

STUDENTS' BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS AND INTERCULTURAL ATTITUDES

The relationship between university students' Background
Characteristics and Intercultural Attitudes

Ingrid Wagendorp

Rand Afrikaans University



Abstract

In an exploratory field study, the authors examined relations among intercultural/intergroup attitudes, gender, residence vs. day-house membership amongst students, cultural group membership and home language. The sample consisted of 541 first and second year psychology volunteer students at RAU, and included male and female students from the broad cultural groups (Western, African, Middle Eastern/Muslim and Indian/Asian cultures), and the three main language groups (English, Afrikaans and African groups), as well as residents and day-students from various faculties and years of study. The assessment instrument comprised of a Semantic Differential Scale (SDS) (Nieuwoudt, 1973), designed to measure attitudes towards five broad cultural groups. The independent variables included in the analyses of the data were: gender, resident vs. day-students, cultural group membership/orientation, and language. Males and females differed significantly from one-another in terms of their perceptions of the Indian/Asian cultural group. Resident and day-students differed significantly from one another in terms of their perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans and the Indigenous African cultural groups. The five cultural-orientation groups and the three language groups differed significantly from one another in terms of their perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English and Indigenous African cultural groups. The results led to the conclusion that cultural and language group memberships provide important sources of influence on intercultural attitudes amongst students in South Africa.



The relationship between university students' Background Characteristics and Intercultural Attitudes

Cultural diversity is one of the most important topics in social research. In South Africa, the topic of cultural diversity and cross-cultural relations are of particular significance as individuals are confronted with an increasingly diverse environment at schools, universities, and in the workplace.

In light of the broader socio-political changes in South Africa, the question arises as to the ways in which South African students perceive and evaluate cultural groups, and to what extent certain biographical variables influence these perceptions.

The questions concerning the characteristics of group perceptions and the variables influencing the ways in which cultural groups perceive one another, are of both theoretical and practical significance. It is important in terms of theoretical significance that certain theories are able to offer powerful conceptual tools for understanding intergroup perceptions and behaviours. On a practical level, it is important that research provides an understanding of such problems as intergroup conflict and discrimination. Identifying important variables implicated in the development of negative group perceptions may have implications for social policies and interventions which are aimed at the improvement of cross-cultural relations.

A wide range of local and international studies relating to intergroup attitudes have been documented (Mynhardt, 2002; Segal et al., 1999; Smith & Bond, 1998). However, relatively few of these studies have sought to compare attitudes across cultural groups. The majority of the attitude studies in South Africa have focused on the group perceptions of single cultural groups in terms of their attitudes towards their own and various out-groups (Foster & Nel, 1991). The generalizability of these research studies can thus be questioned in terms of the representation of the broad cultural-orientation groups in South Africa.

In view of the extent of the problem of intergroup relations in South Africa, there is a great need for wide-ranging field research on intercultural/ intergroup attitudes involving a broad range of cultural groups.

The Social Identity Theory

The complexity of the problem of intergroup relations has led to a number of theoretical approaches relating to the field. The Social Identity Theory has recently achieved much popularity in social psychology as it presents an attempt to integrate individual and group factors in an explanation of intergroup relations and intergroup attitudes (Aronson et al., 2004; Mynhardt, 2002; Smith & Bond, 1998).

The value of the Social Identity Theory is that it looks at intergroup phenomena at the analytic level of the social groups. Intergroup attitudes are seen as broadly shared or consensual within social groups. The Social Identity Theory thus specifies the social parameters and normative patterns that give rise to particular intergroup attitudes (Aronson et al., 2004; Hogg, 2003).

Within the framework of the Social Identity Theory, intergroup attitudes are discussed in terms of the processes of social categorisation in which people are classified on the basis of certain characteristics. The central tenet of this perspective is that categorization and social comparison generates specific group behaviours such as intergroup differentiation, in-group favouritism, and stereotypic perceptions of the in-group and the out-group. These processes are rooted in the desire for individuals to maintain a positive social identification with the in-group and a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups (Aronson et al, 2004; Hogg, 2003; Mynhardt, 2002).

The Social Identity Theory is of particular relevance to South Africa where rigid group boundaries have been drawn on the basis of ethnic and cultural markers. In the South African context, cultural group memberships provide individuals with norms and boundaries that are responsible for producing particular forms of social behaviour, such as group solidarity,

cohesiveness and group favouritism. This may be very vivid in the case of resident students living in close proximity to members of other cultural groups.

Intergroup attitude studies

A wide range of local and international studies relating to intergroup attitudes have been documented. However, relatively few of these studies have sought to compare attitudes across diverse cultural groups. Previous attitude studies in South Africa highlight the influence of cultural and language group memberships and identifications on the perceptions and attitudes of one's own and other cultural groups (Appelgryn & Bornman, 1996; Bornman & Mynhardt, 1991; Bornman 1995; 1999; Mynhardt, 2002; Nieuwoudt & Plug, 1983; Thiele, 1988). These studies suggest that intergroup attitudes are widely and consistently held amongst members of the same cultural groups.

