

Diversity at

ECU

... Student Perspectives

During the current academic year, the Chancellor established an Initiative on Race in order to promote a healthy climate for diversity at East Carolina University. The Office of Research, Assessment, and Testing has collected information over the past few years that portray students' opinions and attitudes regarding race and other forms of diversity. Data were taken from the following surveys, administered by the Office of Research, Assessment, and Testing.

- The *Climate Survey* (CS), 1996 and 1998
- *First Year Student Survey* (FYSS), 1995 through 1999
- The *CIRP* First Year Survey (CIRP), 1992 and 1998

More information on this research is available at 328-6811 and on our website at

<http://www.ecu.edu.studentlife/orat/>

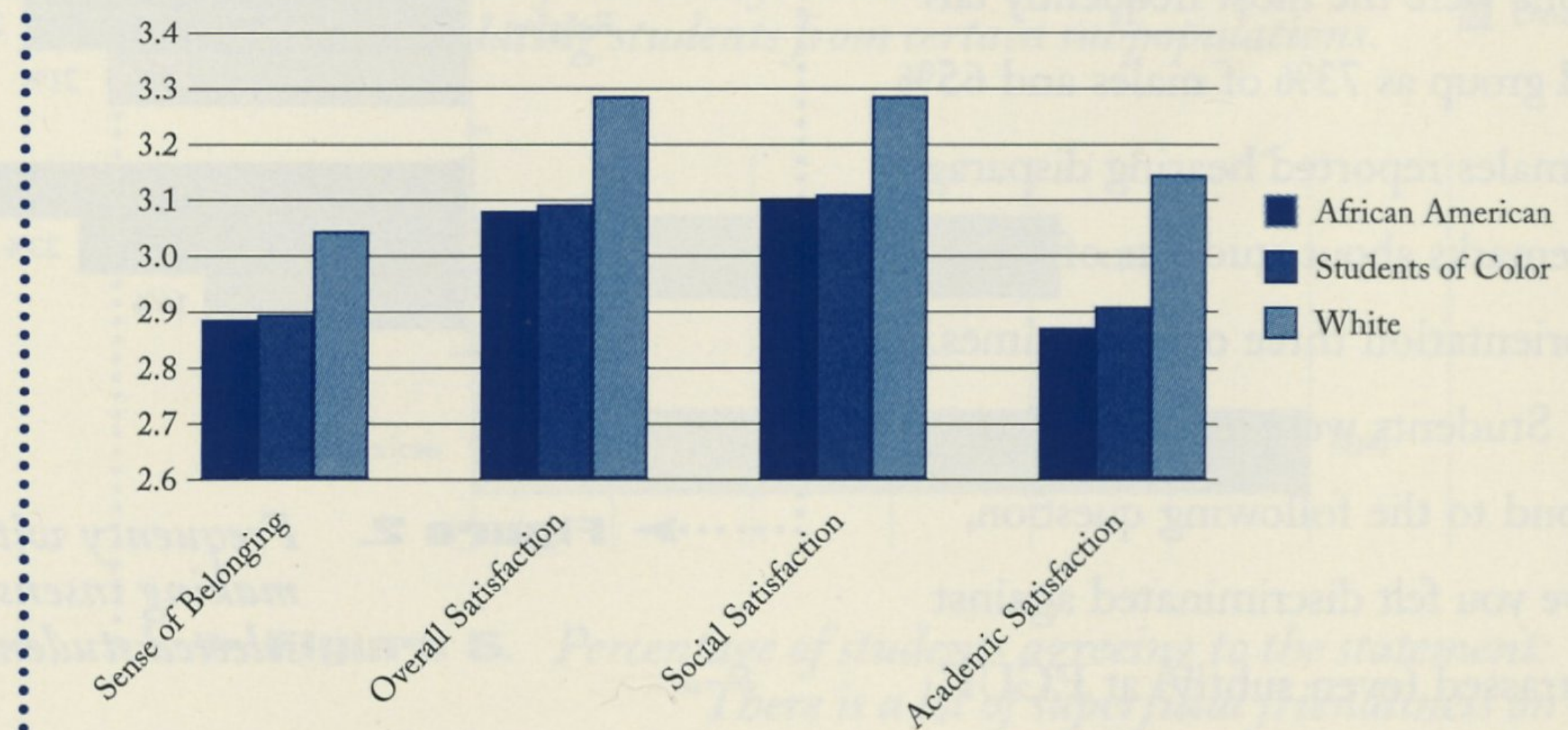


Figure 1. *Student Satisfaction with the Environment (Means).*
(Scale: 1=Very Dissatisfied to 4=Very Satisfied)

