Author: Jer Chen

Title: Why Freshmen Segregate Themselves

About the Author: I am a freshman that came from an Asian origin but born in America. I live in a diverse neighborhood but I don’t get spent my time to get to know people around my community. I am not a very outgoing kind of person because I am shy around strangers. What I cherish the most is my family and friends.

Keywords: freshmen, segregation, comfort

Abstract: In my research, I have conducted three interviews and two observations. All three of my interviews are freshmen and took place in Blaisdell hall of Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall. The interviewees were not strangers to begin with. They were people that I have known since the beginning of the first semester. Before conducting each of my interviews, I would give them a brief summary as of what my research is about. My questions for the interviews consist of one of the most basic questions to get background knowledge of the interviewee. This is essential to my research because it is necessary to know what kind of community they have come from and how they were raised. By asking the interviewees how they made new friends or meet new people and how they spend time with them, I can get some knowledge as of what causes them to make those choices. Asking for the interviewees’ opinions on how to decrease the abundance of campus segregation and improve on getting students to be more comfortable around other races. I had observed Florida Avenue Resident Hall dining hall and Pennsylvania Avenue Hall dining hall because those are where freshmen would hangout since dormitories are mandatory for all incoming freshmen. Dining halls are also the place where people eat and at such a time, they tend to eat with people they are most comfortable being around with. Analyzing other texts would lead me to a more definite point of view on what kind of questions and observations I should make.

Initial Exercises:

Question: Why freshmen segregate themselves?

Plan: Is Comfort Zone Only Found In Segregation

Why do the majority of students on campus always get in their little
groups that only consist of their own race? I hope to find out why
students would have their comfort zone put up a borderline
between their race and others’. I want to know if language and
behavior takes part in why they won’t cross their borderline. This
issue isn’t something that just occurred to me recently. As a matter
of fact, I have been interested since I was back in high school
where the majority of the students were in their racial groups. When
this interest began, I started to notice more and more of these
racial group, and soon enough I noticed that I was taking

part in my own racial group. I have found it hard to join other racial group,
but I found it harder to try to get away from my own group. In an
IDEALS reading about international student segregation, it talked
about the students being homesick and their language barrier.
Learning this and reviewing back to my past observation, I want to
if there is a way to cross the borders and interact as if everyone is
the same.

In my research, I plan to observe students’ interaction within their
racial group and other racial groups. I would want to observe the
tone of their languages, their behaviors, and their reason for
getting involved. What I meant by the tone of their language, I
mean the way they speak because I know that people speak
differently to different people and situations. For example, students
talk freely to their friends and more mature to staff or faculty
members. It will become a difficulty to observe all sorts of racial
groups so I have decided to observe the groups that make up the
majority of the UIUC student population. This observation for the
sake of ethnography will bring me a new way of seeing things.

I believe that having interviews with the majority of the UIUC
student population will make up the majority of my research
because talking to someone privately or so will probably be better
than talking in a group. Having a face to face conversation will be
more comfortable for the person being interviewed because that
person will be able to express his/her thoughts than when that
person is being influenced by the group. The interviews will consist
of questions about comparing their comfort in their racial groups
with others. I will ask them about the language they use in the
different racial groups. By doing this interview, I believe that I will
learn more about the everyday people around me and how I could
do my best to get along with them.
The person I interviewed was my roommate and, he is also my friend. We lived in the same neighborhood and been through the same elementary school and high school. The reason I chose my first interview to be my roommate because I was interested in knowing how much do I know about this person and his thoughts, and I wanted to start out with a comfortable interview first. I wanted to try getting use to the atmosphere of starting and leading an interview.

