twenty-four percent lived with parents or relatives, in private residences, or in fraternities or sororities. Dominant religious affiliations were Baptist 38%; other Christian, 14.5%; Methodist, 14%; and Roman Catholic, 10%. Nine percent of the participants indicated they had no religious affiliation. Racial groups were represented as follows: Caucasian, 77%; Mixed, 9%; African American, 5%; American Indian, 5%; Asian, 2%; and Hispanic, 1.5%.

Table III-2. Demographic Data (Used as Independent Variables) of College Freshmen in this Study

	Frequency	Percent
Gender	(missing 6)	
Female	304	57
Male	228	43
Hometown Population	(missing 2)	
Less than 1,000	44	8.2
1,000-4,999	96	17.9
5,000-19,999	88	16.4
20,000-49,999	107	20.0
50,000-99,999	69	12.9
100,000-499,999	64	11.9
500,000 or more	68	12.7
Family Income	(missing 15)	
Less than \$10,000	8	1.5
\$10,000-\$19,999	32	6.1
\$20,000-\$49,999	128	24.5
\$50,000-\$99,999	209	40.0
\$100,000-\$199,999	105	20.1
\$200,000 or more	41	7.8
Leisure Reading	(missing 1)	
1 (Never)	43	8.0
2	89	16.6
3	122	22.7
4	104	19.4
5	83	15.5
6 (Daily)	96	17.9
Self Rating as Readers	(missing 3)	
1 (Poor)	13	2.4
2	29	5.4
3	80	15.0
4	158	29.6
5	168	31.4
6 (Excellent)	87	16.3

Participants in this study were enrolled in at least one of four classes: a one-hour Freshmen Orientation class available in all colleges to incoming freshmen, an introductory course offered in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, an introductory course offered in the College of Human Environmental Sciences, or a College Reading and Study Skills class available in the College of Education.

Research Setting

This study was conducted at a comprehensive four-year, land grant university system with four campuses (Oklahoma State University, 2003-2004). The campus is located in the south central region of the United States in a community with a population of about 38,000, not including students. The enrollment on the campus where the study was conducted had approximately 21,000 students with about 4,600 of those students being freshmen (Institutional Research and Information Management, Information Technology Division, 2003). Students represent a diverse background, coming not only from within the state, but also from across the nation and world. Eighty-seven percent of the undergraduate students are from Oklahoma, nine percent from other states, and four percent from more than 115 foreign countries (Oklahoma State University, 2003-2004). Minorities represent 19 percent of the undergraduate student body. Full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates on the campus have a graduation rate of 50 percent. The university advocates a commitment to preparing students with a diversified general education and with a breadth of general knowledge that will help them as they face multifaceted issues in a complex society to “make conscious value judgments consistent with personal needs and the public interest” (p.10).

Instrument Development and Description

A five-part instrument was designed by the researcher for this study to collect in-depth information about incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. The researcher did not want to limit participant responses to predetermined parameters because she wanted student voices "to be heard." To achieve that goal, the researcher included several formats within the instrument for obtaining data. Most demographic information was acquired from closed format questions requiring participants to choose responses from a list of options. Self-rating scales were used for collecting other information about participants. Open ended questions allowed college freshmen to use their own words to describe culturally diverse groups and to offer reasons for not associating with culturally diverse groups.

A pilot test of open ended questions requesting descriptors of diverse groups was conducted in a freshmen level course during the semester prior to data collection for this study. The researcher refined the list of diverse groups and added the self-coding feature. Another pilot test with three individuals was conducted after the instrument was designed to determine the probable length of time participants would need to complete the task and to obtain feedback about questions that incoming freshmen participants might have about the instrument's content and/or instructions for participating in the study.

A copy of the instrument is available in appendix D. The five parts of the instrument were numbered in an order convenient for analyzing the responses rather than in the sequence participants would use to write responses. Part I, demographic information, was presented on a single page for participants to complete. Other instrument questions were presented on color-coded pages. Pages outlining instructions

for completing the instrument were on orange pages. Pages for parts II and III which requested self-coded descriptors were gray. Part IV, seeking reasons for not associating with groups, was on blue pages and Part V, scales indicating influences of various sources on perceptions were on green pages.

Even though all participants received the same set of color coded-pages, the order of gray and blue pages were randomly organized to minimize the likelihood that students would complete pages in the same sequence. Pages for subgroups within racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups were randomized as were the complete set of subgroup pages for each group. Sequencing of pages for most parts of the instrument was determined by random uniform distribution variables generated in S-plus available at Insightful ® Cooperation (1999-2000). Order of pages was merely alternated when a subgroup consisted of 2 pages. During administration of the instrument, the researcher instructed students to independently complete the instrument according to directions written on the instrument.

Part I of the instrument requested demographic information about the participants. In addition to participant's age, gender, race, and religious preference, demographic data included hometown population, high school graduating class size, and parents' income. Hometown population, graduating class size, and parents' income were determined from participants' self reports and not verified with official records. Participant classification, college of major study, employment status, type of residence, personal reading habits and self rating as a reader were also requested.

Parts II and III were aimed at amassing perceptions incoming college freshmen have about people from racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. In these sections,

students were asked to provide descriptors (words, phrases, or labels) that portrayed the subgroup identified on the top of each page.

Participants later self-coded their descriptors as reflecting positive, negative, or neutral perceptions. Positive descriptors suggested an affirming or confirming impression of the subgroup. Negative descriptors suggested critical, judgmental, or disapproving opinions of the subgroup. Neutral descriptors were interpreted as impartial or as either positive or negative depending on the context in which the descriptor was used.

Anticipating the use of symbols to determine perceptions presented the possibility that coding might sway some participants to portray a subgroup in a particular way, e.g., how the participant thought the researcher wanted the subgroup portrayed. To minimize the possibility that coding a descriptor with positive, neutral, and negative symbols would influence participants' choices of descriptors for subsequent subgroups, descriptors were coded with symbols *after* all descriptors were recorded.

Descriptors, accompanied by self-coded symbols expressing the positive, neutral, or negative intent of the descriptor, offered the researcher an awareness of participants' sense of social identity, how participants view themselves and how students viewed other people. Labels participants used to make sense of other people and whether or not those labels reflected stereotypes of either individuals or subgroups contributed to understanding how incoming freshmen process information to make sense of others.

The amount of association incoming freshmen had had with various subgroups and the reasons freshmen students cited for not associating with subgroups provided the possibility of uncovering discriminatory beliefs or prejudices that participants have

toward some subgroups. Sources of information that influence incoming freshmen student perceptions relate to external factors that help shape the campus climate.

Parts II and III of the instrument also included nine-point Likert-type scales indicating the degree of interaction participants had had with individuals from each racial, religious, or sexual orientation subgroup.

Part IV presented an open-ended question soliciting brief reasons clarifying why participants did not associate with racial, religious, or sexual orientation groups. Reasons for not associating with a group was requested only if the participant's degree of interaction with a sub- group was specified as a one, two, or three on the Likert-type scale in Part III.

Part V of the instrument used nine-point Likert-type scales to determine which sources of information (e.g., literature, media, internet, family, church affiliation, school) were likely influences of participants' perceptions.

The data collected from this instrument were based on self-reports for demographic information and for perceptions of participants. Although validity of self-reporting instruments is dependent upon the honesty of participants (Mertens, 1998), no direct observation of participants' behaviors was attempted because the researcher was seeking participants' perceptions from their perspectives.

Procedure

The instrument was administered to participants during the fall semester, 2003 (late September through early November), in Freshmen Orientation classes, in introductory courses in the Agricultural and Human Environmental Sciences Colleges,

and in the College of Education Reading and Study Skills classes. The goal of the researcher was to administer the instrument early in the fall semester so as to obtain perceptions of incoming college freshmen about diverse groups prior to the freshmen's complete assimilation into college life, which usually occurs later in the first year of college. The researcher, a doctoral student in the College of Education, administered the instrument in all classes referred to earlier.

Before administering the instrument, the researcher obtained permission from the university to ensure protection of human subjects as required by the Institutional Review Board. Confirmation of IRB approval is shown in Appendix A. Following approval from all parties concerned, instructors of Freshmen Orientation, Introductory, and Study Skills classes allowed the researcher to present the research plan to the students in an attempt to solicit participation in the study. The researcher briefed students about the study and about benefits of their participation. Students were asked to voluntarily participate in the study; but, if they preferred to not participate, students were allowed to opt out of the study for any reason, at any time. Potential participants were assured that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and students were allowed to ask procedural questions prior to receiving the instrument. A copy of the researcher's script soliciting freshmen participants is available in Appendix B.

Because information requested in the instrument required participants to generate, rather than respond to, descriptors of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups, the researcher presented guidelines to assist the participants in completing the task. The researcher illustrated meaningful descriptor words, phrases, and labels to aid students in understanding what constitutes constructive descriptors. The researcher used *scientists* as

an example of a group and assured participants that *scientists* was not a group included in this study. Nevertheless, *scientists* is a group of people about which individuals have perceptions and to which individuals attach various words, phrases, or labels to describe their perceptions. The researcher further explained that *curious* (a word), *predictable as the sun* (a phrase), and *nerdy* (a label), would all qualify as meaningful descriptors of *scientists*. The researcher indicated that *laboratory*, on the other hand, is a word that indicates where scientists might work and is not a descriptor of a scientist. Participants were instructed that descriptors they provided could be three words, three phrases, three labels, or any combination of words, phrases, or labels. A copy of the instruction script for the instrument is presented in Appendix C. Appendix D includes a copy of the student instrument.

Analyses

Quantitative methods of analysis were used to assess data and to provide information for reporting descriptive and inferential findings. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, and percent) provided a demographic depiction of participants. In addition to the number of participants and participants' representation by gender, race, religious preference, and probable college for major study, data included participants' age, parents' average income, average hometown population, size of high school graduating class, employment status, current housing location, self rating as a reader and leisure reading habits as measured by the frequency of reading newspapers, magazines, and books for leisure.

Following are six research questions that guided this study and a corresponding discussion of the method of analysis used for each question. A brief comment about the need for information obtained from the data is stated for some questions.

Research Question #1: What language descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) do incoming college freshmen use to portray their perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Because openness to diversity includes assessing the extent to which students hold ethnocentric attitudes (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora, 2001), the researcher examined student language to uncover ethnocentric words and expressions. The 10,824 descriptors (words, phrases, labels) generated and used by incoming freshmen to depict various subgroups were the units of analysis (content) used to create categories of descriptors. The researcher systematically categorized the descriptors and quantified the number of descriptors in each category to find in-depth meaning or patterns in language use.

The researcher consulted work cited in literature to determine the appropriateness of single coder content analysis. New variants of content analysis (Ahuvia, 2001) were reviewed for suitability. The methodology most applicable for this study was interpretive content analysis, a category of latent content analysis in which the researcher looks for the underlying meaning (Babbie, 1998) of the content examined. Once again, content for this study was the massive number of descriptors participants used to depict various subgroups.

The use of complicated and analytical categories found in latent content analysis creates reliability problems when traditional content methodology is applied (Ahuvia,

2001). For example, as the number of content categories increases, the potential for inter-rater coding errors also increase (Milne and Adder, 1998). Furthermore, Ahuvia, 2001, maintains that the use of formal coding rules used in traditional content analysis to increase inter-rater agreement is done so at a price. Coding rules, he states, do a poor job in regard to context effects which influence how a particular text will be understood. Thus, “coding rules are inappropriate for interpretive content analysis” (The Need for Interpretive Content Analysis section, ¶ 5). Ahuvia also asserts that it is not realistic to expect coding assistants to be easily trained to code properly and that assistants differ in their level of theoretical sensitivity. Thus, in principal, a single coder is sufficient.

Rodrique (2002) indicates that single coder content analysis guarantees coding consistency across content because one person applies a single approach to all content examined for coding. Likewise, de Grogia (2005) believes that a single coder can be reliable if the coder does not drift from the criteria. A single coder is aware of the kinds of decisions that influenced analysis and a single coder can adjust a pre-arranged system to accept unexpected kinds of information.

In this study, the researcher did all coding. Other professionals in higher education were consulted when the researcher was unclear about developing categories or when the researcher was uncertain about the best categorical fit for a descriptor. Initially, the researcher examined a portion of descriptors and created categories for descriptors based on descriptors having similar meaning and/or using language in a related manner. New categories were created when subsequent descriptors that were examined did not fit the existing categories. Descriptors were moved from their existing categories to other categories if the move appeared to be a better fit for the descriptors. Categories were

combined if distinction between categories seemed less significant or more superficial than originally supposed. The researcher continually reviewed and revised the appropriateness of categories as well as the assigning of descriptors to categories.

Categories for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups were examined and analyzed independently of each other. Likewise, descriptors with self-coded positive symbols were analyzed separately from descriptors with self-coded negative symbols. Descriptors coded differently by participants than the researcher had expected were neither eliminated from the study nor re-coded to fit the researcher's perception. Descriptors were used as participants reported. The number of descriptors for each category were tallied to determine the frequency of descriptors in the category and to determine which categories of descriptors were used most often by incoming freshmen participants.

Ahuvia (2001) believes that public justifiability substitutes for inter-rater reliability when using interpretive content analysis. Public justifiability is achieved by including texts (contents), codings, and necessary justifications of codings when publicizing research. Reviewers can independently assess quality of coding. When text is very large, random samples can be submitted.

In this study, all positive and negative categories for racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups are reported and examples of descriptors for the categories with the most descriptors are included. Readers of this study (which could represent many diverse groups) have the privilege to determine if, from their perspective, the categories and coding are reliable and make sense for their purposes or from their cultural viewpoint.