Satisfaction and Sense of Belonging

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of respondents expressed pleasure with their social, academic and overall experiences at ECU. White students were more satisfied than their minority peers. However, among all groups, most students reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences.

Discrimination

Results displayed on Figure 2 (see next page) indicate that at least half of the respondents reported hearing disparaging remarks concerning people of same sex orientation, racial minorities, and women at least three times since their arrival on the ECU Campus. Derogatory remarks concerning religious affiliation and disability were substantially less prevalent.

Office of
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East Carolina University Greenville, NC



Thirty-eight percent of African American and 58 percent of White respondents reported hearing disparaging comments directed at ethnic minorities. Regarding sex, the targeted group (females) reported hearing fewer comments (47%) than did males (58%). Gay, lesbian, and transgender persons were the most frequently targeted group as 73% of males and 65% of females reported hearing disparaging remarks about students of same-sex orientation three or more times.

Students were asked (CS) to respond to the following question, "Have you felt discriminated against or harassed (even subtly) at ECU?" In response, 41% of African American students and 26% of White students responded affirmatively. Also, 30% of females and 25% of males reported feeling discriminated against. Of the respondents who were reportedly victims of discrimination, African American students were much more likely to ascribe the discrimination to their race (73%) than were White students (33%).

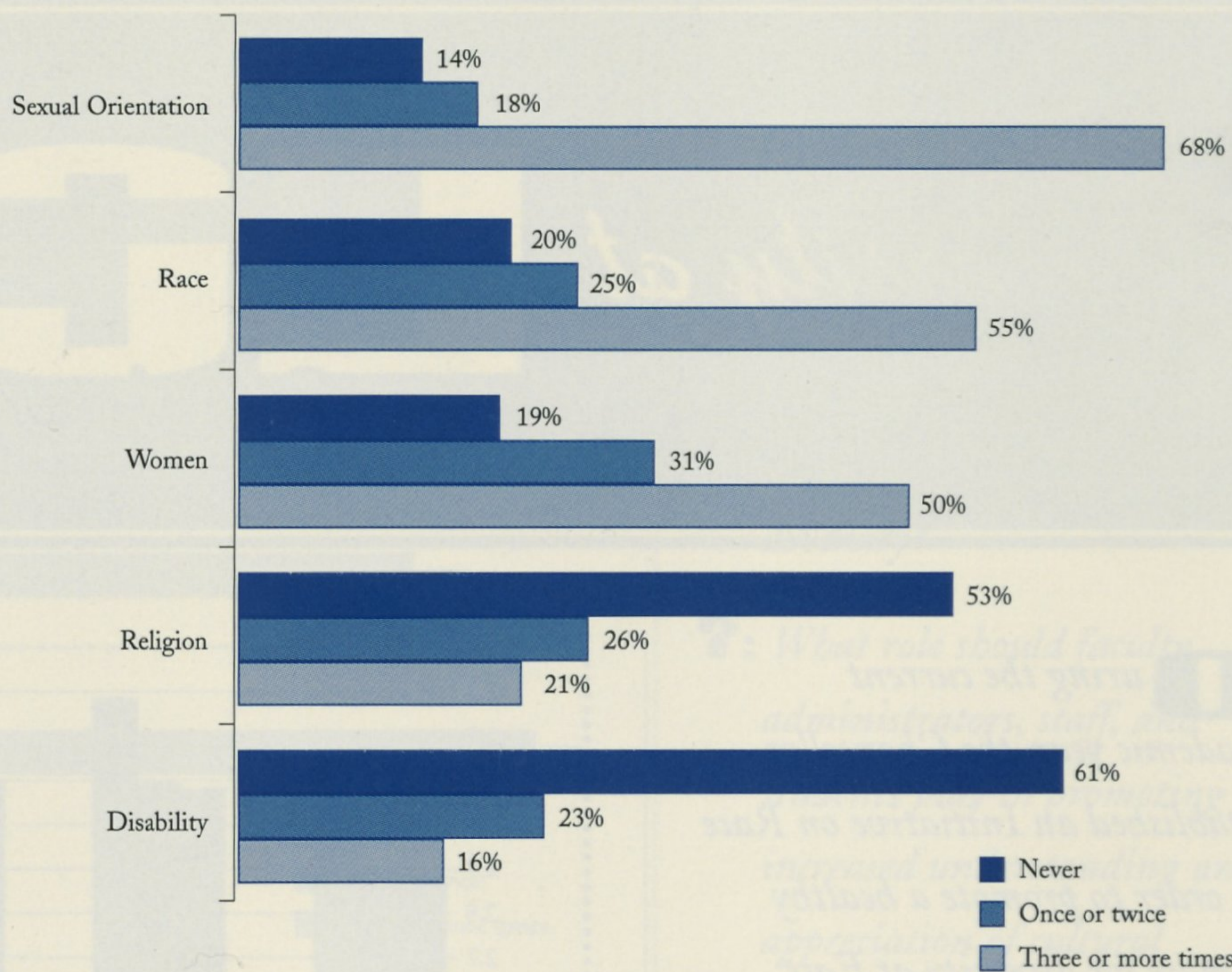


Figure 2. Frequency with which students reported hearing peers making insensitive or disparaging remarks about selected student subpopulations.

Fifty-nine percent of females and 13% of males responded that they were targeted due to their sex. Fifteen percent of respondents indicated that they had been discriminated against due to their age.

Attitudes

The Climate and First Year Student Surveys (FYSS) included a number of indicators of students' attitudes regarding campus diversity.

The FYSS was administered during the orientation program prior to students' ECU matriculation, thus provides information concerning the students' pre-college attitudes. Figure 3 displays student reports from the 1999 summer administration.

In the Climate Survey, students were asked how their attitudes had changed since they began their education at ECU, thus providing information concerning how students' ECU experiences shape their attitudes toward diversity. Students reported an increase in levels of acceptance in all of the categories. Acceptance of persons with disabilities represented the largest increase in acceptance (33%), followed by African Americans (26%) and Gays and Lesbians (24% each). There was no detectable