During my interview, unfortunately, my interviewee and I were not alone. The interview took place in my dorm with three other people, who are the interviewee’s friends. Our conversation had been interrupted, and the interviewee’s thought have been disturbed quite a few time. However, I can see that the interviewee had taken my questions seriously despite the carefree atmosphere. Upon my first question, he referred his friends and family as being Asians with no hesitation. He mentioned that his family doesn’t get along well and there was absolutely no “family time.” It also seems that he doesn’t pay much attention to his community since he said that he knew nothing about it. On the third question, it seemed that he was getting more comfortable and was openly express his thoughts. He had a lot of expectations of a college life but as of now, only a minority was reached. He had thought that he would be able to experience new things and become more active. Even though that his expectations were not met, he gave a carefree expression in answering this question as if there is still time. The fourth question was quite short because he said he had a hard time trying to communicate with his friends back at his community. This is something I had expected because most of his friends are with him in college. When we got to the question about how he spend his time, he says that he spend his time with his old friends because they are more reliable. His thoughts on racism are that everybody is racist. He believes that it is impossible to have all racial groups to get along and just “let it flow.” On the last question, he instantly agreed to my statement about freshmen segregating themselves for comfort. He said, “Culture clashes” and “culture finds other culture to be more ‘different’ or disturbing.

It seems that freshmen getting harmonious and comfortable with others despite the knowledge of their race would be hard. The
reason why racism exists is because the major difference in culture. All cultures have different perceptive in each other, and this will be the “ideology and power” of racism. This state true because people of different race find Asians disgusting because of the food they eat are different and unthinkable.

Upon the results of my interview, I learned that he is highly conscious of the people around him and the people he hangs around with. He is especially conscious of the person’s race. Being a freshman, he is attempting to get along with other race despite the difficulty and doing so while making new friends of the same race because in his expectation of a college experience, he expected to make a variety of new friends. Even so, the undeniable fact of him being most comfortable around his own race still remains.

Observation of the Common Place for freshmen
The places I observe can be consider the most common place the majority of freshmen would go to. These places are the dining halls of Florida Avenue Resident Hall and Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall. The reason I chose these places because freshmen make the
majority of the dorm population, and my project is about freshmen segregation.

In the dining hall of Florida Avenue Resident Hall, I observed student employees, people coming into the dining hall, what people are doing, and where people are sitting. Most of the employees work in the kitchen where I can’t see them, but there was one Asian employee that was working away from the kitchen. It seemed that her job was to supply the empty baskets of tissues. I noticed that she would only supply tables that consist of Asians. She would supply other tables after the group of non-Asians leave. When people were swiped in, they were either coming alone or they were in a group of white, group of Asians, or a group of black. White groups and black groups are always talking while eating, and the Asian groups would only interact with each other when they are either finish or about to finish. Lastly, the most interesting thing I observe in the dining hall was the location people sat. The center of the room consisted of only white people, and people that make up the crust of the white group are Asians and black.

In the dining hall of Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall, I observed the same factors as I have done in the dining hall of Florida Avenue Resident Hall. The majority of student employees in this dining hall are black. This can also be said about the adult employees. People coming into the dining hall have the same factor as what I observed in Florida Avenue Resident Hall. People are coming either by themselves or in groups of their own race. What I also notice is that a majority of the people that came in a group still have their book bags or their purses. White and black would eat and talk at the same time while Asians would only communicate either after they are finished or near finish. Once again, I see that people segregate themselves because the dining hall is separated into four sections, and two sections are full with white people. The other section is full of Asians and the last is a mix.

The Asian employee seems to be very shy or very uncomfortable around other races since she wouldn’t supply the table that didn’t consist of Asians. The majority of employees in Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall are black, and this includes the student and adult employees. I felt that the way the employees interact was very natural since they were using the ghetto kind of English. What this could mean is that people of the same race stick together in their groups and their working place. In both dining halls, when people
are swiped in, they are usually in groups of the same race. This goes back to the idea that people of the same races sticks together because they are more comfortable that way. I say this because I noticed that groups of the same race is more active together than groups that are multicultural. In Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall, people coming in groups still have book bags with them. This could mean that they had the same class together, and decided to eat together. White and black people eating and talking at the same time just shows that their culture is different from the Asian culture because Asians don’t eat and talk at the same time. The most similar factor about my observation is the segregation. It seems that people are unconscious of choosing their surroundings because they probably want to be in an environment that felt like home.