In essence, interpretative content analysis allows for complex interpretations of the content being studied and recognizes “that every interpretation must be made from a particular perspective” (Ahuvia, 2001, Conclusion section, ¶ 4).

Research Question #2: What perceptions do incoming college freshmen have about racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Given that student’ perceptions of their peers are one of the most important institutional elements for fostering openness to diversity (Whitt et al., 2001), units of analysis for this question were positive, neutral, or negative self-coded symbols associated with the descriptors participants provided in response to research question #1. Frequencies and percents of self-rated positive and negative descriptors were used to determine positive or negative perceptions.

Participants reporting two or more self-rated positive descriptors for a subgroup were classified as having a positive perception of that subgroup. Participants reporting two or more negative descriptors for a subgroup were classified as having a negative perception of the subgroup. Frequency of positive and negative descriptors varied from subgroup to subgroup because the numbers of descriptors generated for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups were obviously not identical. Participants reporting two or more neutral descriptors or one positive, one negative, and one neutral for a subgroup were considered to have a neutral perception of the subgroup. Participants not submitting descriptors for a particular subgroup were considered a non-participant for that subgroup. Perceptions for each participant could vary between subgroups of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups. Once again, positive, neutral, and negative perceptions were based on reported descriptive information from the participants and not whether the

participants indicated they had a positive, neutral, or negative perception of the subgroups.

Question #3: Do perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups vary by freshmen's gender, parents' income, hometown population, self rating as a reader, reading habits as measured by frequency of leisure reading and extent of association with the groups?

Although research (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr, 2000) indicates that racially and ethnically diverse students perceive campus life differently, the impact of some factors cited in question #3 has not been extensively explored. McDonald and Associates (2000) suggest that a host of individual factors, e.g., age, gender, and academic classification, may affect students' perceptions of community within a college environment. Therefore the units of measure for this question were the positive and negative perceptions identified in data from question 2, as well as the independent and dependent variables selected for this study.

Chi-square and ordered logistic regression were used for analyzing data for question 3. Chi-square, a nonparametric statistic, used frequency count data with each participant's response falling into only one category of a discrete, independent variable (Shaveson, 1996). One-way chi-square indicated whether a systematic relationship, or association, existed in question 3 between two observed variables such as participant's gender and a positive perception of a subgroup.

After determining chi-square values for each independent variable, a stepwise selection procedure discussed by Bilder (2002) was followed to build the ordered logistic regression (logit) model. The logit model has been used to analyze data in other survey studies

(Hornung, 2004) with ranked dependent variables. The goal of ordered logistic regression is to determine the most parsimonious model that would predict the dependent variable response with the fewest number of independent variables. The ordered logit model estimates a cumulative probability of an independent variable being in a defined category or lower. For example, the logit model computes the response to questions such as ‘Does the size of one’s hometown (independent variable) increase the probability of having a positive perception (dependent variable) about a specific group?’ The odd ratio is the subsequent calculated probability of an independent variable (e.g., hometown size) being placed within a specific and defined dependent variable (e.g., positive perception) group.

The logit model for this study is represented below in the linear form used by Hornung (2004).

$$(1) \quad z_i = \alpha^* + \beta^*x_i + e_i$$

where z_i represents the dependent variable value, α^* is the intercept value, β^* is the logistic estimation coefficients (or parameter estimates), x_i indicates the independent variable(s) 1-6 depending on the variable’s significance in the chi-square test, and e_i is the random error (unexplained portion of the z_i value).

Self-coded descriptors reported by each participant were used to determine if the participant perceived a specific subgroup as positive or negative. The binary dependent variables, positive or negative perceptions, were coded so that 1 represented those participants with positive perceptions and 2 represented those participants with negative perceptions. The resulting data were analyzed using the ordered logistic regression model that examined the relationship between participants’ perceptions and participants’ characteristics.

Steps used in finding the best logistic regression model follow. 1. All possible one variable logistic regression models were identified from contingency tables, chi-square tables. For this study, those models (independent variables) were gender, parents' income, hometown population, self rating as a reader, leisure reading, and association. Models that appeared to be important, ones that had moderately significant χ^2 values (.20 or less p values), were considered further. Moderately significant χ^2 values are recorded in Table III-3.

Table III-3. Moderately Significant χ^2 Values

Group	Variables, X identifies moderately significant values					
	Gender	Income	Population	Self rating as a Reader	Leisure Reading	Association
Asian	X		X		X	X
Hispanic	X	X		X		X
Caucasian	X	X	X	X		X
African	X	X				X
Middle Eastern	X	X			X	X
American Indian	X					X
Catholic	X					X
Protestant			X	X	X	X
Jewish					X	
Muslim	X					X
Lesbian	X					X
Gay	X		X	X	X	X

Other models, independent variables not having moderately significant χ^2 values, were no longer considered. Regression models for each group varied depending on which variables had moderately significant χ^2 values. 2. Moderately significant variables found in Step 1 were placed into a logistic regression model equation. Backward elimination of

the significant variables was performed (beginning with the variable with the smallest p-value and continuing until all moderately significant variables had been considered). 3. Only important interactions were retained. 4. The resulting data were examined to verify how well the model fit the data. In this study, all Wald values were at or lower than .05, which indicated a good model fit. 5. The logit model, $\text{Logit}(y) = \text{intercept estimate} + \text{parameter estimate of variable 1} \times \text{variable 1 mean} + \text{parameter estimate of variable 2} \times \text{variable 2 mean} + \dots$, produced odds ratios estimates. Odds ratios estimates were used to interpret the relationship between the independent (explanatory) variables and the dependent variables. Definitions of independent and dependent variables used in this study are summarized in Table III-4.

Table III-4. Logit Model, Variable Definitions

Dependent Variables	Variable Definition
Positive Perceptions	Affirming or confirming impression of the group
Negative Perceptions	Critical, judgmental, or disapproving opinion of the group
Independent Variables	Variable Definition
Gender	Male or Female
Parent's Income	Parent's estimated total income before taxes for preceding year (less than \$10,000 to \$200,000 or more)
Hometown Population	Estimate of hometown population (less than 1,000 people to 500,000 or more)
Self rating as a Reader	Rating of self as a reader (1=poor to 6 =excellent)
Reading Amount	Frequency of reading leisure, e.g., newspapers, magazines, books (1=never to 6 daily)
Association	Degree of interaction with someone from the group (1=very little to 9=very much)

Question #4: How frequently do incoming college freshmen associate with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Smith and Schonfeld (2000) claim that the impact of opportunities for student interaction between and among groups cannot be underestimated. A previous CSS Survey (OSU Student Affairs, 2001) on the campus where this study was conducted indicated that student socialization with someone from another racial/ethnic group declined between a student's freshman year and four years later. Because association with others has been shown to be a major influence on an individual's perception of others, the units of analysis for this question were the self-ratings incoming college freshmen provided on a 9-point Likert-type scale indicating their degree of association with subgroups. A 1 on the scale indicated *very little* association whereas a 9 signified *very much* association. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percent, and means for degree of association with each subgroup) were used to summarize the findings. The rank order for mean degrees of association for subgroups were compared to the rank order for percent of positive descriptors for subgroups to examine the possible (inferred) relationship between association and positive descriptors.

Question #5: What prevents incoming college freshmen from associating with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

The rationale for analysis is based on the notion that student peer groups are crucial for student socialization on campus (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen, 1998) and that peer groups influence students' attitudes and behaviors toward others. Research has shown that students who have a strong social identity with their own social/racial/cultural group are more apt to associate with student in groups different

from their own. Therefore, social/racial group are more apt to associate with students in groups different from their own, the units of analysis for this question were the written responses incoming college freshmen provided regarding reasons they did not associate with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups.

Content analysis discussed previously with question #1 guided the analysis of self-generated student language presented in reasons participants wrote for not associating with others. As with self-generated descriptors, data for this question were systematically gathered and analyzed. The researcher examined reasons and categorized them into groups having similar meaning and/or into groups using language in a related manner. Categories for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups were examined and analyzed independently. Frequency and percent for categories applicable to each group were calculated.

Question #6: What sources of information influence incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Although research indicates that gender influences the kinds of interactions that foster openness to diversity and that association with people from other social/ethnic groups contribute to openness to diversity, other factors investigated in this instrument, have not been addressed. Therefore, the units of analysis for this question were self-reported ratings incoming college freshmen provided on 9-point Likert-type scales regarding the impact of twelve sources of information, pre-selected by the researcher, likely to influence participant's perceptions. Descriptive statistics (frequency, means, and percents) were used to summarize the findings for each of the twelve sources of information.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of incoming college freshmen about racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. Degree of association college freshmen have had with these groups and sources of information that influence perceptions of college freshmen were studied. Questions guiding this study were: 1) What language descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) do incoming college freshmen use to portray their perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups? 2) What perceptions do incoming college freshmen have about racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups? 3) Do perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups vary by freshmen's gender, parents' income, hometown population, self rating as a reader, reading habits as measured by frequency of leisure reading and extent of association with the groups? 4) How frequently do incoming college freshmen associate with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups? 5) What prevents incoming college freshmen from associating with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups? and 6) What sources of information influence incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

This chapter focuses on analysis of data collected for this study. Methods for analyzing data varied for each research question; therefore, findings for each research question are reported independently.

Research Question #1: What language descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) do incoming college freshmen use to portray their perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups?

Descriptors (words, phrases, labels) used for analysis were generated by incoming freshmen students who also self-coded their descriptors as positive, neutral, or negative. Descriptors were examined and categorized into groups of similar meaning. Findings are summarized in Tables IV-1, IV-3, IV-5, IV-7, IV-9, and IV-11. Categories for descriptors recorded in tables were not identical for racial, religious, or sexual orientation groups. Descriptor categories used for a specific racial, religious, or sexual orientation group were contingent on the descriptors generated by participants for the group. Descriptor categories applicable to groups are recognized by observing where frequency data is recorded in Table IV-1. For example, in Table IV-1, the third descriptor category referring to perceived *physical features of group members* was applicable to all racial groups. Specifically, 51 descriptors generated by participants to portray Asians stated or suggested physical features; 26 descriptors for Hispanic; 21 descriptors for Caucasian; 37 descriptors for African American; 12 descriptors for Middle Eastern; and 49 descriptors for American Indian. In contrast, descriptors indicating a group's *relationship to nature*, the next to last category in Table IV-1, applied only to American Indians with 20 descriptors generated by participants fitting this category.

Descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) used by participants to indicate positive and negative perceptions varied for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. Tables IV-2, IV-4, IV-6, IV-8, IV-10, and IV-12 categorize descriptors and list examples of words participants used that fit the categories.

Descriptor categories and descriptor examples reported in this section are not inclusive of all descriptors generated by participants for groups; but, rather, summarize and illustrate three or four most representative descriptor categories and descriptor examples for subgroups. For example, Table IV-1 indicates that 17 of the 20 descriptor categories were used by participants for portraying Middle Easterners. Table IV-2 presents three descriptor categories most frequently used by incoming college freshmen to portray Middle Easterners and illustrates those descriptors categories with representative examples of student language. For example, ‘*Abilities, Talents, and Education*’ was one descriptor category used to portray Middle Easterners. Examples of student language from this category for Middle Easterners were *smart* and *intelligent*.

Descriptor examples from participants are merely representative rather than inclusive of all descriptors generated. Positive and negative descriptor categories with corresponding examples for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups are presented separately.

Table IV-1. Positive Descriptor Categories Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Racial Groups

Descriptor Categories**	Groups					
	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African American	Middle Eastern	American Indian
Ability, Talent, Education	151*	15	64*	20	37*	40
Values and Goals	59*	85*	54	17	30	65
Physical Features	51	26	21	37	12	49*
Personal, Personality Traits	145*	128*	160*	235*	57*	163*
Relationship to/among Group Members	7	16	14	37	9	17
Stereotypical Words/Observations	52	90*	36	37	42*	153*
Judgmental Word or Expression	33	71	77*	55	15	41
Family Connection to Group	6	29	11	7	3	16
Social Economic Status	1	10	60	-	9	1
Technology and Science	25	-	-	-	2	-
Group Viewed as American	4	1	30	5	-	4
Used Self or Another's Name	14	19	61	28	5	15
Food/Cooking Reference	18	27	-	1	2	1
Sports/Athletics Reference	8	2	7	114*	-	2
Refer to Number (population)	-	5	65*	7	1	7
Music/Dancing Reference	-	47	-	57*	1	8
Conspicuous/Trendy/Classiness	-	-	-	8	2	-
Struggles, Rights as Humans	-	-	-	12	5	8
Relationship to Nature	-	-	-	-	-	20
Category Unclear	21	29	47	16	7	23
Totals	595	600	707	693	239	633
Percent of all positive descriptors for racial group	17%	17%	20%	20%	7%	18%

*Descriptor category(ies) with most positive descriptors for the racial subgroup.

**Categories were determined by analyzing descriptors generated by students. Similarity of language and/or similarity of word, phrase, or label meanings (as understood by the researcher) formed the basis for the categories.