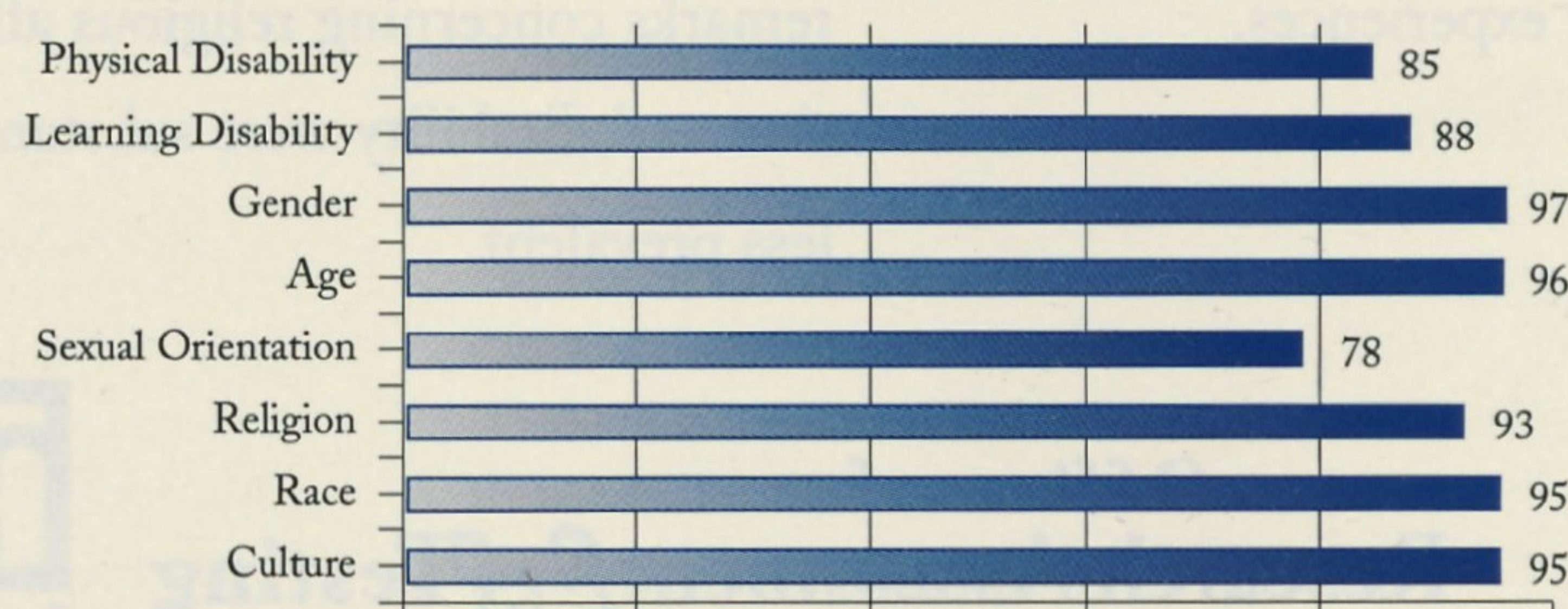


Figure 3. Percentage of students reported to be comfortable (somewhat or very) interacting with individuals with differences from respondents (1999 First Year Student Survey).

difference in students' reported change in attitudes by class. That is, seniors reported no more change in acceptance than did their freshman peers.

Relationships

On the 1996 Climate Survey, students were asked to report their comfort (on a 'yes' or 'no' scale) with being friends, roommates, or with dating people from selected groups. Figure 4 shows that students are more likely to be comfortable in befriending students from other subpopulations than they are in rooming with or dating them. On another item relating to the nature of relationships, a large percentage of students described interracial relationships on campus as "superficial" (Figure 5).