These observations will be a great help to my research because I can see a lot of freshmen segregation. I learned that freshmen are always unconsciously sticking together through the choices they make. When there is a multicultural group together, they lack a lot more of active interaction than the same racial groups. Knowing this help enforce my idea that freshmen are more comfortable around their own race. That’s why when freshmen are choosing a table, they chooses a surrounding that feels mostly like home and avoiding the possible clashing of different cultures.

Discuss: Why Freshmen Segregate Themselves

Introduction

Each year there will always be a new group of freshmen that will arrive at the college they wanted to attend. They will be experiencing and adapting to a new environment as they begin their first semester. They will be expecting other students to be diverse, including themselves, since diversity is one of the main factors to a college. I am a freshman that was born in the United States, and I had lived through a very peaceful and diverse neighborhood. I began to notice segregation when I was back in high school because during class and lunch, where groups of one culture are always eating together. This remained true through all four years of my high school experience. After entering college, I didn’t expect segregation in college because movies and high school present college as a diverse place. College may consist of over 20,000 students of all kinds of culture, but they were excluding themselves from other cultures. I am as guilty as any
other students since I also tend to stick with my Asian friends and avoiding others. I wonder now what the cause for this isolation is. My research is to find the reasons for this lack of diversity, and it is important to know this because college plays a big role in encouraging diversity. College is a place of diversity because, once again, it is how movies and high school presented to us. Applications played a role in bringing the idea that college is diverse because of the variety of choices for you to choose your ethnicity. On Quad Day, I remember seeing all kind of people of different ethnicity. Then, I also remember seeing segregation in the clubs where the members only consist of a single ethnicity, but they seem like they were having a good time staying in their own racial group. Therefore, I claimed that the reason for freshmen segregation is because of comfort. People normally think of comfort as happiness and a being relaxed, but I define comfort as when a person is active, able to participate in the group, feel like they belong effortlessly, and being accepted. The possibility for diversity to occur is if we can somehow have diversity and comfort come together.

Methods

In my research, I have conducted three interviews and two observations. All three of my interviews are freshmen and took place in Blaisdell hall of Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall. The interviewees were not strangers to begin with. They were people that I have known since the beginning of the first semester. Before conducting each of my interviews, I would give them a brief summary as of what my research is about. My questions for the interviews consist of one of the most basic questions to get background knowledge of the interviewee. This is essential to my research because it is necessary to know what kind of community they have come from and how they were raised. By asking the interviewees how they made new friends or meet new people and how they spend time with them, I can get some knowledge as of what causes them to make those choices. Asking for the interviewees’ opinions on how to decrease the abundance of campus segregation and improve on getting students to be more comfortable around other races. I had observed Florida Avenue Resident Hall dining hall and Pennsylvania Avenue Hall dining hall because those are where freshmen would hangout since dormitories are mandatory for all incoming freshmen. Dining halls are also the place where people eat and at such a time, they tend
to eat with people they are most comfortable being around with. Analyzing other texts would lead me to a more definite point of view on what kind of questions and observations I should make.

Thoughts of Other Researchers on Segregation

In doing my research, I also looked at IDEAS articles and one article with no author titled “The Freshmen Experience.” This article mentioned that diversity is promoted by the administration providing all sorts of activities like dormitories, Greek systems, sports, and clubs. Even so, there are plenty of other opportunities for students to participate and become diverse, but there is no encouraging for students to participate. The reason there is segregation because the administration may be promoting diversity opportunities, but the administration don’t encourage students to participate. I agree to this because students need more than just programs to help them be more comfortable around other races.