Table IV-2. Positive Descriptor Categories and Examples Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Racial Groups

Groups	Descriptor Categories	Examples of Descriptors
Asian	Ability, Talents, and Education Personal and/or Personality Traits Values and Goals	Intelligent, smart, well educated Happy, easy going, accepting Hardworking, pride, dedicated
Hispanic	Personal Traits Stereotypical Statement or Observation Values and Goals	Nice, friendly, loyal Great dancers, Mexican, Spanish Hardworking, religious
Caucasian	Personal Traits Judgmental Statement Ability and Education Statement about Group's Population	Nice, friendly, cool Normal, good people Smart, intelligent, educated Majority, diverse, dominant
African American	Personal Traits Sports or Athletics Dance and Music	Funny, friendly, outgoing Athletic, good at sports Can dance, rap music, sense of rhythm
Middle Eastern	Personal and/or Personality Traits Stereotypical Statement or Observation Ability, Talents, and Education	Quiet, nice, kind, polite, shy Live in sand, different language, rag heads Smart, intelligent
American Indian	Personal and Personality Traits Stereotypical Observation or Descriptor Values and Goals	Peaceful, friendly, nice, spiritual, kind, quiet Teepee, buffalo, casinos, native, strong heritage, tribes Proud, religious, strong beliefs, traditional,

Table IV-3. Positive Descriptor Categories Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Religious Groups

Descriptor Categories**	Groups			
	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim
Personal, Personality Traits	273*	432*	212*	184*
Religious Characteristics	132*	163*	71*	63*
Religious Practice	52	56	32	22
Beliefs and Values	50	76	26	16
Difference from Participant is Expressed	13	7	21	21
Judgmental or Negative Word or Expression	9	0	11	13
Images, Icons, Picture, Symbols, People	90*	88*	56*	50*
Trinity (God, Jesus, or Holy Spirit)	49	85*	17	9
Identified self, family, or friends with the group; Group's population mentioned	24	45	2	4
Category Unclear	24	13	7	8
Totals	716	965	455	390
Percent of all positive for religious group	28%	38%	18%	15%

*Descriptor category(ies) with most positive descriptors for the religious subgroup.

**Categories were determined by analyzing descriptors generated by students. Similarity of language and/or similarity of word, phrase, or label meanings (as understood by the researcher) formed the basis for the categories.

Table IV-4. Positive Descriptor Categories and Examples Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Religious Groups

Groups	Descriptor Categories	Example of Descriptors
Catholic	Personal and/or Personality Traits Personal Religious Characteristics Icons, Images, Persons Associated with Religion	Nice, caring, good people, devoted, respectable Religious, faithful, holy, traditional Mary, Pope, big churches, nun, priests
Protestant	Personal and/or Personality Traits Personal Religious Characteristics Pictures, Symbols Associated with Religion	Nice, good, friendly, honest, loving, caring Faithful, religious, holy, believers, Christians Bible, church, crosses, American,
Jewish	Personal and/or Personality Traits Personal Religious Characteristics Pictures, Symbols Associated with Religion	Nice, fun, friendly, polite, proud, interesting, rich Religious, traditional, holy, strong beliefs Israel, wear little hats, Star of David
Muslim	Personal and/or Personality Traits Personal Religious Characteristics Pictures, Symbols, Places Associated with Religion	Nice, friendly, quiet, smart, calm, disciplined Very religious, holy, have many customs Middle East, Malcolm X, Koran, Mosque, Allah

Table IV-5. Positive Descriptor Categories Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Sexual Orientation Groups

Descriptor Categories**	Groups	
	Lesbian	Gay
Personal, Personality Traits	132*	209*
Judgmental or Negative Word or Expression	20*	28*
Sexual Statement	27*	2
Sports, Jobs, Appearance	3	49*
Difference from Participant Expressed	2	2
Personal Reaction to Group	14	11
Masculinity/Femininity Referenced	5	8
Personal Names Used	0	9
Descriptor Difficult to Interpret	22*	6
Totals	225	324
Percent of all positive for sexual orientation group	41%	59%

*Descriptor category(ies) with most positive descriptors for the sexual orientation sub-group.

**Categories were determined by analyzing descriptors generated by students. Similarity of language and/or similarity of word, phrase, or label meanings (as understood by the researcher) formed the basis for the categories.

Table IV-6. Positive Descriptor Categories and Examples Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Sexual Orientation Groups

Group	Descriptor Categories	Examples of Descriptors
Lesbian	Personal and/or Personality Trait	Nice, cool, outgoing, friendly
	Judgmental or Stereotypical	Wrong, lesbo
	Sexual	Hot, sexy, turn on
Gay	Personal and/or Personality Traits	Nice, funny, friendly, good friend, outgoing
	Job or Fashion Related	Good dresser, stylish, fashionable
	Negativity Suggested	Sick, disgusting

Table IV-7. Negative Descriptor Categories Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Racial Groups

Descriptor Categories**	Groups					
	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African American	Middle Eastern	American Indian
Negative/ Stereotypical Word or Label Used	7	26	9*	16	61*	4
Person, Cartoon Character Named	3	0	1	1	37	1
Personal, Personality Traits	49*	107*	136*	145*	139*	105*
Reference to Some Aspect of the Culture or to Difference of Culture	27*	35*	3	15	23	12
Reference to Physical Feature or to Character	29*	15	0	5	34	9
Reference to Group's Presence or Number	8	11	3	3	5	2
Reference to Behavior or Work of Group Members	17	32*	5	12	26	16*
Place (location) or Items Associated with Group	10	17	3	27*	60*	17*
Personal Feelings or Beliefs toward Group	2	12	6	26*	32	15*
Category Unclear	0	4	1	1	0	0
Totals	152	259	167	251	417	181
Percent of all negative descriptors for racial group	11%	18%	12%	18%	29%	13%

*Descriptor category(ies) with most negative descriptors for the racial subgroup.

**Categories were determined by analyzing descriptors generated by students. Similarity of language and/or similarity of word, phrase, or label meanings (as understood by the researcher) formed the basis for the categories.

Table IV-8. Negative Descriptor Categories and Examples Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Racial Groups

Groups	Descriptor Categories	Examples of Descriptors
Asian	Personal, Personality Traits Physical Feature or Character Some Aspect of Culture or Difference of Culture	Rude, stuck up, annoying, weird Smells bad, squinty eyes, short, small Talk weird, rice, culturally different
Hispanic	Personal, Personality Traits Some Aspect of Culture or Difference of Culture Behavior or Work of Group Members	Poor, illegal, rude, uneducated Can't speak English, hard to understand Lawn mowers, drinks a lot of alcohol, labor workers
Caucasian	Personal, Personality Traits Negative Label	Arrogant, lazy, racist, controlling, greedy Big-headed, jerks, hicks
African American	Personal, Personality Traits Place (location) or Items Associated with Group Personal Feeling or Beliefs about Group	Loud, racist, rude, poor Welfare, affirmative action, ghetto, rap music Think people owe them something, reverse discrimination
Middle Eastern	Personal, Personality Traits Negative Label Place (location) or Items Associated with Group	Hard to understand, scary, mean Terrorists, rag head Sept 11, war, terrorism
American Indian	Personal, Personality Traits Place (location) or Items Associated with Group Behavior or Work of Group Members Personal Feeling or Beliefs about Group	Drunks, lazy, poor, mean Casinos, government handouts Want something for nothing, lives on reservations Treated wrong in past, land taken away

Table IV-9. Negative Descriptor Categories Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Religious Groups

Descriptor Categories**	Groups			
	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim
Word(s), Adjectives, Refer to Personal Characteristics	66*	46*	75*	191*
Person, Type of Person, Place or Item Associated with Group Identified	16	1	25*	35
Beliefs or Religious Practice of Group Mentioned	32*	13*	20*	48*
Label Used to Suggest Behavior	49*	26*	8	64*
Comparative Phrase that Cites Difference from Participant is Expressed	7	0	11	18
Number or Frequency of Members in Group	1	3	4	2
Personal Feeling or Response to Group	7	4	10	23
Difficult to Categorize	2	0	1	0
Totals	180	93	154	381
Percent of all negative descriptors for religious group	22%	12%	19%	47%

*Descriptor category(ies) with most negative descriptors for the religious subgroup.

**Categories were determined by analyzing descriptors generated by students. Similarity of language and/or similarity of word, phrase, or label meanings (as understood by the researcher) formed the basis for the categories.

Table IV-10. Negative Descriptor Categories and Examples Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Religious Groups

Groups	Descriptor Categories	Examples of Descriptors
Catholic	Personal Characteristics Label Suggests Behavior Belief or Religious Practice of Group	Strict, scandals Drinkers, hypocrites, judgmental Strange beliefs, think they're better than everyone else
Protestant	Personal Characteristics Label Suggests Behavior Belief or Religious Practice of Group	Annoying, pushy Hypocritical, judgmental Bible thumpers, forceful of religion
Jewish	Personal Characteristics Person, Type of Person or Item Associated with Group Identified Belief or Religious Practice of Group	Weird, big noses, stingy Holocaust, Hitler, concentration camps Wear those little hats, no Christmas, not Christian, don't believe in Christ
Muslim	Personal Characteristics Label Suggests Behavior Belief or Religious Practice of Group	Weird, evil, mean, scary, stupid Terrorist, don't like Americans, Sept 11 Women have no rights, all covered up, non-Christian

Table IV-11. Negative Descriptor Categories Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Sexual Orientation Groups

Descriptor Categories**	Sexual Orientation Groups	
	Lesbian	Gay
Repulsive Word Used	142*	166*
Stereotypical Word or Label	64	109
Moral Implication	113*	120*
General Type of Descriptor Indicating Difference from Participant	182*	195*
Descriptor has Reference to Masculinity/Femininity	105	52
Biological Reference	18	24
Feelings or Beliefs about Group, Especially Participant's Relationship to Group	75	71
Person's Name, Item, Job, or Sport Named	15	26
Category Difficult to Categorize	0	1
Totals	714	765
Percent of all negative descriptors for sexual orientation group	48%	52%

*Descriptor category(ies) with most negative descriptors for the sexual orientation subgroup.

**Categories were determined by analyzing descriptors generated by students. Similarity of language and/or similarity of word, phrase, or label meanings (as understood by the researcher) formed the basis for the categories.

Table IV-12. Negative Descriptor Categories and Examples Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Sexual Orientation Groups

Groups	Descriptor Categories	Examples of Descriptors
Lesbian	General Type of Descriptor	Weird, confused, strange, different
	Repulsive Word Used	Gross, nasty, disgusting
	Moral Implication	Wrong, immoral, sinful
Gay	General Type of Descriptor	Weird, confused, different, stupid
	Repulsive Word Used	Gross, nasty, disgusting
	Moral Implication	Wrong, immoral, sinful

In summary, the words, phrases, and labels that incoming college freshmen used to describe racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups most often reflected perceived personal characteristics or personality traits of subgroup members. Stereotypical descriptors were observed with both positive and negative descriptors.

Research Question #2: What perceptions do incoming college freshmen have about racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Using language descriptors as indicators, perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups were determined by the frequency of self-coded positive, neutral, or negative descriptors that participants submitted. Participants who reported two or more self-rated positive descriptors for a subgroup were classified as having a positive perception of that subgroup. Participants who reported two or more negative descriptors for a group were classified as having a negative perception of the subgroup.

Tables IV-13, IV-14, and IV-15 summarize the frequency of positive and negative descriptors generated by participants for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. All three tables can be interpreted using the following pattern which applies to the Asian subgroup from Table IV-13. The total positive and negative descriptors generated by participants for Asians were 747 (row 1). Five hundred ninety-five (row 2) or 80% (row 3) of the 747 descriptors for Asians were coded as positive and 152 (row 5) or 20% (row 6) of the descriptors were coded as negative. The total positive descriptors for all racial subgroups were 3,467 as indicated in the last column of the second row. Seventeen percent (row 4) or 595 of the 3467 positive descriptors were generated for the Asian subgroup. Total negative descriptors for all racial subgroups were 1427 as shown

in the last column of row 5. Eleven percent (row 7) or 152 of the 1427 negative descriptors were generated for the Asian subgroup.

The base for determining the percent of positive and negative descriptors for each subgroup varied because the number of descriptors generated for subgroups was not consistent. For example, 747 descriptors were offered for Asians and 815 were generated for American Indians.

Table IV-13. Frequency of Positive and Negative Descriptors of Racial Groups by Incoming College Freshmen

Descriptors	Racial Group						Total
	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African American	Middle Eastern	American Indian	
Total¹	747	859	874	944	656	814	4894
Frequency of positive descriptors	595	600	707	693	239	633	3467
Percent of positive descriptors for subgroup ²	80%	70%	81%	73%	36%	78%	71%
Percent of positive descriptors for racial group ³	17%	17%	20%	20%	7%	18%	99%
Frequency of negative descriptors	152	259	167	251	417	181	1427
Percent of negative descriptors for subgroup ²	20%	31%	19%	27%	64%	22%	35%
Percent of negative descriptors for racial group ³	11%	18%	12%	18%	29%	13%	101%

* Descriptors were generated and self-coded by participants to reflect their portrayal of each group.

¹ Neutral descriptors are excluded because this study analyzed only positive and negative descriptors.

² Percent of all positive (row 2/row1) or percent of all negative (row 5/row1) descriptors for the subgroup.

³ Percent of all positive (row 2/3467) or percent of all negative (row 5/1427) descriptors for the racial group. Without rounding, sum of percents in row 4 and row 7 should each equal 100 %.

Table IV-14. Frequency of Positive and Negative Descriptors* of Religious Groups by Incoming College Freshmen

Descriptors	Religious Groups				Totals
	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim	
Total¹	896	1058	609	771	3334
Frequency of positive descriptors	716	965	455	390	2526
Percent of positive descriptors for subgroup ²	80%	91%	75%	51%	76%
Percent of positive descriptors for religious group ³	28%	38%	18%	15%	99%
Frequency of negative descriptors	180	93	154	381	808
Percent of negative descriptors for subgroup ²	20%	9%	25%	49%	24%
Percent of negative descriptors for religious group ³	22%	12%	19%	47	100%

* Descriptors were generated and self-coded by participants to reflect their portrayal of each group.