In general, previous intergroup attitude studies in South Africa have indicated that all cultural groups provide the most favourable evaluations of their own cultural group. Non-Western cultural groups are given the least favourable evaluations as viewed by the Western-English and Western-Afrikaans cultural groups. The Western-English group however appear to be more tolerant in their perceptions of the Non-Western cultures, in comparison with the Western-Afrikaans group. The African and Indian/Asian groups differentiate clearly in their perceptions of Western-English and Western-Afrikaans cultural groups, providing the most favourable perceptions of Western-English cultural group (Appelgryn & Bornman, 1996; Bornman and Mynhardt, 1991; Bornman 1995; 1999; HSRC, 1985; Mynhardt, 2002; Nieuwoudt & Plug, 1983; Thiele, 1988)..

A limitation of previous group attitude studies in South Africa is that the majority of these studies have focused on the attitudes of single ethno-cultural groups towards a target group, or towards a number of target groups. Only a handful of these studies have investigated the attitudes of the broad cultural groups in relation to one another (Foster & Nel, 1991). Such an exclusive focus on single ethno-cultural groups gives us only part of what we need to know in order to understand the relationships between the cultural groups in South Africa.

Research objectives

In accordance with the problem statement as mentioned above, the aim of this research is largely exploratory. The specific objectives of the study will be to explore intergroup attitudes and related variables, amongst resident and non-resident psychology students at the Rand Afrikaans University.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Ho₁: There is no statistically significant difference between the male and female participants in respect of their SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Ha₁: There is a statistically significant difference between the male and female participants in respect of their SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Hypothesis 2

Ho₂: There is no statistically significant difference between the resident students and the day (non-resident) students in respect of their SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Ha₂: There is a statistically significant difference between the resident students and the day (non-resident) students in respect of the SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Hypothesis 3

Ho₃: There are no statistically significant differences between the Indigenous African, the combined Middle-Eastern (Muslim) and Indian/Asian groups, as well as the Western-English, Western-Afrikaans and Westernised-African groups, in respect of their SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Ha₃: There are statistically significant differences between the Indigenous African, the combined Middle-Eastern (Muslim) and Indian/Asian groups, as well as the Western-English, Western-Afrikaans and Westernised-African groups in respect of their SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Hypothesis 4

Ho₄ There are no statistically significant differences between the Afrikaans, English and African language speakers with regard to their SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Ha₄: There are statistically significant differences between the Afrikaans, English and African language speakers with regard to their SDS attitude scores towards the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Asian/Indian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim), and Indigenous African cultural groups respectively.

Method

Design

The study can be described as an exploratory field study (Newman, 2000) investigating the relationships between a variety of biographical factors and intergroup attitudes. It took the form of a questionnaire survey that was undertaken within the Department of Psychology at RAU, by the researcher together with the study supervisor.

Procedure

The survey was conducted with 1st and 2nd year psychology volunteer students at RAU during August and September 2003. The participants were informed about the nature of the study, they were informed that their participation would be voluntary, and the anonymity and confidentiality of the data was guaranteed. The questionnaires were completed within the first 30 minutes of a scheduled psychology practical under the supervision of the researcher and the study supervisor. A letter of informed consent explaining the nature of the study was distributed to the participants together with the questionnaire. All the students who were present at the time the questionnaires were administered willingly participated by signing the letter and completing the questionnaires.

Participants

The sample consisted of 541 volunteer students from 1st and 2nd year psychology courses. This sample included both male and female students from a broad range of language and cultural groups and of various age groups, faculties and year of study.

There was a sharp difference between the proportion of male and female respondents and the proportion of the respondents registered within the Faculty of Arts compared to the proportion of the respondents registered within one of the other faculties. Females formed 80.8% of the sample

and males formed 19.2 % of the sample. This finding is in line with many psychological research studies making use of volunteer students, and may also indicate a greater proportion of female Psychology students in general. The majority of the research sample (75.5%) were registered within the Faculty of Arts, and only 24.5% of the sample were registered within one of the other faculties. Due to practical constraints, these were the only volunteer Psychology students from other faculties that could be accessed through their registration in more than one faculty. Approximately 60% of the sample were in their first academic year of study and approximately 40% of the sample were in their 2nd or third year of study.

As the effect of contact within the student residences compared to the day-houses was of special interest, the resident students and day-students were treated as separate independent groups. A relatively small proportion (18.8%) of the sample were resident students and 81.2% of the sample were day-students. Approximately 56 % of the sample were 19 years and younger and approximately 43% of the sample were 20 years and older.