In another IDEAS article, Quianna Hart, in “Diversity at Home: The Question of Racialized Lived Spaces on the University of Illinois Campus,” claims that a university is a place of new experience as freshmen adjust to the new environments, and they will be facing different culture everyday. She believes that diversity starts in dormitories, but it seems that her interviewees feel different because they don’t feel comfortable in their dorm. Instead, they feel secluded culturally from the rest of the residence, and “they will spend most of their time in segregated spaces” (3). The reasons the students secluded themselves is because they feel that in dormitories, they are being ignored and living there did not feel like home. Home is the place where people communicate, interact, and feel comfortable. Taking this into mind, with the lack of acceptance from other ethnicities and the lack of the home feeling, students will avoid the other race and seek out comfort by becoming segregated, where they are accepted.

Interview with Benny

Benny is an Asian and a friend back in high school, and now we are roommates. The interview took place in our dorm since it was the most convenient for us to have one. The reason I chose to interview Benny is because I believed that the interview with him will go smoothly since we are comfortable being around each other. In a way, he will be able to give me honest answers because
people trust friends more than strangers. When I asked him about his background, he responded that he had lived in a diverse neighborhood and went to a diverse high school. He was very close to his friends because he was not close to his family. Therefore, he was able to have close long term friends who he can talk with, share his thoughts, and joke around. Before coming to college, he had a lot of expectations for himself. He expected to be able to get a girlfriend, get involved, become active, participating in activities, and make an effort of becoming diverse by making friends with other race. But, things don’t always go as planned because instead of exceeding his expectations, he held onto his old Asian friends. He was not active, wasn’t participating in any activities, wasn’t getting involved, wasn’t seeking for a girlfriend, and wasn’t even trying to make new friends. It was interesting that he claimed that everyone is racist.

Benny had only stuck with his old friends that came from his neighborhood and high school. On choosing resident halls, we deliberately chose to live in the same resident hall and end up being his roommate and others as dorm mates. This importance of friendship could be the reason caused by the lack of closeness with his family. By sticking with his old friends, all Asians, he was unable to force himself to meet new people and make new friends. We can say that he was satisfied with what he already has. His expectation was influenced by movies because he believed that college was supposed to be in a certain way. What Benny expected was more of a fantasized or ideal college because he had not foreseen the racial tensions and cultural clashes exist in college. Therefore, he never really needed to adjust to the new environment because he ends up sticking with what he was most comfortable with, his old friends. The values of being a freshman are influenced by movies, and teachers telling stories about college. We know that freshman, before coming to college, have the possibility to start anew or stay the same. For freshmen chose to stay the same, they are hanging out with their old friends because they find support and acceptance from the old friends.

**Interview with Jay**

Like Benny, Jay is also an Asian and a friend back in high school. Our interview took place in his dorm it was his most comfortable place. Again, the reason I decided to interview a friend is because that their answers are more reliable than strangers. However, Jay
seemed to dislike being interviewed because he didn’t have much to say for each of my questions. He only had two things to say about his background. He lived under a roof of a “classical Asian” family. What he meant by “classical Asian” family is the stereotyping of an Asian family as strict, full of pride, and bossy. He also claimed that he lived in a neighborhood that consisted of only white people. It is very interesting that Jay also had expectations of the college experience to be like the movies. He also expected for the campus to be bigger, lots of “hot” girls, and seeing him self not being in his dorm as much. In college, instead of going out and getting involved, he goes hang out at his old friend’s dorm, his old friends are all Asians.

Even though he had the expectation to be diverse, he purposely chose to dorm with his old friends. Sticking to his old friends had allowed him to segregate himself from other races because it is more comfortable that way. Jay had been influenced by movies and teachers on how freshmen should experience their college life, but the teachers and movies never bring up the fact that in reality, college is full of segregation, racial tension, and cultural clashes. This sense of betrayal would only send freshmen to segregate themselves. The values for freshmen that stay segregated will receive support and acceptance. There won’t be a need to put up an effort to change what you already have.