¹ Neutral descriptors are excluded because this study analyzed only positive and negative descriptors.

² Percent of all positive (row 2/row1) or percent of all negative (row 5/row1) descriptors for the subgroup.

³ Percent of all positive (row 2/2526) or percent of all negative (row 5/808) descriptors for the religious group. Without rounding, sum of percents in row 4 and row 7 should each equal 100 %.

Table IV-15. Frequency of Positive and Negative Descriptors* of Sexual Orientation Groups by Incoming College Freshmen

Descriptors	Sexual Orientation Groups		Totals
	Lesbian	Gay	
Total¹	939	1088	2027
Frequency of positive descriptors	225	324	549
Percent of positive descriptors for subgroup ²	24%	30%	27%
Percent of positive descriptors for sexual orientation group ³	41%	59%	100%
Frequency of negative descriptors	714	764	1478
Percent of negative descriptors for subgroup ²	76%	70%	73%
Percent of negative descriptors for sexual orientation group ³	48%	52%	100%

* Descriptors were generated and self-coded by participants to reflect their portrayal of each group.

¹ Neutral descriptors are excluded because this study analyzed only positive and negative descriptors

² Percent of all positive (row 2/row1) or percent of all negative (row 5/fow1) descriptors for the subgroup.

³ Percent of all positive (row 2/549) or percent of all negative (row 5/1478) descriptors for the sexual orientation group. Without rounding, sum of percents in row 4 and row 7 should each equal 100 %.

Perceptions, determined by criteria discussed in chapter III under the analyses section, that incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups are summarized in Table IV-16. Frequency of students having positive perceptions was greater than frequency of students having negative perceptions for eight of the twelve subgroups. Subgroups perceived positively were Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, American Indian, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Frequency of students having negative perceptions of subgroups was greater than frequency of students having positive perceptions of subgroups for four of the twelve subgroups. Subgroups perceived negatively were Middle Eastern, Muslim, Lesbian, and Gay.

Table IV-13 also reveals that the number of participants varied from subgroup to subgroup because the criteria described earlier and used to determine positive or negative perceptions allowed for both positive and negative perceptions within the groups by participants. For example, a participant could submit two or three positive descriptors for Asian, two or three neutral descriptors for Middle Eastern, and two or three negative descriptors for Caucasian. That participant would be classified as having a reported positive perception of Asians, neutral perception of Middle Easterners, and negative perception of Caucasians. Furthermore, the difference between the sum of positive and negative perceptions for a specific race, religious, and sexual orientation subgroup and the number of participants who participated in the study indicate the number of participants who are categorized as having either a neutral perception of the subgroup or as not providing descriptors for the subgroup.

Table IV-16. Perceptions of Incoming College Freshmen about Racial, Religious, and Sexual Orientation Groups

Perception	Groups											
	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African American	Middle Eastern	American Indian	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim	Lesbian	Gay
Positive*	228	222	255	261	96	245	264	343	187	97	92	128
Negative*	67	108	76	104	165	75	77	40	67	149	272	273
Sum (Positive plus Negative)	295	330	331	365	261	320	341	383	254	246	364	401
Percent of Positive Perceptions	77%	67%	77%	72%	37%	76%	77%	92%	74%	39%	25%	32%
Participants in Study **	518	521	522	527	508	524	523	512	506	507	521	523
Neutral Perception*** (approx.)	223	191	191	161	247	204	182	129	252	261	157	122
Non-participants**** (approx.)	20	17	16	11	30	14	15	26	32	31	17	15

* Frequencies extracted from logit data

** Frequencies are N from Mean information data

*** Participants in Study minus sum (participants classified as having positive or negative perceptions)

**** Sum (participants having neutral perceptions and those not generating descriptors) minus participants having neutral perceptions

Explanation (using Asian subgroup) of calculations for last two rows of data:

538 number of participants in study

-295 number of participants classified as having positive or negative perceptions of Asians

243 number of participants who had neutral perceptions or did not generate descriptors for Asians

518 number of participants, N, who indicated an interaction with Asians

-295 number of participants classified as having positive or negative perceptions of Asians

223 number of participants who had a neutral perception of Asians;

243 – 223 = 20 non-participants (participants who did not generate descriptors for Asians)

Except for Muslims, which had more positive than negative descriptors but more negative than positive perceptions, the number of self-generated and self-coded positive and negative descriptors that incoming college freshmen used is comparable to positive and negative perceptions. The Muslim exception probably occurred because more participants who were reported as having a positive perception of Muslims offered 3 rather than 2 positive descriptors while more participants reported as having a negative perception of Muslim offered 2 rather than 3 negative descriptors. To clarify further, 12 descriptors (positive or negative) could result in 4 or 6 participants having a reported positive or negative perception of a subgroup.

Table IV-17 presents the percent (from chi-square tables) of positive and negative perceptions associated with independent variables studied, namely, participant's gender, hometown population, self rating as reader, amount of leisure reading, and degree of association with subgroup. Percents represent all participants who reported data for that variable regardless of participant's degree or amount of the variable. The first entry, 77.74, indicates that 77.74 percent of all participants (male and female) who identified their gender had positive perceptions of Asians. The last entry in the same column, 22.12, indicates that 22.12 per cent of all participants, regardless of their degree of association with Asians but who had indicated their degree of association, had a negative perception of Asians.

Positive and negative perceptions were consistent across all six independent variables examined. If a greater percent of participants reported positive perceptions of a subgroup, the percent of positive perceptions associated *all* independent variables was greater than the percent of negative perceptions associated with independent variables.

For example, more participants were reported as having positive perceptions of the Jewish group than participants having negative perceptions of the Jewish group. All six independent variable for the Jewish group also reflected a greater percent of positive than negative perceptions. The converse was shown if the percent of negative perceptions for a group e.g., Muslims, was greater than the percent of positive perceptions for the group. All independent variables for Muslims also gave a greater percent of negative than positive perceptions.

In this study, the percent presented in any cell of the column for a specific subgroup corresponds with the positive or negative perception participants had for the subgroup. Thus, the percent of positive perceptions in all cells associated with African Americans corresponds to the positive perception of African Americans by participants in this study. In summary, incoming college freshmen reported positive perceptions for eight of the twelve subgroups, namely Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, American Indian, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Incoming college freshmen reported negative perceptions for four of the twelve subgroups, namely Middle Eastern, Muslim, lesbian, and gay. Perceptions reported as neutral were not analyzed.

Table IV-17. Percent of Positive and Negative Perceptions of Incoming College Freshmen for Independent Variables Associated with Racial, Religious, and Sexual Orientation groups

Perception	Groups											
	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African American	Middle Eastern	American Indian	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim	Lesbian	Gay
Gender												
Positive	77.74	68.30	77.10	71.77	37.64	76.64	77.49	89.41	73.02	39.27	25.14	30.77
Negative	22.26	31.70	22.90	28.23	62.36	23.36	22.51	10.59	26.98	60.73	74.86	68.23
Parent's Inc.												
Positive	77.63	68.04	77.29	71.89	36.74	76.58	78.04	89.36	73.90	40.25	25.56	32.16
Negative	22.37	31.96	22.71	28.11	63.26	23.42	21.96	10.64	26.10	59.75	74.44	67.84
Home Pop												
Positive	77.63	68.38	77.36	71.99	37.37	77.23	77.46	89.46	73.62	39.76	25.75	32.11
Negative	22.37	31.62	22.64	28.01	62.63	22.77	22.54	10.54	26.38	60.24	74.25	67.89
Self rating as a Reader												
Positive	78.27	68.38	77.36	72.37	38.01	76.85	77.68	89.66	73.91	39.36	25.75	31.94
Negative	21.73	31.62	22.64	27.63	61.99	23.15	22.32	10.34	26.09	60.64	74.25	68.06
Leis. Read												
Positive	78.10	68.56	77.43	72.25	37.73	76.92	77.75	68.46	73.62	39.60	25.68	32.03
Negative	21.90	31.44	22.57	27.75	62.27	23.08	22.25	31.44	26.38	60.40	74.32	67.97
Association												
Positive	77.88	68.38	77.65	71.99	37.59	71.99	77.46	89.41	73.33	39.60	25.75	31.95
Negative	22.12	31.62	31.62	28.01	62.41	28.01	22.54	10.59	26.67	60.40	74.25	68.05

Question #3 Do perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups vary by freshmen's gender, parents' income, hometown population, self rating as a reader, reading habits as measured by frequency of leisure reading and extent of association with the subgroups?

The relationship between independent variables defined in chapter 3 and the likelihood of a positive perception by college freshmen was examined using the ordered logit model also discussed in chapter 3. Positive and negative perceptions of college freshmen were modeled with both selected demographic information, e.g., gender, and selected behavior characteristics, e.g., leisure reading, of participants. Model parameter estimates are shown in Table IV-18 and indicate which independent variables have a significant relationship to the probability of positive perceptions by incoming college freshmen

In general, estimates with a positive coefficient indicated that an increased level of the independent variable had a higher probability of being associated with a positive perception. Estimates with a negative coefficient indicated that a lower level of the independent variable had a higher probability of being associated with a positive perception. For example, the model parameter coefficient for association and Hispanic was +0.910 which indicates that more association with Hispanics by college freshmen increases the probability of a positive perception of Hispanics. On the other hand, the model parameter coefficient for hometown population and Protestants was -0.508 which indicates that a smaller hometown population increased the probability of a positive perception of Protestants.

Specific degrees or amounts of the independent variables are not calculated because the independent data was continuous. Thus only *more* or *less* and *greater* or *smaller* are used to interpret results. For example, more association (regardless of the quantity of more) with Hispanics increases the likelihood of a positive perception of Hispanics. A smaller hometown population (regardless of how much smaller) increases the likelihood of a positive perception of Protestants.

Gender is interpreted differently from the other independent variables because gender is a discrete variable rather than a continuous variable. Gender estimates with a positive coefficient indicate a higher probability of being associated with a positive perception by incoming college freshmen if the participant is female. Gender estimates with a negative coefficient indicate a higher probability of being associated with a positive perception by incoming college freshmen if the participant is male. The model parameter coefficient for gender and American Indian was +0.777 which indicates a higher probability of a positive perception by female freshmen. The model parameter coefficient for gender and lesbian was -0.840 which indicates a higher probability of a positive perception by male freshmen.

Table IV-18. Logit Model Parameter Estimates

	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African American	Middle Eastern	American Indian	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim	Lesbian	Gays
Intercept	-0.655 (0.512)	-1.097 (0.641)	-4.065 (2.207)	-1.311 * (0.570)	-1.502 ** (0.428)	0.022 (0.411)	-0.71 (0.615)	2.797 ** (1.032)	0.172 (0.396)	-1.253 ** (0.433)	-1.648 ** (0.457)	-5.356 ** (0.747)
Independent Variables												
Gender		0.625 * (0.254)		0.617 ** (0.238)	0.625 * (0.262)	0.777 ** (0.269)	0.554 * (0.264)			0.534 * (0.265)	-0.840** (0.269)	1.058 ** (0.275)
Parent's Income		-0.548 ** (0.169)										
Hometown Population								-0.508 * (0.250)				0.359 * (0.179)
Self rating as a Reader								-0.637 ** (0.247)				-0.122 (0.176)
Leisure Reading	0.418 * (0.188)								0.423 * (0.188)			0.140 (0.184)
Association	0.537 ** (0.198)	0.910 ** (0.172)	1.777 * (0.743)	0.507 ** (0.182)			0.473 * (0.185)	0.707 ** (0.274)			1.215 * (0.186)	1.275 ** (0.172)

Number in parentheses are standard errors.

* Significance at 0.05 level

** Significance at 0.01 level

Odds ratios for the models are presented in Table IV-19. Odds ratios were used to interpret the relationship between the independent (explanatory) variables and the dependent variables. Odds ratios measured the probability of an independent variable being placed within a specific dependent variable group. For example, the odds ratio estimate for leisure reading and Jewish was 1.526. The interpretation is that the odds of a positive perception (dependent variable group) of Jewish people was 1.526 times greater for incoming college freshmen who had some degree of leisure reading (independent or explanatory variable) than for college freshmen who had minimal leisure reading. Interpretation for odds ratios less than one, such as 0.529 for self rating as a reader and Protestant, was that the odds of a positive perception (dependent variable group) of Protestants is 0.529 times as great for incoming college freshmen who had higher self ratings as readers (independent or explanatory variable) than for incoming college freshmen who had lower self ratings as readers

In summary, a positive perception of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups was most frequently associated with female participants and with participants who had had some association with the subgroup. Increased income by parents, a larger hometown population, and a higher self-rating as a reader were negatively associated with a positive perception for some groups. Although not the same variable, a positive perception was associated with only one variable for Caucasian, Middle Eastern, American Indian, Jewish, and Muslim groups.

Table IV-19. Logit Model Odds Ratio Estimates

Independent Variables	Groups											
	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African	Middle Eastern	American Indian	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim	Lesbian	Gays
Gender	-	1.869	-	1.854	1.867	2.175	1.741	-	-	1.706	0.432	2.882
Parent's Income	-	0.578	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hometown Population	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.602	-	-	-	1.431
Self rating as a Reader	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.529	-	-	-	0.885
Leisure Reading	1.520	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.526	-	-	1.150
Association	1.711	2.483	5.913	1.660	-	-	1.605	2.028	-	-	3.369	3.579

Question #4: How frequently do incoming college freshmen associate with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Frequency of association was determined by participants' self-reported interaction with each subgroup using a 9-point Likert-type scale. A *one* on the scale indicated minimal association whereas a *nine* signified much association.