The first/home language groups included in the analyses were African, English and Afrikaans speaking groups. As only a small number of students indicated that they spoke an Indian/Asian or Middle-Eastern (Muslim) language as a first/home language, these respondents were omitted from the analyses. The majority of the respondents spoke an English language as a first language (46.6%), a relatively smaller proportion of the respondents spoke Afrikaans (27.7%) or an African language (25.7%), as a first language.

In order to classify the broad cultural groups in the present study, the respondents were asked to indicate which broad cultural group viz. Western, Indian/Asian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim) (Muslim) and African, they identified with the most. This, together with the respondents' home/first-learned language, was used as an indication of the respondents' cultural-group membership/cultural-orientation. In order to incorporate a group of respondents who identified themselves with a Western cultural-orientation, yet they spoke an African language as a first language, a new variable was created. This was referred to as the Westernised-African group. As only a small proportion of the respondents identified with a Middle-Eastern (Muslim) cultural-orientation,

these respondents were classified together with the Indian/Asian group. The final cultural groups included in the analysis were: Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Indian/Asian, Indigenous African and Westernised-African groups. The majority of the sample consisted of Western-English (34.8%), Western-Afrikaans (25.7%) and Indigenous African (19.4%) cultural groups, and a relatively smaller proportion of the sample consisted of Westernised-African (8.8%) and Indian/Asian (11.4%) cultural groups.

Apparatus

Data was collected using several measures. A Semantic Differential Attitude Scale (SDS) (Nieuwoudt, 1973), and other measures specifically designed by the researcher. For the purposes of the present study, only information pertaining to the demographic variables and the Semantic Differential Attitude Scale will be considered. A questionnaire was specifically developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was compiled in such a way as to enable the measure to be administered to different groups of participants as a self-administered task.

The purpose of the questionnaire was outlined on the first page. Respondents were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. The first section of the questionnaire required the participants to provide certain biographical information about themselves. It was intended that this information would offer an indication of the variation of the responses according to the respondents' gender, membership of a student resident or student day-house (proximity and intimacy of contact with other cultural groups), cultural-orientation/ group membership and first/home language. An approximate measure of cultural-orientation/group membership was identified in terms of the participants' broad cultural-orientation/identification and their home language.

The following section of the questionnaire described in simple language the nature of the rating procedure that was to be done on the Semantic Differential Scale, instructions on how the task was to be carried out, together with examples. This was followed by five identical Semantic Differential Attitude Scales (Nieuwoudt, 1973) designed to measure the respondents' perceptions

of Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Indian/Asian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim) and Indigenous African cultural groups.

Fifteen pairs of bipolar adjectives/adverbs were chosen from the original list of Nieuwoudt's (1973) scale which are easily understandable to students of all the cultural groups within the present study and which had high factor loadings on the evaluative dimension. To these were added five pairs of bipolar items which the researcher believed would be relevant to the present study. These included: open-minded - closed-minded; flexible - rigid; accepting - rejecting; argumentative -co-operative; courteous - rude, and harmonious - aggressive.

The 20 pairs of bipolar adjective/adverbs were incorporated into the questionnaire that listed the cultural groups, each of which would be evaluated by the participants using the same Semantic Differential Scale. Great care was taken with regard to the arrangement of the target cultural groups and their accompanying scales within the questionnaire. The order of the scales were kept constant across all the items to facilitate the scoring. The poles of approximately half of the scales selected at random were reversed. This was done to prevent the tendency of scale point position preference during the process of rating. For ease of interpreting the attitude scores, calculations were carried out on the scale point average for each respondent towards each cultural group. The mean total attitude score towards each cultural group ranged from a value of one (most negative), to a value of seven (most positive).

The SDS items were subjected to a factor analysis as a verification of their construct validity following the actual data collection. The items pertaining to each cultural group demonstrated adequate factor structures and all of the items pertaining to each cultural group loaded higher than .30 on the principle factors extracted for each case. A second-order factor analysis of each of the five total SDS scores pertaining to each cultural group indicated that 65.5 % and 57.2 % of the total variation of the responses for the Western-Afrikaans SDS scores and Western-English SDS scores respectively, were explained by a single factor, and 58.2%, 66.9%, and 68.4 % of the total variance of the responses for the Indian/ Asian, Middle-Eastern (Muslim) and Indigenous African SDS respectively, were explained by a single factor. The internal consistency reliability

(Cronbach alpha) coefficients pertaining to the first second-order factor of each of the five cultural groups were .81 for the Western-Afrikaans cultural group, .82 for the Western-English cultural group, .82 for the Indian/Asian cultural group, .84 for the Middle-Eastern (Muslim) cultural group and .82 for the Indigenous African cultural group.

The above questionnaire was designed to generate a large amount of information. An in-depth analysis of all this data was beyond the scope of this report. Thus, various sections of data were either ignored or condensed. Any information not utilised in this study will form the basis of further analyses and articles.