Interview with Healy

Healy, and African American, is someone I met back in my first semester as a college student. Throughout those days, we didn’t really talk to each other or hangout. Although he is not someone like Benny or Jay, he is also not a stranger. This interview took place in Healy’s dorm where was most comfortable. The reason I interview Healy is because I believed that it will lead my research to a better and definite conclusion if I have a different point of view. When asking about his background, he responded that he was raised in a segregated community and had a segregated education. He didn’t have many friends that came with him to college, so he started out his semester being alone. Even so, Healy expected to have a different experience from living in his home and from high school. He expected to be more independent, make new friends, making a future path, and getting away from home. In college, he claimed that he was able to make friends, become independent, and experience diversity, something that he was not able to
experience back at his high school and home.

Healy was able to find comfort in diversity that led him to exceed his expectations. With the lack of old friends being with him, he was forced to meet new people and seek new friends. His life experience of segregation in his community had brought knowledge that diversity is not something that can be easily obtained. This helped him realize that college is diverse from the outside, but segregated on the inside. Realizing that the campus is segregated, Healy was able to make the next move into becoming more diverse. Freshman that comes to a college without any friends will have to put up an effort in making their experience enjoyable. They will usually start anew because they have nothing to begin with.

**Observation of the dining hall in FAR**

My first observation is in the dining hall of Florida Avenue Resident Hall. I chose to observe this dining hall because due to the requirement of freshmen staying in dormitories, they are served food in the dining halls. Dining halls is also a time when freshmen will become comfortable with the people they eat with and the time when they will communicate and interact. I observed student employees, people coming into the dining hall, what activities people are doing, and where people decide to sit. Most of the employees work in the kitchen where I can’t see them, but there was one Asian employee that was working away from the kitchen. It seemed that her job was to supply the empty baskets of tissues. I noticed that she would only supply tables that consist of Asians. She would supply other tables after the group of non-Asians leave. This kind of action had happened more than three times. When people were swiped in, they were either coming alone or they were in a group of white, group of Asians, or a group of black. White groups and black groups are always talking while eating and the Asian groups would only interact with each other when they are either finished eating or about to finish. The most interesting thing I observe in the dining hall was the location people sat. The center of the room consisted of only white people, and people that make up the crust of the white group are Asians and black.

The Asian employee seems very uncomfortable when she is around other race since she wouldn’t supply the tables that weren’t a group of Asians. The fact that White and African Americans are
eating and interacting at the same time, and Asians would only interact when they are either finished eating or about finish suggests their cultural difference. If they were to eat together, they might think of each other as an annoyance. By segregating, freshmen are able to avoid the clashing of cultures and the possible conflicts.

**Observation of the dining hall in PAR**

My last observation was in the dining hall of Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall. I chose to observe this dining hall because it is filled with freshmen everyday, and this is the place where I often eat my meals. By observing the dining hall, I will gain a better knowledge of the surrounds at the place I eat. I observed the same factors as I have done in the dining hall of Florida Avenue Resident Hall. I noticed that the majority of student employees in this dining hall are African Americans. People coming into the dining hall are in segregated groups. What I also notice is that a majority of the people that came in a group still have their book bags or their purses. White and black would eat and talk at the same time while Asians would only communicate either after they are finished or nearly finished. The design of the dining hall is quite interesting because to me it seems like it is divided into four sections, one section per corner. In each section, I see that the segregated groups are sitting in their segregated sections. White takes up most of the top–left and top–right and bottom–left, Asian takes up most of the bottom–right, and African Americans are scatter everywhere.

A freshman that comes into the dining hall with their book bag or purse suggests that they had just come back from class or that they are going to eat and go to class. However, that freshman was with his/her segregated group with their book bag or purse. This suggests that they are segregated in dining halls and in class. Freshmen in segregated groups show that their friendship consists of eating together and going to class together. This shares the value of supporting and comforting each other.