The extent of association between college freshmen and racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups, summarized in Table IV-20, reflected, to some degree, the major religion of participants and the dominant racial population on the campus where data were collected. For example, 77% of participants in this study were Caucasian and the mean value for interaction between participants and Caucasian was 8.8 on a 9-point scale. Sixty-seven percent of participants in this study indicated affiliation with protestant faiths and the mean value for interaction between participants and Protestants was 7.5 on a 9-point scale.

The least degree of association measured by mean value of association on a 9-point scale was between participants and Muslim (2.7), lesbian (3.0), Middle Eastern (3.3), gay (3.4), and Jewish (3.5) groups. No freshmen indicated affiliation with the Muslim faith and only one participant was identified as Jewish. Middle Easterners, lesbian, and gay participants were not identified from demographic information.

Table IV-20. Frequency that Incoming College Freshmen Associated with Racial, Religious, and Sexual Orientation Groups

	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	African America	Middle Eastern	American Indian	Catholic	Protestant	Jewish	Muslim	Lesbian	Gay
Mean	4.614	5.797	8.780	6.858	3.272	5.223	6.669	7.473	3.492	2.700	2.998	3.449
1 Frequency (Percent)	66 (12.74)	7 (3.26)	1 (0.19)	4 (0.76)	146 (28.74)	54 (10.31)	24 (4.59)	27 (5.27)	138 (27.27)	215 (42.41)	183 (35.12)	170 (32.50)
2 Frequency (Percent)	40 (7.72)	29 (5.57)	0 (0.0)	10 (1.9)	70 (13.78)	60 (11.45)	16 (3.06)	10 (1.95)	71 (14.03)	81 (15.98)	103 (19.77)	78 (14.91)
3 Frequency (Percent)	61 (11.78)	46 (8.83)	1 (0.19)	23 (4.36)	74 (14.57)	37 (7.06)	27 (5.16)	6 (1.17)	64 (12.65)	50 (9.86)	61 (11.71)	60 (11.47)
4 Frequency (Percent)	92 (17.76)	68 (13.05)	2 (0.38)	39 (7.40)	96 (18.90)	51 (9.73)	47 (8.99)	19 (3.71)	88 (17.39)	66 (13.02)	56 (10.75)	65 (12.43)
5 Frequency (Percent)	67 (12.93)	77 (14.78)	8 (1.53)	51 (9.68)	46 (9.06)	75 (14.31)	49 (9.37)	34 (6.64)	50 (9.88)	43 (8.48)	43 (8.25)	36 (6.88)
6 Frequency (Percent)	72 (13.90)	71 (13.63)	2 (0.38)	63 (11.95)	27 (5.31)	61 (11.64)	48 (9.18)	34 (4.69)	35 (6.92)	25 (4.93)	27 (5.18)	27 (5.16)
7 Frequency (Percent)	64 (12.36)	71 (13.63)	15 (2.87)	104 (19.73)	25 (4.92)	61 (11.64)	61 (11.66)	50 (9.77)	21 (4.15)	10 (1.97)	15 (2.88)	33 (6.31)
8 Frequency (Percent)	26 (5.02)	51 (9.79)	23 (4.41)	93 (17.65)	13 (2.56)	45 (8.59)	56 (10.71)	57 (11.13)	15 (2.96)	10 (1.97)	13 (2.50)	21 (4.02)
9 Frequency (Percent)	30 (5.79)	91 (17.47)	470 (90.04)	140 (26.57)	11 (2.17)	80 (15.27)	195 (37.28)	55 (55.66)	24 (4.47)	7 (1.38)	20 (3.84)	33 (6.31)

The similarities between extent of association by incoming college freshmen with racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups and the percent of positive descriptors by incoming college freshmen of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups is expressed in Table IV-21. Groups with which participants had the greatest extent of known association also had higher percents of positive descriptors. For instance, participants had more association with Caucasian and Protestants than with other groups and 81 % of descriptors for Caucasian and 91 % of descriptors for Protestant were positive. Conversely, groups with which participants had the least association had the smallest percent of positive descriptors. Incoming college freshmen had the least known association with Muslim, lesbian, Middle Eastern, and gay groups and the percent of positive descriptors for those groups were 51%, 25%, 36%, and 30% respectfully.

Table IV-21. Similarity of Incoming College Freshmen's Association *with* Racial, Religious, and Sexual Orientation Groups and Positive Descriptors *for* Groups

Amount of Association (Scale 1-9)	Positive Descriptors (in Percent)
8.8 Caucasian	91 Protestant
7.5 Protestant	81 Caucasian
6.9 African American	80 Asian
6.7 Catholic	80 Catholic
5.8 Hispanic	78 American Indian
5.2 American Indian	75 Jewish
4.6 Asian	73 African American
3.5 Jewish	69 Hispanic
3.4 Gay	51 Muslim
3.3 Middle East	36 Middle East
3.0 Lesbian	30 Gay
2.7 Muslim	25 Lesbian

In summary, the extent of association between participants and racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups was somewhat reflective of the campus population and varied from 2.7, minimal association with the Muslim group, to 8.8, much association with the Caucasian group.

Question #5: What prevents incoming college freshmen from associating with racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

If a participant's degree of association with a specific subgroup was self-rated as 3 or less on the 9-point Likert-type scale, the participant was asked to write a brief reason explaining why s/he did not associate with the subgroup.

Classification of reasons indicating why incoming college freshmen did not associate with racial, religious and sexual orientation groups are summarized in Table IV-22. The frequency that each classification of reasons was generated for each group is presented. Reasons (explanations for not associating) were placed together in classifications based on two premises: similarity of meaning suggested by the reasons and similarity of language or words used in the reasons. Classification of reasons could possibly have been merged to create fewer classifications, but word choice and plausible meaning of language selected by participants seemed to justify the classifications used.

Table IV-22 Classification of Reasons Incoming College Freshmen Did Not Associate with Racial, Religious, and Sexual Orientation Groups.

	Groups		
	Racial	Religious	Sexual Orientation
Classifications of Reasons			
1 Lack of opportunity to associate or participant has no friends from that group	260 (67%)	297 (67%)	222 (42%)
2 No interest in or need to interact; nothing in common; beliefs different; personalities different from that of participant	36 (9%)		
2 Beliefs are different from participant or participant has little in common with group		83(19%)	
2 Non-acceptance of homosexuality by participant			101 (19%)
3 Prejudice or racism stated or implied by participant	27 (7%)		
3 Awareness of another's religion is not known, asked, or seen as important to participant		25 (6%)	
3 Homophobic reaction by participant			91 (17%)
4 Language barrier for participant	21(5%)		
4 No interest in interacting or are not the group participant hangs out with		12 (3%)	
4 Participant chooses to stay away or feel no need to associate; interest, values, attitudes and friends are different from group; don't want to be labeled homosexual			70 (13%)
5 The group tends to isolate itself from others by hanging out with themselves	15 (4%)	10 (2%)	
5 Another person's sexual orientation is not known or asked by participant			33 (6%)
6 Awareness of another's race is not known, asked or seen as important; lack of knowledge by participant of another's race	15 (4%)		
6 Dislike for, unaccepting, or negative judgment by participant about a religious group		9 (2%)	
6 Other comments			6 (1%)
7 Other comments	14 (4%)	8 (2%)	
7 Group doesn't tend to mix with others outside the group			1 (0%)
TOTAL number of reasons generated	388 (100%)	444 (101%)	524 (98%)
Numeral to left of reason indicates the reason's rank order (greatest to least) for each group (racial, religious, sexual orientation) Numeral in parenthesis indicates the percent of reasons for the group attributed to that specific classification of reasons			

Table IV-23 summarizes abbreviated examples of participants' written responses for the various classifications of reasons for not associating. Examples are merely representative, and not inclusive, of all examples offered by participants.

Of the 538 participants in this study, the number who wrote reasons for not associating with various groups varied for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. Three hundred seventeen participants (59%) offered reasons for not associating with racial groups, 379 (70%) for not associating with religious groups, and 389 (73%) for not associating with sexual orientation groups. Although freshmen often referred to a specific racial, religious, or sexual orientation subgroups, e.g., Caucasian, Catholic, Gay, in their reasons, this study reports general classifications of reasons and is not identifying specific subgroups within racial, religious, and sexual orientations groups.

Even though participants were asked for a brief reason indicating why they did not associate with a specific racial, religious, or sexual orientation group, many participants wrote multiple reasons or wrote reasons with multiple components (explanations). For example, a response (reason) such as "I do not understand the group's language, I have not had the opportunity to interact with the group, and I have nothing in common with the group" can fit three categories of reasons. Therefore, the number of reasons analyzed for racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups exceeded the number of participants who responded to those groups.

At least 75 percent or three-fourths of responses for racial, religious, and sexual orientations groups fell into three classifications of reasons for not associating. Lack of opportunity or lack of friends in the group was the primary reason for not associating with all groups-racial, religious, and sexual orientation. This classification applied to

67% of the reasons participants did not associate with racial and religious groups and for 42% for of the reasons participants did not associate with sexual orientation groups. Second and third most cited classification of reasons varied among groups. *No interest in associating* or *no need to associate* contributed 9% of the reasons for not associating with racial groups. *Beliefs are different* and *there is little I have in common* accounted for 19% of reasons for not associating with religious groups and *not accepted* provided 19% of the reasons for not associating with sexual orientation groups. Third most cited reason for not associating with the groups follows: *Prejudice or racism* was stated or implied in 7% for racial groups; the *Other's religion was not known*, 6% for religious groups; and a *homophobic reaction* was given for 17% of sexual orientation groups.

In summary, the most frequently cited reason for not associating with a group was the lack of opportunity to interact.

Table IV-23. Classification of Reasons and Examples Used by Incoming College Freshmen for Not Associating with Racial, Religious and Sexual Orientation Groups

Classification of Reasons	Abbreviated Examples of Reasons
1 (all groups) Lack of opportunity to associate or participant has no friends from that group	Haven't been around them; not had the opportunity; aren't that many to associate with; did not grow up around them; don't know that many of them
2 (racial) No interest in or need to interact; nothing in common; beliefs different; personalities different from that of participant	We are different kind of people who enjoy different things; don't need to, never had the desire to interact with ...
2 (religious) Beliefs are different from participant or participant has little in common with group	It is not my religion; don't agree with; don't know about their religion
2 (sexual orientation) Non-acceptance of homosexuality by participant	Don't agree with their life style; I believe it is wrong; men and women are not supposed to be same sex oriented
8 3 (racial) Prejudice or racism stated or implied by participant	They are not white; they are strange; cause trouble in society and terrorist attack of 9/11
3 (religious) Awareness of another's religion is not known, asked, or seen as important to participant	Not aware of their religious preference; don't ask what religion people are; maybe met, but not know
3 (sexual orientation) Homophobic reaction by participant	Scared of them; unnatural practice; I don't want to be labeled as one

Question #6: What sources of information influence incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Twelve sources of information that might influence participants' perceptions were analyzed by using participants' self-reported scores on 9-point Likert-type scales. Table IV-24 lists the rank order from highest to lowest of likely sources influencing participants' perceptions. Based on a scale of 0 to 9, the range of mean scores for sources varied from 3.8 for *internet* to 7.5 for *family*.

Table IV-24. Mean Scores for Sources of Information Influencing Incoming College Freshmen's Perceptions of Racial Religious, and Sexual Orientation Groups

Sources of Information	Mean Score (Scale 1-9)
Personal Contact	7.5
Family	6.8
Friends	6.6
Church	5.9
School	5.5
Music	5.0
Sports	5.0
Movies	4.9
TV	4.8
Newspapers	4.4
Books	4.0
Internet	3.8

Table IV-25 offers means, frequencies and percents for all sources presented that would likely influence perceptions of incoming college freshmen. The mean score for *family* was 6.874 on a 9-point scale. Frequency of rank 1 for *family* was 29 with a percent of 5.39 signifying that 29 incoming college freshmen representing 5.39% of participants believed that *family* had *very little influence* on their perceptions. Frequency of rank 9 for *family* was 179 with a percent of 33.27 signifying that 179 incoming college

freshmen representing 33.27% of participants believed that *family* had *very much influence* on their perceptions

Personal contact with an individual from a specific subgroup, with a mean score of 7.5 on a 9-point scale, was the source most influencing incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. Personal contact is reflected in other sources and exemplifies the importance of individual association. Family (6.8) and friends (6.6), the second and third most frequently rated sources of information, also suggest the value of personal relationships on participant's perceptions. Both family and friends provide one-on-one as well as group interaction. Church and school, with mean values of 5.9 and 5.5, respectfully, are both organized social institutions that influence learning through instruction, personal discovery, and social interaction. Music (5.0), sports (5.0), movies (4.9), and TV (4.8) represent activities with a social dimension, activities that function as an avenue for leisure and pleasure rather than activities primarily for guiding thought and critical thinking. Least influential were newspapers (4.4), books (4.0), and the Internet (3.8), sources that allow for minimal, if any, active personal exchange of beliefs, feelings, or views between the creator/sender of information and the recipient/receiver. Newspapers, books, and the Internet are also sources that are most likely used in isolation by participants.

In summary, personal contact, family, and friends were sources of information most often influencing perceptions of incoming college freshmen.