Data analysis

Data analyses for this study were performed using several statistical techniques. The first consisted of simple descriptive statistics (viz. age, gender, faculty of registration, resident vs. day-student, cultural-orientation/group membership and language), computed for the demographic variables and the dependent measures, which were checked for normality of distribution. This provided a quantitative picture of the data collected from the participants. The independent variables included in the analysis were: 1) gender, 2) student resident vs. day-house membership (proximity of contact variable), 3) cultural identification/group membership (as a function of home-language and identification with a general cultural-orientation), and 4) language. The dependent measures were the SDS scores pertaining to each of the five cultural groups included in the questionnaire.

Levene's test was applied to provide an indication of the equality (homogeneity) of variance of the dependent variables across the groups. Subsequently, between-group comparisons were then conducted. Differences in the attitude scores for the male and female respondents, as well as resident and day-students, were analysed by means of ttests for independent groups. ANOVA and subsequent post-hoc analyses were used to identify differences between the scores of the five cultural-orientation groups, as well as the three language groups. Post-hoc Scheffe' tests were used for the multiple comparisons between the five cultural-orientation groups and the three

language groups, in those instances where the statistically significant value of Levene's test indicated a value that was $p \geq .05$. Dunnett T₃ tests were applied when the statistically significant value for Levene's test was $p \leq .05$.

The predetermined decisional level of statistical significance was set at $p = .05$. In the cases where the observed significance values are on a smaller probability level, for example $p = .01$ or $.001$, these values exceed the required levels of statistical significance and are therefore regarded as highly significant.

Results

Hypothesis 1: differences between male and female participants

The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the SDS attitude scores of the male and female respondents for the perceptions of Western-Afrikaans, Western-English, Middle-Eastern (Muslim) and Indigenous African cultural groups. Statistically significant differences between the SDS scores of males and female respondents were indicated for the perceptions of the Indian/Asian cultural group, viz. $p=.027$. The female respondents indicated a significantly more favourable perception of the Indian/ Asian cultural group ($m=4.4719$) than the male respondents ($m=4.2201$).

Hypothesis 2: Differences between resident and day-students

No statistically significant differences between the resident and day-students were indicated for the perceptions of the Western-English, Indian/ Asian and Middle-Eastern (Muslim) cultural groups. Statistically significant differences between the resident and day-students were indicated in terms of the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans ($p=.009$) and Indigenous African ($p=.030$) cultural groups. The resident students indicated a statistically more favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group ($m=4.8259$) than the day-students ($m=4.5640$), and the day-

students indicated a statistically more favourable perception of the Indigenous African cultural group ($m=4.3054$) than resident students ($m=4.0544$).

Hypothesis 3: Differences between the five cultural groups

Significant differences for the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group were indicated for the comparisons of the Indigenous African group in comparison with the Western-English, the Western-Afrikaans and the Westernised-African group. The significance values were equal for all three group comparisons, viz. $p=.000$. The Indigenous African group had a significantly less favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group ($m=4.0159$) in comparison with the Western-English ($m=4.6073$), the Western-Afrikaans ($m=5.0867$), and the Westernised-African ($m=4.8539$) groups' perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. The Indigenous African group did not differ significantly from the Indian/ Asian group in their perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group.

Significant differences for the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group were indicated for the Indian/ Asian group in comparison with the Western-Afrikaans and Westernised-African groups. The significance values being $p=.000$ and $p=.025$ respectively. The Indian/Asian group provided a significantly less favourable perception ($m=4.3610$) of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group than the Western-Afrikaans ($m=5.0867$) and the Westernised-African ($m=4.8539$) groups. No statistically significant differences for the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans culture were indicated for the Indian/Asian group in comparison with the Western-English group.

Statistically significant differences for the perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group were indicated for the comparisons between the Western-English group and the Western-Afrikaans group, viz. $p=.000$. The Western-Afrikaans group had a significantly more favourable perception of their own cultural group ($m=5.0867$) than the Western-English group's ($m=4.6073$) perceptions of them. No significant differences were indicated for the Western-English and Westernised-African group's perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans culture.

Statistically significant differences for the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans group were indicated for the comparisons between the Western-Afrikaans group with the Indigenous African, the Indian/ Asian and the Western-English groups, the significance values being equal for all three comparisons, viz. $p=.000$. The Western-Afrikaans group indicated a significantly more favourable perception of their own cultural group ($m=5.0867$), in comparison with the Indigenous African ($m=4.0159$), Indian/Asian ($m=4.3610$) and the Western-English ($m=4.6073$) groups' perceptions of them.