**Conclusion**

Comfort is a very important aspect in diversity. I concluded that comfort should be the very first thing brought upon freshmen. Instead of promoting diversity, the administration should promote comfort because the reason behind segregation is comfort, and if
comfort is provided in diversity, all freshmen would be able to get along and it will be the beginning of the prosperity of diversity. The research in “The Freshmen Experience” and “Diversity at Home: The Question of Racialized Lived Spaces on the University of Illinois Campus” claims that freshmen are segregated with a vague reason while my discovery of comfort can explain freshmen segregation in dormitories and dining halls. Although that comfort can explain a lot of the reasons for freshmen segregation, there is still further research that can be done like interviewing a more variety of freshmen. I think it would be great if future researchers can get information from others than just freshmen.

Question for the Interview

1. Tell me a little about your background. How would you describe your family? Community? Friends?

2. Before coming to college, what were your thoughts on being a freshman in college? Is your college experience meeting your expectation?

3. What was the hardest thing to adapt to during your first semester?

4. How did you make friends or meet new people?

5. Now that you are in college, how do you communicate with your friends back at your community? What do you and your friends talk about?

6. Who do you spend most of your time with? How do you spend your time with he/she/them? Why?

7. What factors led you to decide to come to UIUC?

8. I find myself most comfortable when I am around my own race. Do you think that freshmen, adapting to a new environment, would tend to interact with their own race or segregate themselves because it is more comfortable that way?
9. What will help to make things more diverse?

10. What will you do to be more diverse?

EUI Links: Annotated Bibliography


The researcher explores the students’ dormitory experiences and relating this experience with the University’s promotion of diversity. One of his interviewees mentions that students that are awkward are usually hard to get along with. Students that have their own personal idea of how college experience should be don’t really get involved with the activities. The researcher had notice that there are dormitories that are more active than other dormitories. The possibility of students’ first time getting involved will become awkward for them. The researcher sees that college is a place for learning of the community, diversity, and involvement. This is helpful for my paper because the reasons behind students getting involved or not in activities can explain why students segregate themselves.


Hart states that the basic idea of being diverse is to be able to adapt to the new environment, the college experience. She starts out defining his definition of diversity and where and how it starts in the college life. She directs this connection to the living spaces of freshmen, in other words, the dormitories. Her interviewees’ responses all say that the housing and dormitories doesn’t really promote diversity and that it doesn’t really give of this home feeling. Using this research paper, I have more support for my thesis on why freshmen are segregating themselves.

Hibbler, Sharrell. "In which university spaces are students more likely to interact across racial/ethnic lines?" [Ideals.uiuc.edu. 09
Hibbler researches the communications and actions between racial groups in a variety of places. She is working on finding where students will break their boundary and interact with other races. By doing so, she describes each of her interviews and the observation. In her works, she discovers that racial group are taking a certain area in the quad and setting a boundary for themselves. In her observation, she noticed that minority would segregate themselves for “supportive network,” and diverse groups are more of a study group than just for hanging out. This is useful because her discoveries will be helpful in supporting my ideas on the reasons for self segregation.


Novak explores diversity within the campus housing, and he defines the consequences of being diverse or not. In his paper, he mentions that the college experience will become the first hand experience of diversity, and he backs it up with the book Making The Most of College by Richard J. Light. Then, he goes into the details of his interviewees. The questions consist of explanations for the reasons behind them and the interviewees’ responses to the questions. He mentions that his view was too fixed, and that resident halls are a big factor of student being self segregated. I find this research paper useful because it seems to be a great example for writing my paper. The discussion about diversity and self segregation will really help my research on freshmen segregation.


The researcher, being an international student himself, believes that international students are segregating themselves and that they are segregating base on their culture. The researcher goes in detail about his observation at resident halls, classes, a church, and the
Illini Union. The researcher’s research had proven that to get along with another race, all you need is to be fluent in their culture. The paper also reveals that discrimination plays a big role to students segregating themselves. This paper will be useful for my bigger project because the researcher’s idea about culture and discrimination playing a role in segregation is the same reason as mines. The observations in the resident halls can help enforce my observations since we observe the same place.