Table IV-25 Sources of Information Influencing Incoming College Freshmen's Perceptions of Racial, Religious and Sexual Orientation Groups

	Family	Friends	School	Church	Newspapers	TV	Internet	Books	Movies	Music	Sports	Peers
Mean	6.874	6.593	5.476	5.881	4.441	4.831	3.758	3.998	4.905	4.987	5.039	7.454
1 Frequency (Percent)	29 (5.39)	22 (4.09)	35 (6.51)	72 (13.38)	64 (11.92)	55 (10.22)	115 (21.38)	98 (18.22)	58 (10.80)	69 (12.83)	104 (19.44)	26 (4.88)
2 Frequency (Percent)	9 (1.67)	15 (2.79)	32 (5.95)	25 (4.65)	55 (10.24)	45 (8.36)	85 (15.80)	64 (11.90)	54 (10.06)	47 (8.74)	27 (5.05)	0.02 (00.38)
3 Frequency (Percent)	27 (5.02)	29 (5.39)	47 (8.74)	34 (6.32)	76 (14.15)	55 (10.22)	85 (15.80)	82 (15.24)	50 (9.31)	49 (9.11)	36 (6.73)	12 (2.25)
4 Frequency (Percent)	24 (4.46)	26 (4.83)	49 (9.11)	25 (4.65)	73 (13.59)	75 (13.94)	60 (11.15)	86 (15.99)	68 (12.66)	51 (9.48)	43 (8.04)	14 (2.63)
5 Frequency (Percent)	34 (6.32)	55 (10.22)	95 (17.66)	58 (10.78)	101 (18.81)	104 (19.33)	67 (12.45)	71 (13.20)	72 (13.41)	82 (15.24)	75 (14.02)	37 (6.94)
6 Frequency (Percent)	46 (8.55)	71 (13.20)	91 (16.91)	44 (8.18)	63 (11.73)	69 (12.83)	43 (7.99)	46 (8.55)	88 (16.39)	64 (11.90)	52 (9.72)	27 (5.07)
7 Frequency (Percent)	103 (19.14)	90 (16.73)	84 (15.61)	79 (14.68)	55 (10.24)	61 (11.34)	38 (7.06)	42 (7.81)	52 (9.68)	80 (14.87)	74 (13.83)	75 (14.07)
8 Frequency (Percent)	87 (16.17)	97 (18.03)	44 (8.18)	76 (14.13)	27 (5.03)	38 (7.06)	22 (4.09)	31 (5.76)	61 (11.36)	49 (9.11)	63 (11.78)	81 (15.20)
9 Frequency (Percent)	179 (33.27)	133 (24.72)	61 (11.34)	125 (23.23)	23 (4.28)	36 (6.69)	23 (4.28)	18 (3.35)	34 (6.33)	47 (8.74)	61 (2.50)	259 (48.59)

Summary of Results

This study about perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups have revealed six important findings. First, descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) used by incoming college freshmen to portray groups most often reference personal characteristics or personality traits of group members. Second, incoming college freshmen reported positive perceptions for two thirds of the groups in the study, namely Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, American Indian, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Third, positive perceptions of racial, religious and sexual orientation groups were more frequently associated with female participants and with participants who had had some association with the group of interest. Fourth, the extent of association between participants and groups tended to reflect the identified predominant campus racial and religious population and varied from minimal association with the Muslim group to much association with Caucasians. Fifth, lack of opportunity to interact was the most frequently cited reason for not associating with a group. Sixth, perceptions were most influenced by personal contact with a member of the group, by other member's of the participant's family, and by participant's friends.

The next chapter describes summary of these findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. Specifically, the study was designed to determine if perceptions of these diverse groups were generally perceived as positive or negative by participants. Degree of association with the groups, correlation of perceptions with personal characteristics and behaviors of participants, and sources that influence the perceptions of college freshmen were studied.

Rationale for this study stemmed from evidence in literature indicating that students' perceptions impact the acceptance of diversity on college campuses. Researchers (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora. 2001) purport that students' perceptions of their peers are one of the most important institutional demands fostering openness to diversity. Phillips Morrow, Burris-Kitchen, and Der-Karabetian (2000) found that little is known about perceptions students have of each other and that students' voices do not receive in-depth attention.

Five hundred thirty-eight incoming college freshmen at a comprehensive four-year land grant university in the South Central region of the United States participated in this study. Most participants were 18 and 19 years old. Approximately 57 percent of the participants were female and 43 percent male.

Participants completed a five-part instrument designed by the researcher to allow Likert-type scaled participant responses and to elicit self-generated participant language to which participants assigned values. Participants wrote descriptors to characterize racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups and subsequently self-coded their descriptors as positive, neutral, or negative. Participants denoted their degree of interaction with each subgroup on a nine-point Likert-type scale and, if applicable, wrote a brief written reason why they did not associate with the group. Finally, participants indicated on a set of nine-point Likert-type scales the degree of influence that various sources of information have on their perceptions.

Although the instrument developed by the researcher provided much useful information, additional data and added support to the data collected would be possible with minor changes in the design of the instrument. For example, a few participants indicated that they did not know who fit into specific groups, e.g., Protestant, and thus those participants did not offer descriptors for Protestants. Had definitions of all groups been presented, the likelihood that more participants would have offered descriptors for all groups would have increased. Using a definition for all groups would have given participants a common base of understanding for groups rather than having each participant rely on his/her own understanding of group membership.

Another change in design would have been to inquire about the *kinds of association* participant had had with the groups. Such information would have added depth to the data about the *amount of association* participants had had with groups. *Kinds of association* could have been obtained from a check list pre-naming various natures of association, e.g. ‘only contact with this group is in class,’ ‘someone from this

group is on my intramural team,’ ‘my best friend is from this group.’ A second way to access the *kind of association* would be from an open ended question that has the advantage of obtaining a response expressed in the participant’s own language.

Requesting reasons for not associating with each subgroup marked on the Likert-type scale as 3 or less would have provided more insight about the participant’s perception of each subgroup. Asking for a single reason for not association with the broader group (racial, religious, or sexual orientation) may have required the participant to over generalize.

Converting students’ hand-written responses to a computer program for analyzing required vigilant effort and numerous hours. Analysis of the data could possibly be completed in a timelier manner if students complete the instrument on a computer-formatted program such as Microsoft Access.

Six research questions were addressed in this study: 1) What language descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) do incoming college freshmen use to portray their perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups? 2) What perceptions do incoming college freshmen have about racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups? 3) Do perceptions incoming college freshmen have of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups vary by freshmen’s gender, parents’ income, hometown population, self rating as a reader, reading habits as measured by frequency of leisure reading and extent of association with the groups? 4) How frequently do incoming college freshmen associate with racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups? 5) What prevents incoming college freshmen from associating with racial, religious, and

sexual orientation groups? 6) What sources of information influence incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups?

Content analysis of participants' language, descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, & percents), chi-square and ordered logistic regression were used for analyzing data. Ordered logistic regression provided an odds ratio which is the calculated probability of an independent variable being placed within a specific dependent variable group. For this study the independent variables were gender, parents' income, hometown population, self rating as a reader, amount of leisure reading, and degree of association. Dependent variables were positive perception and negative perception (of racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups).

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, conclusion of the study, practical implications of the study, recommendations for further research, and limitations of the study.

Summary of the Findings

Language categories created from examining and analyzing participants' descriptors generated for question #1 were contingent on the descriptors reported by the participants. Descriptors (words, phrases, and labels) that participants used to indicate both positive and negative perceptions varied for racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups.

The category of descriptors most reflective of positive perceptions of racial subgroups was *personal and/or personality traits*. Examples of participant language for

this category are happy, easy going, accepting, loyal, funny, outgoing, kind, polite, shy, and peaceful.

Three other descriptor categories were important for examining positive language portraying the racial group. These categories with representative examples of student language in parenthesis follow: *ability, talents, and education* (intelligent, smart, well-educated); *values and goals* (hardworking, religious, dedicated, traditional); and *stereotypical statement or observation* (great dancers, Spanish, live in sand, rag heads, teepee, casinos).

Categories for language implying positive perceptions of religious groups were of special interest. The three categories most reflective of descriptors were consistent for all four religious subgroups irrespective of the wide range of religious practices represented. The category with representative examples of participants' language in parenthesis are *personal and/or personality traits* (caring, devoted, respectable, honest, loving, fun, polite, rich, proud, quiet, smart, calm,), *personal religious characteristics* (faithful, holy, traditional, Christian, strong beliefs), and *icons, images, symbols, pictures, and persons associated with religious group* (Mary, priests, Bible, crosses, wear little hats, Star of David, Koran, Mosque, Allah).

The *most frequently* used *category* and corresponding language descriptors suggesting positive perceptions of sexual orientation groups were quite similar to the most frequently used category and language examples for racial and religious groups. Categories and representative examples of student language in parenthesis follow: *personal or personality traits* (nice, cool, outgoing, friendly, funny, good friend); *job or*

fashion related statement (good dresser, stylish, fashionable); and *sexual implication* (hot, sexy, turn on).

Negativity was included in some positively coded descriptors for the sexual orientation groups. Whether this observation was an error in the participant's marking or an intentional coding by the participant could not be determined by the researcher.

Personal or personality trait was the most frequently used categories of positive descriptors of racial groups was also the most frequently used category of negative descriptors of racial groups. Examples of participant language for this category are rude, poor, illegal, uneducated, arrogant, lazy, racist, greedy, hard to understand, scary, mean, drunks.

Four additional negative descriptor categories used to portray the racial group were noteworthy. These categories, with language examples in parenthesis, follow : *places (locations), items, or ideas associated with group* (welfare, affirmative action, ghetto, rap music, Sept. 11, terrorism, casinos, government handouts); *some recognizable aspect of the culture or difference of the culture* (rice, can't speak English, hard to understand); *behavior or work of the group* (lawn mowers, drinks a lot of alcohol, labor workers, wants something for nothing, lives on reservations); and *negative labels* (big-headed, jerks, hicks, terrorists, rag head).

The most frequently used category for negative descriptors of religious groups were *personal characteristics* (strict, annoying, pushy, big noses, stingy, evil, scary, stupid). A *label that suggests behavior* (drinkers, hypocrites, judgmental, terrorists, don't like Americans, Sept. 11); and a *belief or religious practice of group* (think they are better than everyone else, Bible thumpers, forceful of religion, women have no right,

non-Christian) comprised the two other major categories for negative religious descriptors.

The most frequently used categories for negative perceptions of sexual orientation groups were *personal and general types of descriptors* (weird, confused, strange, different, stupid); *repulsive words used* (gross, nasty, disgusting); and *moral implications* (wrong, immoral, sinful). Many words students used as negative descriptors for gays and lesbians were very similar; thus the number of descriptors in each category seemed to vary less for lesbian and gays than was evident between descriptor categories for racial and religious subgroups.

It is important to remember that the categories created via content analysis were informative and offered a generalized picture of how incoming college freshmen perceived various groups at a specific time and during a specific stage in their lives. The categories might change as the students mature and have new interactions with these groups of diverse individuals.

Separating positive and negative descriptors for analysis was crucial as evident in the differences between categories for positive and negative descriptors. The category designated as *personal characteristics* and/or *personality traits* was an exception as this category was appropriate for a large number of descriptors for most groups. Variation in word choice was apparent as the function of the language changed from expressing confirmation or affirmation of the group to conveying disapproval or an unfavorable view of the group.

Contingent on participants' self-coding of descriptors, analysis of question #2 indicated that incoming college freshmen had more positive than negative perceptions of

these eight groups: Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, American Indian, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Negative perceptions were more frequent for individuals from Middle Eastern, Muslim, Lesbian, and Gay groups.

The number of neutral perceptions varied from subgroup to subgroup with no pattern emerging that associated more neutral perceptions with either more positive perceptions of a group or more negative perceptions of a group. Except for Middle Eastern, Jewish, Muslim, and gay subgroups, the number of neutral perceptions for each subgroup group fell between the number of positive and the number of negative perceptions. For Middle Eastern, Jewish, and Muslim subgroups, the number of neutral perceptions was more than either positive or negative perceptions; but, for the gay group, the number of neutral perceptions was less than the number of either positive or negative perceptions.

Positive and negative perceptions of subgroups were consistent across the six independent variables examined. For instance, when more participants had positive than negative perceptions of a subgroup, the number of positive perceptions associated with all six independent variables was greater than negative perceptions associated with the six independent variables.

The relationship between independent variables (gender, parents' income, hometown population, self rating as a reader, amount of leisure reading, and association) and a positive perception was examined for question #3. Findings were inconsistent among the twelve racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups.

The probability of a positive perception was greater for eight of the groups if the participant, incoming college freshman, had some degree of association with the group.

Female participants were more likely than male participants to use language that indicated a positive perception for seven of the groups. Participants doing some leisure reading were more apt than those not reading for leisure to have a positive perception for three groups. The relationship between a larger hometown and a positive perception was more likely for one group. An increase in parents' income and higher self rating as a reader did not seem to increase the likelihood of a positive perception for any of the twelve groups.

Because the relationship between six independent variables and a positive perception were inconsistent among the racial, religious, and sexual orientation subgroups, the most parsimonious model predicting the probability of a positive perception for each subgroup also varied.

Although not the same variable, a single independent variable provided the most parsimonious model for predicting the probability of a positive perception for five groups. Gender (female) was the independent variable critical for a positive perception of Middle Eastern, American Indian, and Muslim groups; increased association was the independent variable vital for a positive perception of the Caucasian group; and increased leisure reading was the independent variable necessary for a positive perception of the Jewish group.