The results indicate that there are significant differences between the Western-English and the Indian/Asian groups, viz. $p=.02$, and between the Western-English and the Western-Afrikaans group, viz. $p=.000$, for the perceptions of the Western-English cultural group. The Western-English group indicated a significantly more favourable perception of their own cultural group ($m=5.0356$) in comparison with the Indian/ Asian ($m=4.6488$) and the Western-Afrikaans ($m=4.6275$) groups' perceptions of them. No significant differences between the other cultural-groups were indicated for the perceptions of the Western-English cultural group.

Statistically significant differences for the perception of the Indigenous African cultural group were indicated for the Indigenous African group in comparison with the Indian/Asian ($p=.027$), the Western-English ($p=.000$), the Western-Afrikaans ($p=.000$) and the Westernised African ($p=.012$) groups. The Indigenous African group indicated a significantly more favourable perception of their own cultural group ($m=4.7824$) than the Indian/Asian ($m=4.2528$), the Western-English ($m=4.1945$), the Western-Afrikaans ($m=3.9296$) and the Westernised-African ($m=4.1597$) groups' perceptions of them. No significant differences for the perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group were indicated for the comparisons between the four out-groups.

Hypothesis 4: Differences between the three language groups

A significant difference for the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group was indicated for the African and Afrikaans language groups, viz. $p=.000$. The Afrikaans group indicated a significantly more favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group ($m=5.0537$)

than the African language group ($m=4.3119$). No significant differences in the perceptions of Western-Afrikaans cultural group were indicated for the comparisons between the African and the English language groups.

A significant difference for the perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group was indicated for the comparison of the English and Afrikaans language groups ($p=.000$). The Afrikaans language group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group ($m=5.0537$) than the English language group ($m=4.5097$).

A significant difference for the perceptions of the Western-English cultural group was indicated for the English and the Afrikaans language groups, viz. $p=.000$. The English group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Western-English cultural group ($m=4.9660$) than the Afrikaans language group ($m=4.6199$). No significant difference in the perceptions of the Western-English cultural group was indicated for the comparisons of the English and the African language groups.

A significant difference in the perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group was indicated for the African and English language groups, viz. $p=.005$. The African language group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Indigenous African cultural group ($m=4.5844$) than the English language group ($m=4.2363$). A statistically significant difference in the perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group was indicated for the comparison of the African and the Afrikaans language groups, viz. $p=.000$. The African language group had a significantly more favourable attitude of the Indigenous African cultural group ($m=4.5844$) than the Afrikaans group ($m=3.9392$). A statistically significant difference in the perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group for the comparisons of the English and the Afrikaans groups was indicated, viz. $p=.018$. The English language group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Indigenous African cultural group ($m =4.2363$) than the Afrikaans language group ($m=3.9392$).

Discussion

It would appear that the very real social stratifications and socio-political discrimination still present in South Africa may be leading to interesting results with respect to the assessment of the perceptions of the broad cultural groups. The assessment of the SDS attitude scores, in terms of the independent variables included in the analysis, suggest that issues of cultural group identity and cultural group memberships play an important role in the perceptions of the broad cultural groups in South Africa.

In reference to Hypothesis (H_{01}), the results indicated no statistically significant differences between the SDS attitude scores of the male and female respondents for the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans, the Western-English, the Middle-Eastern and the African cultural groups. Statistically significant differences in the SDS scores of the male and female respondents were indicated for the perceptions of the Indian/Asian cultural group.

The results suggest that the male and female respondents do not differ significantly in their perceptions of the cultural groups, (with the exception of the perceptions of the Indian/Asian cultural group). The reason for the significantly more favourable perception of the Indian/Asian cultural group, as perceived by the female respondents, in comparison with the male respondents, is unclear. It is possible that the more favourable perception of the female respondents towards the Indian/Asian cultural group is an indication of social desirability.

In reference to Hypothesis (H_{02}), significant differences between the resident and day-students were identified in terms of their perceptions of Western-Afrikaans and Indigenous African cultural groups. No significant differences between the resident and day-students were identified for the perceptions of the other three cultural groups.

The results suggest that the differences between the SDS attitude scores of the resident and day-students may reflect a greater proportion of Western students within the residences and a greater

proportion of Indigenous African students within the day-houses. Resident students had a statistically more favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group and a statistically less favourable perception of the Indigenous African cultural group in comparison to the day-students. In this regard, the attitudes of the resident students are thought to reflect underlying feelings of being threatened by the increasing number of Indigenous African students within the residences. The less favourable perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group amongst the resident students may also suggest that contact between the cultural groups within the residences does not foster positive relations, and thus encourages negative stereotyping of the minority (Indigenous African) cultural group.

In reference to Hypothesis (H₀₃), significant differences in the SDS attitude scores for perceptions of Western-Afrikaans, Western-English and Indigenous-African cultural groups were found between the cultural groups (as indicated by the ANOVA and post-hoc test comparisons). No significant differences between the cultural groups were indicated for the perceptions of the Indian/Asian and Middle-Eastern (Muslim) cultural groups.