Two independent variables were necessary for predicting a positive perception for four subgroups. Gender (female) and increased association were the two independent variables essential for African Americans, and Catholics; gender (male) and increased association for lesbian groups; increased leisure reading and increased association were the independent variables crucial for the Asian group. Three independent variables were

necessary for predicting a positive perception of two subgroups, namely gender (female), decreased parent's income, and increased association for Hispanics and smaller hometown population, lower self rating as a reader, and increased association for Protestants. Five independent variables - gender (female), larger hometown population, lower self-rating as a reader, more leisure reading, and increased association - provided the most parsimonious model for a positive perception of gays.

Most association between participants and members of the twelve racial, religious, and sexual orientation sub groups, as reported for question #4, tended to mirror the campus population and thus the racial and religious characteristics of participants. Greatest associations were with Caucasian and Protestants groups, which were also the groups having the highest percent of positive descriptors. Groups (Muslim, lesbian, Middle Eastern, and gays) with which the participants had the least known association were, conversely, the groups having the smallest percent of positive descriptors.

At least three-fourths of the responses participants offered for question #5 regarding no association or minimal association with groups fell into three classifications of reasons. *Lack of opportunity or lack of friends* in the group was the primary classification for not associating with all groups (racial, religious, and sexual orientation).

The second and third classifications most frequently cited varied between groups. *No interest in or need to interact* (racial), *little in common or different beliefs* (religious), and *lack of acceptance for the group* (sexual orientation) were the second most often cited classifications. Third most frequent classifications were *racism or prejudice*, *not knowing what another person's religion is*, or a *homophobic reaction to the group*.

Several students recognized that they may have associated with someone from a particular group but were unaware of the *other* person's affiliation with the group. Students remarked that the *other* person's group was either not a group the student could recognize, group identity was not a question about which the student would ask, or the group's identity did not matter to the student.

Sources of information influencing participants' perceptions derived from question #6 can be divided into five categories, 1) personal association with someone from the group, 2) close personal acquaintances that could be within or outside the group, 3) institutions that may or may not include members of the group but that would address and recognize the presence of the group in society, 4) activities that are often social and recreational in nature, and 5) informational media that offer minimal personal contact with others. *Personal association* with members of the groups was the most influential source of information influencing perceptions. *Family and friends*, sources of personal interaction, ranked next as influential sources. Having the least impact were *Internet*, *books*, and *newspapers*, sources most likely used in privacy by the participant.

Conclusions of the Study

Results of this study revealed that *personal characteristics and personality traits* were language categories most often used to describe subgroups. *Stereotypical* descriptors were used at times with both positive and negative perceptions. Stereotypical labels were indicative of the structures students used to make sense of other people (Friske and Taylor cited in Hinton, 2000). Incoming college freshmen had positive perceptions of eight of the twelve racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups

examined. Because of the limited time these freshmen had been on campus, these perceptions may or may not have been reflective of the openness to diversity displayed by students on this campus who are classified as sophomore or beyond. Positive perceptions were most often associated with female participants and with participants who had had some association with the group. The most frequent reason for not associating with a group was the lack of opportunity to interact. Perceptions were most influenced by personal contact, family, and friends.

This study uncovered additional findings that were beyond the scope of this research to analyze and interpret. For instance, the average ACT sub score in reading for participants was above the national average which would suggest that reading may be important to the participants. Nevertheless, books and newspapers were not sources of information that students reported as greatly affecting their perceptions. With the expanding use of the internet (electronic reading) for personal and academic purposes, the internet was reported as the least influential factor influencing students' perceptions.

The impact of gender on openness to diversity has been examined by other researchers. Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, and Nora (2001) found that females were significantly more apt to be open to diversity than were males across the first three years of college. Particularly interesting is this study was the inclusion of females in seven of the most parsimonious models for predicting a positive perception of groups. Being female was the sole variable in three (Middle Eastern, American Indian, and Muslim) of those models. For two of the groups perceived as negative, females were significant for those participants in the study who expressed positive perceptions of the two groups.

Hometown population and parents' income were included in only three of the most parsimonious models for predicting a positive perception. In all of the three models, at least two other variables were necessary to predict a positive perception.

Positive perceptions of incoming freshmen were greater for gays than for lesbians and the number of negative perception for gays and lesbians was about the same. Nevertheless, five variables were necessary in the most parsimonious model to predict a positive perception for gays, but only two variables were necessary in the model to predict a positive perception of lesbians.

As indicated earlier, association was the independent variable included in eight of the models for predicting a positive perception of a subgroup. Association was neither a variable in the models for two subgroups (American Indian and Jewish) who were perceived positively nor in models for two subgroups (Middle Eastern and Muslim) who were perceived negatively.

In view of findings, it would seem that positive perceptions would be enhanced by providing more opportunities on this campus for students to interact with individuals who are different from them and with whom students may have had minimal opportunity to associate with in the past. Buttny (1999) believes that increased interracial association provides opportunities for students to hear each others' stories. Gurin, Day, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) emphasize the need for educators to intentionally design opportunities for college students to step outside their homogeneous ingroups and develop relationships with others, those from racially and ethnically diverse student groups. Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini (1996) found that students' openness to challenge and diversity developed to a greater extent with those students who had interacted more with

diverse peers and when more of the interaction focused on issues that had the potential to cause a change in one's perspective.

On the campus where this study was conducted, the groups with whom the incoming freshmen students had the least interactions were Muslim, lesbian, Middle Eastern, gay, and Jewish. Because *personal characteristics* and *personality traits* were most often used for positive descriptors, increased association with these groups would more likely support a positive perception if the association was on a personal rather than an formal level, e.g., talking and interacting with a person from these groups rather than merely listening to individuals serving as speaker representatives from these groups.

Racial, homophobic, and prejudicial language and labels used by college students give insight to misconceptions participants may have about a group. The following would be examples participants in this study presented: *terrorist* for Middle Easterners, *illegal* for Hispanics, *mean* for American Indians, *stingy* for Jewish, and *confused* for lesbian and gays. If faculty, administrators, and student leaders are aware of student language that conveys an apparent lack of understanding about specific groups, those same faculty, administrators, and student leaders would hopefully assume a role in rectifying misunderstandings.

Use of stereotypical and prejudicial language may have been an indication of how the participant's identity with an ingroup influenced how the participant viewed others, outgroups. For instance, because only one participant in this study was identified as Jewish, the Jewish group for the majority of participants would be an outgroup. Furthermore, because association with the Jewish group was minimal, perceptions of Jewish, such as *stingy*, had to have been based on something other than personal

interaction. Students in the study probably lacked knowledge of observed personal characteristics and resorted to labels, regardless of the label's validity, acquired from other sources to help the students make sense of the Jewish group.

Practical Implications of the Study

Findings from this study can provide a springboard for campus leaders who wish to increase student awareness and advance cultural understanding of people from diverse backgrounds. For instance, as students participating in this study acquire more knowledge of Middle Eastern, Jewish, Muslim, gay, and lesbian groups, the participants' own social group identity as well as their view of the groups listed above would likely be amended. With more complete and hopefully a more accurate understanding, participants might feel more secure and confident about associating with the groups. Association has been shown in this study to be an important factor in predicting positive perceptions.

Enhanced cultural understanding will hopefully contribute to a more positive campus climate. As shared in Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen's (1998) framework for a campus climate for diversity, positive campus climates aid in student recruitment, academic and social success of students, and student retention.

Practical implications would include the sincere effort of campus leaders and personnel to listen to student voices as promoted by Phillips Morrow, Burris-Kitchen, and Der-Karabetian (2000), to learn what students know and believe about various groups, to increase awareness of subtle as well as overt signs of cultural tension, and to search for a deeper meaning of words, images, and actions that students use. McDonald and

Associates (2002) purport that students must have a voice in deciding how colleges and universities create campus community.

In this study students expressed severe, judgmental, and negative impressions of gays and lesbians using words such as *wrong*, *sinful*, and *immoral* to describe gays and lesbians. Ignoring what students are saying about gays and lesbians and allowing such attitudes to be unchallenged only perpetuates a campus climate which alienates gays and lesbians. A sense of security for gays and lesbians on the campus will remain tenuous and students who are gay and lesbian may fear expressing an important feature of their social identity if cruel and severe negative perceptions are disregarded. Campus leaders have a grave responsibility to protect the dignity of all students regardless of their race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Overt and covert expressions of homophobic, racist, and biased language and behavior must not be tolerated. Campus leaders must set examples for understanding, respecting, and accepting cultural diversity. Rankin (2003) provided general recommendations for maximizing equity on campuses for gays and lesbians. Those recommendations, in an abbreviated language, include the following topics: recruitment and retention, institutional commitment to sexual orientation concerns, integration and inclusion of gay and lesbian concerns in the curriculum and educational programming, and creating safe places for dialogue. Another researcher, Waldo (1998), shares tangible efforts that college and universities have taken to demonstrate support for lesbians and gays. One example is the involvement of faculty and staff allies who hang posters in their offices and who wear buttons indicating support and respect for gays and lesbians.

Depending on the extent and kind of diversity on a specific campus, diversity could be a theme underlying all aspects of required freshman orientation courses. For example, regardless of the topic under study (adjusting to independent living, study skills, choosing a major, campus services), small groups of diverse students could be assigned to work together to examine the topic. Group composition could change from topic to topic so students would have maximum opportunities to interact with individuals unlike themselves.

Living groups and campus organizations could plan activities that foster association with individuals whose backgrounds are different from theirs. Activities could be as involved as designing community service projects and organizing campus events or as simple as becoming a study buddy with a person of another background.

Recommendation for Further Research

Much is yet to be explored regarding perceptions students have about racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups, especially as perceptions are expressed in words and actions that contribute to or distract from positive campus environments.

Participants in this study represented freshmen at a land grant university in the South Central region of the United States. Gender, race, and religion of participants reflected general trends of not only the freshmen population, but also the student population on the university's main campus. Research is needed in the 2007 spring semester to determine if the participants' perceptions changed during their four years of college life with and without their participation in deliberate university-wide intervention

strategies designed to increase understanding and openness to racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups.

Likewise, because the participants of this study were predominately Caucasian and Christian, other studies are needed to determine if universities with students having different racial and religious demographics would reveal comparable results. Campus population, location, type of institution (private, urban, etc.) might also disclose dissimilar results.

Participants in this study generated many personal characteristics and personality traits to describe racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. Although participants self-coded their descriptors as positive, neutral, or negative, follow-up research in the form of focus groups would clarify the origin and intended meaning of language used. A deeper probe of language might uncover additional misconceptions.

The relationship between race or religion and perceptions were not examined. Also not analyzed was the correlation between perceptions and the kinds of reading a student does for leisure, the employment status of students, or the major fields of study students' choose.

Perceptions of students in a college with many International students, such as the College of Engineering, could be compared with perceptions of students in a college with few International students, such as the College of Education. Such a study would enhance findings relating to the impact of association with perceptions. Likewise, of interest is the International students' perception of American students.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitation of this research should be addressed if future studies with similar purposes are pursued. An obvious limitation of this study is the lack of ability to generalize findings to colleges and universities in other geographical locations. Research that includes a wider range of college and university settings and compositions is recommended.

Future research should be designed so that a 'true' random sample of participants is obtained. A random sample would insure a representation of participants that is not based on availability to participate.

Findings of this study depended on self-reported information from participants. Actual experiences and confirmation of data was not observed. Honesty and accuracy of students' reporting was not assessed.

Self-coding of descriptors by participants without further probing of language was another limitation. Participants could be asked to take part in follow-up sessions such as focus groups to examine descriptors submitted. Self-coding could be cross analyzed by a team of independent raters to determine if words, phrases, and labels participants used are interpreted by independent analyzers in a comparable way.

No information was requested regarding the kinds of association participants had had with individuals from other racial, religious, or sexual orientation groups. Neither was data asked about experiences students encountered as a minority and the impact that those experiences had on perceptions reported.

Finally, categories for descriptors and for reasons participants do not associate with groups were determined solely by the researcher. A team of at least two other

analyzers to determine categories and to assign responses to categories is recommended to increase validity and reliability of findings.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Forms

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 8/24/2004

Date: Monday, August 25, 2003

IRB Application No ED0416

Proposal Title: INCOMING COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSE GROUPS

Principal
Investigator(s):

Miram Alfarata Ward
1517 S. Mansfield Dr.
Stillwater, OK 74074

Dr. Kouider Mokhtari
248 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved *

Dear PI :

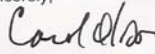
Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,


Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

*NOTE: Reviewer suggests that the informed consent script stipulate that the participant be 18 years old or older.

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 8/24/2004

Date : Thursday, October 02, 2003

IRB Application No ED0416

Proposal Title: INCOMING COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSE GROUPS

Principal
Investigator(s) :

Miram Alfarata Ward
1517 S. Mansfield Dr.
Stillwater, OK 74074

Dr. Kouider Mokhtari
248 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

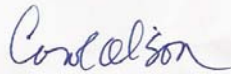
Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Modification

Please note that the protocol expires on the following date which is one year from the date of the approval of the original protocol:

Protocol Expires: 8/24/2004

Signature :



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Thursday, October 02, 2003
Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

(Script will be read to participants by the researcher prior to conducting the study.)

Hello, my name is Miriam Ward and I am a doctoral graduate student in the College of Education at Oklahoma State University. I am collecting information in a instrument to gain a better understanding of perceptions college freshmen have of diverse groups of people. Here are answers to some questions you may have about research studies such as this one.