The greatest degree of variability in the SDS attitude scores of the five cultural groups was noted for the perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. The Western-Afrikaans group had a significantly more favourable perception of their own cultural group compared to the Western-English, Indian/Asian and Indigenous-African groups' perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. The Westernised-African cultural group did not however differ significantly from the Western-Afrikaans group or the Western-English group in their perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. Interestingly, the Westernised-African group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group than the Indian/Asian and Indigenous-African groups. The Indigenous-African group had the least favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. Their attitude scores were significantly less favourable in comparison to the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English and Westernised-African groups. The Indigenous-African group did not however differ significantly from the Indian/Asian group in their perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group.

With regards to the perceptions of the Western-English cultural group, the Western-English group held significantly more favourable attitudes towards their own cultural group compared to the attitudes of the Western-Afrikaans and Indian/Asian groups of the Western-English group. No significant differences in the perceptions of the Western-English cultural group were found for the comparisons between the Western-English group with the Indigenous-African and the Westernised-African groups. The four out-groups did not differ significantly from one-another in their perceptions of the Western-English cultural group. There thus appears to be a relative amount of consistency between the cultural groups in terms of their perceptions of the Western-English cultural group. All five cultural groups held relatively favourable perceptions of the Western-English cultural group.

With regards to the perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group, the Indigenous-African group held significantly more favourable perceptions of their own cultural group than the four other cultural groups had of them. The four out-groups did not differ significantly from one another in their perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group. Thus, as in the case of the perceptions of the Western-English cultural group, there seems to be a relative amount of consistency amongst the out-groups in their perceptions of the Indigenous-African cultural group.

The cultural groups did not differ significantly from one another in their perceptions of the Indian/Asian and Middle-Eastern cultural groups. This suggests that there was a fair amount of agreement amongst the respondents in their perceptions of the Indian/Asian and Middle-Eastern cultural groups.

The SDS attitude scores in terms of the independent variable of cultural group membership, are similar to those reported in previous attitude studies (Appelgryn & Bornman, 1996; Bornman & Mynhardt, 1991; Bornman 1995; 1999; Mynhardt, 2002; Nieuwoudt & Plug, 1983; Thiele, 1988). All five cultural groups differed perceptually in their attitudes towards each of the five cultural groups included in the questionnaire. Similar to previous studies, the Western-Afrikaans and the Western-English cultural groups provided the most favourable evaluations of their own cultural group and the least favourable evaluations of the Indigenous African cultural group. It is

interesting to note that both Western-English and Western-Afrikaans groups provided similar, favourable evaluations of their own cultural groups, viz. $m=5.0356$ and 5.0867 respectively, and reciprocated similar evaluations of one another. Both groups rated one another second to that of their own group, followed by Middle-Eastern (Muslim) cultural group, the Indian/Asian cultural group, and lastly the Indigenous African cultural group, in order of the most to the least favourable. The Indigenous African group had the most favourable evaluation of the Western-English cultural group, whom they rated on a par with their own group, and provided the least favourable evaluation of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. The Indian/Asian group was the least ethnocentric of all five cultural groups. They provided the most favourable perceptions of the Western-English cultural group, the Indian/Asian cultural group, as well as the Middle-Eastern (Muslim) cultural group, and the least favourable perception of the Indigenous African cultural group.

Similar to previous attitude studies in South Africa, the Indigenous African and Indian/Asian groups differed in their perceptions of Western-English and Western-Afrikaans cultural groups. Both groups indicated a more favourable perception of the Western-English cultural group compared to their perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. These findings are generally in agreement with those of previous attitude studies in South Africa (Bornman & Mynhardt, 1991; Bornman 1995; 1999; Mynhardt, 2002; Nieuwoudt & Plug, 1983).

These results provide an indication of the relative stability of group attitudes in South Africa over time (Mynhardt, 2002; Foster & Nel, 1991). The consistency of the results with previous attitude studies in South Africa suggests that the overall pattern of intergroup attitudes amongst the broad cultural groups in South Africa has remained fairly stable over the past 30 years or more.

The results of the SDS attitude scores provide support for the Social Identity Theory which interprets intergroup attitudes in terms of group processes that are widely shared amongst members of the same social groups (Abrams & Hogg, 2001; Aronson et al., 2004; Hogg, 2003; Mynhardt, 2002). Within the present study, the uniformity in the attitudes of members of the same cultural group may be described in terms of the structural arrangements and group identities of the

South African population, rather than merely in terms of individual ideas. For instance, the more ethnocentric attitudes of the Western-Afrikaans and Western-English groups, and their less favourable perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group, may be regarded as a product of the group position of Western cultural groups in South African society. Western cultural groups occupy a relatively high status in South Africa as a result of their previously advantaged social position. The increasing social position of African cultural groups and the increasing number of African students within the universities may be perceived by the Western groups as a threat to the social status and identity of the in-group.