1. **What is expected of participants?** You must be enrolled as a freshman at Oklahoma State University to participate in this study. You will be asked to complete a five-part instrument. Part I requests demographic information about you. Parts II, III, IV, and V seek information about your perceptions of diverse groups of people. There are not right or wrong answers. Information you provide is important and you are asked to answer honestly and thoughtfully.
2. **How much time will the instrument require?** The instrument will be completed in class today and will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes.
3. **What are the benefits of participating in this study?** While there may be no individual benefits of this study, the collective information will help administrators, faculty, staff, and students better understand student perceptions and student behaviors toward various groups of people and findings can be used to improve student recruitment, student academic and social success, and student retention.
4. **What are the possible risks?** I do not anticipate any discomfort or risks (physical, psychological, or emotional) to you as a result of participating in this study.
5. **Who will see my responses to the instrument?** Only data entry assistants, my advisor, and I (the researcher) will have access to the information. Responses are anonymous, as data will not include your name or any other identifying information. I will keep all information you provide in a secure file so that no one else sees your responses. After I analyze and write about the information, I will destroy the data so that no one can have access to it. All data will be reported in summary format. Strict confidentiality will be maintained during all aspects of the study.
6. **What if I choose not to participate in the study?** You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason, by informing your instructor and/or me. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You can stop at any time without any penalties whatsoever. Your decision to participate or to not participate does not affect your class grade or evaluation in any way.
7. **Who do I contact if I have questions, concerns, or comments about this study?** You can talk to your instructor, phone Sharon Bacher, Office Research Compliance at Oklahoma State University at (405) 744-5700, ask me now or contact me later at (405) 744-9438. Your inquiry and remarks are welcome and encouraged.

Do you have any questions or need additional information about this study? Please do not hesitate to ask.

If there are no further questions and you would like to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand that you do not sign your name on any part of the instrument. This protects your identity and keeps me or anyone else from knowing your individual answers. Your completion of the instrument indicates that you understand the risks and benefits of the study and that you voluntarily agree to provide the data requested in this study. If you do not participate in the study, you may read through the instrument, but do not mark on the instrument in any way. When I have collected all instruments, your instructor will continue class as planned.

APPENDIX C

Instrument Instructions

INSTRUMENT INSTRUCTIONS

(Script will be read to participants by the researcher prior to handing out the survey.)

All materials for this instrument will be handed to you. A coded number is printed on the envelope and on the top of Instrument Parts I and II. The number does not identify you in any way. Numbering ensures that your responses are kept together. If you are not participating in the study, you may read through the instrument, but do not make any marks on the instrument. Read and complete all instrument parts in the order they are presented to you.

Part I of the instrument asks for demographic information about you. For Parts II and III, you will be presented with twelve gray cards that identify groups of people for which you are to provide descriptors. Descriptors are words, phrases, or labels that first come to mind about a group and which you would use to portray that group. I will show you (overhead below) a mock card with a group not included in the instrument to illustrate what the card looks like and to explain what qualifies as a descriptor.

Scientists are a group of people about which we have perceptions and to which we may use words, phrases, or labels to describe our perceptions. For this study, *intelligent* (a word), *predictable as the sun* (a phrase), or *nerdy* (a label) would be appropriate descriptors. *Laboratory*, on the other hand, is not a descriptor because laboratory indicates where scientists might work rather than being a descriptor of a scientist. Your descriptors can be all words, all phrases, all labels, or a combination of words, phrases, and labels.

After writing two descriptors, mark the scale at the bottom of the page indicating how much association you have had with that group. Mark the scale before going to the following card.

This instrument is not timed, but you should be able to complete this instrument in approximately 30 minutes. Do not spend a lot of time deciding what descriptors to write. Write the first two descriptors that come to mind. Remember: there are no right or wrong answers. Respond honestly and thoughtfully.

If, after providing information requested in the instrument, you want to comment about some aspect of the instrument, please do so on the back of the white sheet. If you want to talk to someone personally, you may copy the numbers listed on the overhead. When you have completed the instrument, place all materials (the white page and eighteen color coded cards) in the envelope and hand the envelope to your instructor or me. All materials must be returned.

Thank you for participating!

(Overheads cited in script above)

SCIENTISTS										
_____	Descriptor #1 _____									
_____	Descriptor #2 _____									
_____	Descriptor #3 _____									
On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group.										
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
Very								Very		
Little								Much		

PHONE NUMBERS	
Researcher:	
Miriam A. Ward (405) 744-9438	
Office Research Compliance, OSU:	
Sharon Bacher (405) 744-5700	
Freshman Orientation Professor:	

APPENDIX D:

Fall 2003 Student Perceptions Instrument, Part I

FALL 2003 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, PART I

Dear Freshman,

I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at Oklahoma State University and am collecting information in this survey as part of the requirements for a research study. Your participation in this study will help me have a better understanding of perceptions college freshmen have about various groups of people. No identified risks are involved in participating. Your identity will not be known to me or to anyone who reads or uses the information. Participation is not a class requirement and your involvement is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. The information you offer is important and you are asked to answer questions honestly and thoughtfully. **THANK YOU!**

Miriam Alfarata Ward

DIRECTIONS: Print clearly. Make heavy marks to fill in ovals or to circle numbers. If you change your answer, erase pencil marks cleanly or X through ink marks before remarking your answer. Your responses will be hand-read.

1. When were you born? Month (01-12) Year 19

2. Your sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female

3. What is your student classification? (Mark one)

☐ Fulltime Freshman ☐ Part-time Freshman
☐ Other classification (specify) _____

4. Are you employed: (Mark one)

☐ Fulltime ☐ Part-time ☐ Not employed

5. Are you: (Mark all that apply)

☐ African American/Black
☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
☐ Asian (e.g., Chinese, Pakistani, Korean)
☐ Hispanic/Latino(a)
☐ Pacific Islander (e.g., Native Hawaiian, Samoan)
☐ White/ Caucasian
☐ International _____
(Identify Continent) (Identify Race)

6. What is the best estimate of the population of your hometown? (Mark one)

☐ Less than 1000 people
☐ 1,000 - 4,999 people
☐ 5,000-19,999 people
☐ 20,000-49,999 people
☐ 50,000-99,999 people
☐ 100,000-499,999 people
☐ 500,000 or more people

7. What is your best estimate of the size of your high school graduating class? (Mark one)

☐ 50 or fewer students
☐ 51 - 150 students
☐ 151 - 250 students
☐ 251 - 400 students
☐ 401 - 600 students
☐ 601 - 900 students
☐ 901 or more students

8. What is your best estimate of your parents' total income last year? Consider income from all sources before taxes. (Mark one)

☐ Less than \$10,000
☐ \$10,000-19,999
☐ \$20,000-49,999
☐ \$50,000-99,999
☐ \$100,000-199,999
☐ \$200,000 or more

9. Current religious preference. (Mark one)

☐ Atheist ☐ LDS (Mormon)
☐ Baptist ☐ Lutheran
☐ Buddhist ☐ Methodist
☐ Eastern Orthodox ☐ Presbyterian
☐ Episcopal ☐ Quaker
☐ Hindu ☐ Roman Catholic
☐ Muslim ☐ Seventh Day Adventist
☐ Jewish ☐ United Church of Christ
☐ Other Christian Religion (specify) _____
☐ Other Non-Christian Religion (specify) _____
☐ None

10. Identify Native Language, if not English _____

11. Where are you living during the fall semester?

☐ With parents or relatives ☐ Other private home, apartment, or room ☐ University dormitory or university suites
☐ Campus apartments, single or married ☐ Fraternity or sorority house ☐ Other (specify) _____

12. Mark the college in which your probable major is offered.

☐ Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources ☐ Arts and Science ☐ Business Administration
☐ Education ☐ Engineering ☐ Human Environmental Sciences ☐ Undecided

13. How often do you read for leisure, e.g., newspapers, magazines, books:

I never read 1 2 3 4 5 6 I read daily

14. In general, how do you rate yourself as a reader: Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 Excellent

Fall 2003 Student Perceptions Instrument, Part II, III, IV and V

FALL 2003 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, PART II

Perceptions are your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about individuals, groups of people, situations, and/or events.

Twelve groups are presented on cards that follow.

1. After reading the group named on the top of each card, **immediately** record after the word 'descriptor' the first three words, phrases, or labels that come to mind about that group.
2. Mark the scale at the bottom of **each** card **before** going to the following card.
3. **Read** and **complete all cards in the order** they are presented.

African American / Black

___ Descriptor #1 _____

___ Descriptor #2 _____

___ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

American Indian

___ Descriptor #1 _____

___ Descriptor #2 _____

___ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

Asian American

___ Descriptor #1 _____

___ Descriptor #2 _____

___ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

Hispanic / Latino(a)

___ Descriptor #1 _____

___ Descriptor #2 _____

___ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

Middle Eastern

___ Descriptor #1 _____

___ Descriptor #2 _____

___ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

White / Caucasian

____ Descriptor #1 _____

____ Descriptor #2 _____

____ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

FALL 2003 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, PART IV

If your degree of interaction with **African American, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, or White** was marked as 1, 2, or 3 on the gray cards, write a brief reason below indicating why you do not associate with these racial groups.

Christian / Roman Catholic

____ Descriptor #1 _____

____ Descriptor #2 _____

____ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

Judaism / Jewish

____ Descriptor #1 _____

____ Descriptor #2 _____

____ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

Muslim / Islamic

____ Descriptor #1 _____

____ Descriptor #2 _____

____ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

Christian / Protestant

____ Descriptor #1 _____

____ Descriptor #2 _____

____ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very Little								Very Much

FALL 2003 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, PART IV

If your degree of interaction with **Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim** was marked as 1, 2, or 3 on the gray cards, write a brief reason below indicating why you do not associate with these religious groups.

Homosexual Man / Gay

___ Descriptor #1 _____

___ Descriptor #2 _____

___ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very								Very
Little								Much

Homosexual Woman / Lesbian

___ Descriptor #1 _____

___ Descriptor #2 _____

___ Descriptor #3 _____

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree of interaction you have had with someone from this group

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very								Very
Little								Much

FALL 2003 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, PART IV

If your degree of interaction with **gay men or lesbian women** was marked as 1, 2, or 3 on the gray cards, write a brief reason below indicating why you do not associate with these sexual orientation groups.

FALL 2003 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, PART III

- Go back through all gray cards.
- On the short line, ___, in front of the word, *Descriptor*, identify your descriptors as positive, neutral, or negative. Do not change any descriptors you initially wrote.
- Use the following codes:
 - + = positive (affirming, confirming, pleasant)
 - o = neutral (impartial or depends on when used)
 - = negative (disapproving, critical, judgmental)

FALL 2003 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS SURVEY, PART V

On a scale of 1 to 9, indicate the degree the following factors influence your perceptions about groups of people.

	Very Little									Very Much									
Parents / Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Friends / Peers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
School	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Church	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Papers/Magazines	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
TV/Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Books	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Movies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Music	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Sports	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Personal contact with someone from the group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										
Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9										

VITA

Miriam Alfarata Ward

Candidate for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Thesis: INCOMING COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL,
RELIGIOUS, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION GROUPS

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on Literacy/Reading

Biographical

Personal Data: Born in Concordia, Kansas, March 3, 1946, the daughter of LaRoy Michael and Mildred Viola (Kelly) Moore. Married Clement Edward Ward in Topeka, KS, January 8, 1972. Mother of Brian David Ward and Justin Andrew Ward.

Education: Received Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics and Liberal Arts: Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas in 1968; received a Master of Science degree in Home Economics Education: Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas in 1971; completed requirements for certification in Special Education: Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 1990; completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education Degree with a focus on Literacy/Reading Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July 2005.

Experience: County Extension Home Economist: Lyndon, Kansas; Home Economics Department Chair and Instructor: Washburn University of Topeka, Topeka, Kansas; Special Education Teacher: Stillwater Public Schools, Stillwater, Oklahoma; Graduate Teaching Assistant and Adjunct Instructor: Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

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Name: Miriam Alfarata Ward

Date of Degree: July, 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: INCOMING COLLEGE FRESHMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL,
RELIGIOUS, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION GROUPS

Pages in Study: 134

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction with Reading/Literacy Focus

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to describe incoming college freshmen's perceptions of racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups. Degree of association incoming college freshmen have with these groups and sources of information that influence perceptions were studied. Five hundred thirty-eight incoming college freshmen, most being 18 and 19 years old, participated in the study. Participants completed, a five-part instrument requesting demographic information, self-generated and self-coded descriptors for groups, and Likert-type scales indicating both degree of association with groups and impact of likely sources that influence perceptions. Content analysis, descriptive statistics, Chi Square, and Ordered Logistic Regression were used for analysis.

Findings and Conclusions: This study revealed six important findings. *First*, Descriptors used by participants to portray groups most often referenced personal characteristics or personality traits of targeted group members. *Second*, participants reported positive perceptions for Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, American Indian, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish groups. *Third*, positive perceptions of groups were more frequently associated with female participants and with participants who had had some association with the group. *Fourth*, the extent of association between participants and targeted groups tended to reflect the identified predominant campus racial and religious population and varied from minimal association with Muslims to much association with Caucasians. *Fifth*, 'lack of opportunity to interact' was the most frequently cited reason for not associating with groups. *Sixth*, perceptions were most influenced by personal contact with a member of the group and by participant's family members and participant's friends. Findings from this study can provide a springboard for campus leaders who wish to increase student acceptance of people from diverse cultures. Acceptance has the potential to advance cultural understanding and to contribute to positive campus climates which can enhance student recruitment, academic and social success of students, and student retention.