Social Identity theorists predict that when the status of the in-group is perceived as unstable, group members may react by exaggerating the distinctiveness of the in-group in attempt to distinguish the in-group positively from the out-group (Abrams & Hogg, 2001, Hogg, 2003). In terms of this perspective, the attitudes of the Western cultural groups within the present study may be interpreted as a reaction to a perceived threat posed by African cultural groups, and the need to maintain positive group distinctiveness from the other cultural groups. This idea is supported by a recent study of ethnic identification in South Africa which suggests that a greater social identification amongst the Western-Afrikaans cultural group, in comparison with the African cultural groups, is associated with a greater willingness to protect and preserve the identity of one's cultural in-group (Bornman, 1999).

The pattern of favourable attitudes of the Indian/Asian and Indigenous African groups towards the Western-English cultural group, and the favourable perceptions of the Westernised-African group towards the Western-English and Western-Afrikaans cultural groups, may be interpreted as a form of out-group favourability evidenced by oppressed groups (Foster & Nel, 1991). This may also be interpreted as a poorer sense of social belonging within a university environment that is dominated by a Western cultural group. The Westernised-African groups' identification with a Western cultural-orientation, as opposed to an African cultural-orientation, and their significantly less favourable perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group, in comparison to the Indigenous African group, may also be indicative of out-group favourability.

A fundamental assumption of the Social Identity Theory is that individuals are motivated to enhance their self-esteem by improving their social identity or positive group affiliations. Individuals belonging to low status groups may thus be motivated to improve their social identifications through processes of social mobility, creativity or change. For previously disadvantaged groups having experienced considerable oppression, as the African population in South Africa, individuals may choose to associate themselves psychologically with a higher status group, or they may disassociate themselves from their in-group in order to gain psychological entry into a dominant group. This was evidenced in the present study by the Westernised-African group who identified with a Western-orientation and indicated the highest SDS scores for the two Western cultural groups, and the lowest SDS scores for the Indigenous African cultural group.

The Westernised-African group may have chosen to disassociate themselves from an African cultural group in order to maintain a positive social identity, and hence an improved self-esteem. This idea is supported by studies of ethnic identification and self-esteem in South Africa which suggest that a stronger ethnic identification amongst the African cultural groups is associated with a lower self-esteem, in contrast to the Western-Afrikaans cultural group, where a stronger ethnic identification is associated with a higher self-esteem (Appelgryn & Bornman, 1996; Bornman, 1995, 1999).

In reference to Hypothesis (Ho₄), significant differences between the three language groups were identified for the perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans, Western-English and Indigenous African cultural groups. No significant differences between the three language groups were identified for the perceptions of the Indian/Asian and Middle-Eastern (Muslim) cultural groups.

The results indicated that the Afrikaans group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans culture than the African language group. No significant differences in the perceptions of Western-Afrikaans cultures were indicated for the comparisons between the African group and the English group. The Afrikaans group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Western-Afrikaans culture than the English group.

The English group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Western-English culture than the Afrikaans group. No significant differences in the perceptions of the Western-English culture were indicated for the comparisons of the English and the African language groups and between the African and Afrikaans language groups.

The African language group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Indigenous African culture than the English language group. A statistically significant difference in the perceptions of the Indigenous African culture was also indicated for the comparison of the African and the Afrikaans language groups. The results indicated that the African language group had a significantly more favourable attitude of the Indigenous African culture than the Afrikaans group. The English group had a significantly more favourable perception of the Indigenous African culture than the Afrikaans group.

The SDS attitude scores in terms of the effects of the first/home language groups, provide support for the influence of language on group perceptions identified in previous attitude studies in South Africa. Cultural differences, as expressed through language, have been found to have a pervasive effect on group attitudes in South Africa (Appelgryn & Bornman, 1996; Bornman & Mynhardt, 1992; Bornman 1995; 1999; Mynhardt, 2002; Nieuwoudt & Plug, 1983; Thiele, 1988). There is a well-established difference between Afrikaans, English and African language speakers in terms of their degrees of prejudice and ethnocentrism. Afrikaans speakers consistently indicate significantly greater levels of ethnocentrism and prejudice towards African cultural groups than English-speakers. African language groups consistently indicate less favourable perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group and more favourable perceptions of the Western-English cultural group (Appelgryn & Bornman, 1996; Bornman & Mynhardt, 1991; Bornman 1995; 1999; Mynhardt, 2002; Nieuwoudt & Plug, 1983; Thiele, 1988).

The results of the present study are in accordance with the previous attitude studies in South Africa. Within the present study, the Afrikaans and English Language speakers provided the most favourable perceptions of their own cultural group, and the least favourable perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group. The Afrikaans group indicated significantly less favourable

perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group, in comparison with the English group. The Indigenous African cultural group rated the Western-English cultural group above that of their own cultural group and indicated the least favourable perceptions of the Western-Afrikaans cultural group. These findings serve as a further confirmation of the importance of language, and related cultural differences, in the attitudes and perceptions of the broad cultural groups in South Africa.

The findings of the present study have major implications for attempts to promote positive intergroup relations in South Africa. The effect of group membership on intergroup attitudes has been illustrated in the present study as well as in a number of local and international studies, and should be taken into account when formulating policies for improving intergroup relations. It appears that the Western-Afrikaans and Western-English groups are more ethnocentric than Non-Western cultural groups. This is especially the case for the Western-Afrikaans cultural group (Mynhardt, 2002). Because ethnocentric attitudes can have serious implications for intergroup relations, subtle methods need to be used to diminish the importance of in-group identification amongst the Western cultural groups by establishing a common South African identity with which all groups can identify.



The less favourable perceptions of the Indigenous African cultural group, as perceived by the four out-groups, appear to be a reflection of the low-status position of the African cultural groups in society. Urgent attention should thus be given to strategies to help African cultural groups improve their social position in South African society.

From a cross-cultural perspective, this study is limited in that the cultural and language groups are treated as independent variables in the research design and data analysis. This study is thus limited to the association between the cultural and language group memberships and the attitude scores and was therefore unable to account for the type of psychological processes that are responsible for producing different patterns of attitudes amongst the groups. Given the vast cultural differences amongst the South African populations, a study of the underlying value-orientations and perceptual styles within and across the broad cultural groups may be valuable for

identifying the different psychological mechanisms responsible for the variation of group attitudes across the broad cultural groups.

In conclusion, the results of this study illustrate that intergroup relations are determined by a dynamic interplay between individual characteristics, the effect of cultural and language group memberships, and social factors. Intergroup relations in a multicultural society are complex. Positive intergroup relations and harmony amongst the broad cultural groups in South Africa may depend on the extent to which the cultural groups are able to acknowledge and accept cultural differences. Because students are increasingly in contact with members of diverse cultural groups, special efforts need to be made to improve the quality of intercultural relations amongst students.



References

Abrams, D. and Hogg, M. A. (2001). Collective identity: Group membership and self-conception. In M. A. Hogg and R. S. Tindale (Eds.). Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes (pp 425-460). Oxford: Blackwell.

Appelgryn, A. E. M. & Bornman, E. (1996). Relative deprivation in contemporary South Africa. Journal of Social Psychology, 136 (3), 381-397.

Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D. & Akert, R. M. (2004). Social psychology. (4th ed.), Prentice Hall: New Jersey.

Bornman, E & Mynhardt, J. C. (1991). Social identity and intergroup contact in South Africa with specific reference to the work situation. Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs, 117, (4), 439-462.

Bornman, E. (1995). Ethnicity in a transitional period: A social psychological study. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Bornman, E (1999). Self-image and ethnic identification in South Africa. Journal of Social Psychology, 139(4), 411-425.

Foster, D. (1991). A note on attitude measurement. In D. Foster & J. Louw-Potgieter (Eds.), Social Psychology in South Africa. (pp. 487-505). Johannesburg: Lexicon.

Foster, D. & Nel, E. (1991). Attitudes and related concepts. In D. Foster & J. Louw-Potgieter (Eds.), Social Psychology in South Africa. (pp. 121-171). Johannesburg: Lexicon.

Hogg, M. A. (2003). Social Identity Theory. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.) Handbook of Self and Identity (pp 462-479). New York: Guilford Press.

Human Sciences Research Council. (1985). The South African Society. Pretoria: HSRC.

Mynhardt, J. & du Toit, A. (1991). Contact and change. In D. Foster & J. Louw-Potgieter (Eds.), Social Psychology in South Africa (pp. 273-316). Johannesburg: Lexicon.

Mynhardt, J. C. (2002). South African supplement to Social Psychology: R. A. Baron & D. Byrne. Social Psychology. Pearson Education: South Africa.

Nieuwoudt, J. M. (1973). Die invloed van kontak tussen Afrikaans- en Engelssprekende dienspligtiges op hulle houdings teenoor mekaar en teenoor die Bantoe. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Nieuwoudt, J. M., Plug, C. & Mynhardt, J. C. (1977). White attitudes after Soweto: a field experiment. South African Journal of Sociology, 16, 1-11.

Nieuwoudt, J. M. & Plug, C. (1983). South African ethnic attitudes: 1973-1978. Journal of Social Psychology, 121, 163-171.

Segall, M. H., Dasen, P. R., Berry, J. W. & Poortinga, Y. H. (1999). Human behaviour in global perspective. 2nd edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Smith, P. B. & Bond, M. H. (1998). Social psychology across cultures. 2nd edition. London: Prentice Hall.

Thiele, G. A. (1988). Stereotipering onder Blankes en Kleurlinge in die RSA. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.