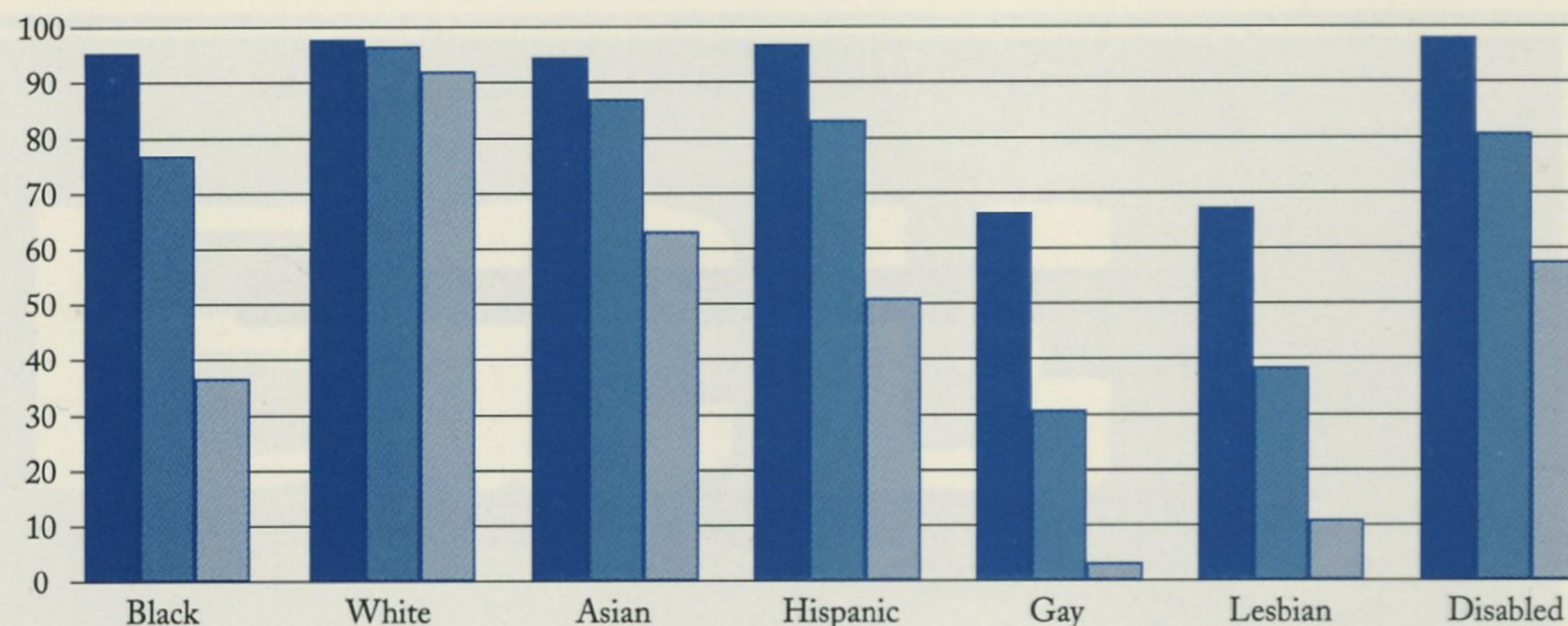


Figure 4. Percentage of students indicating they are comfortable befriending, rooming with, and dating students from certain subpopulations.

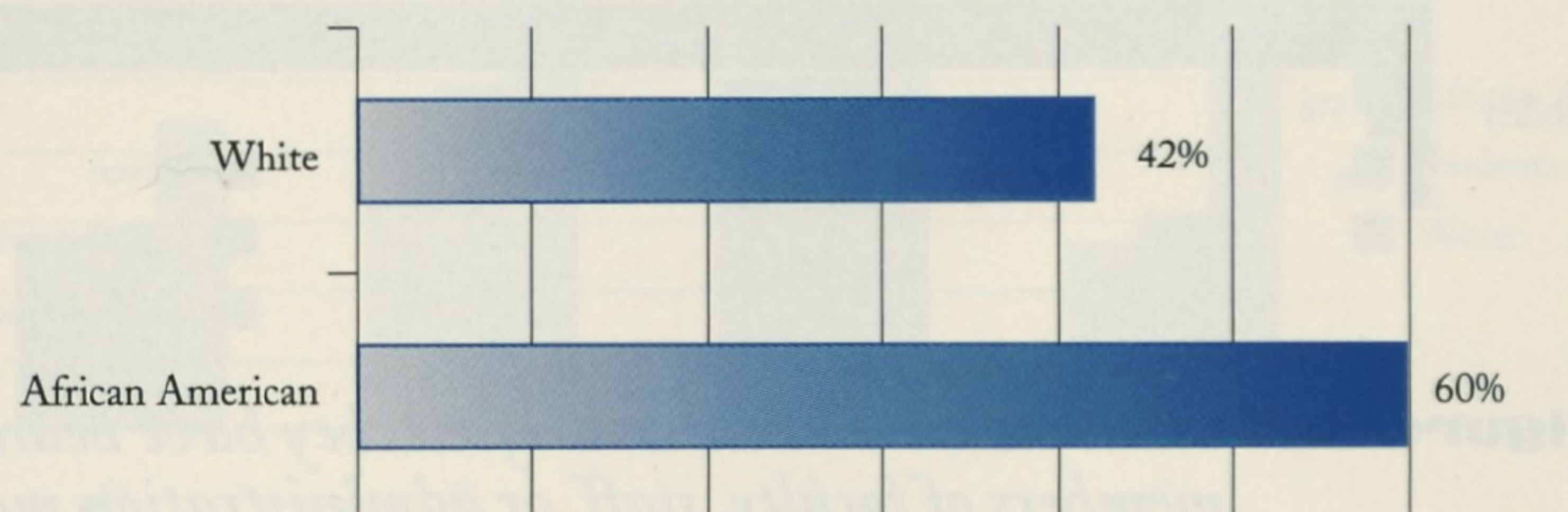


Figure 5. Percentage of students agreeing to the statement: "There is a lot of superficial friendliness on this campus among those of different races, but underneath there is tension"

Faculty, Staff, and Administration

In addition to reports on student attitudes, information was gathered on students' perceptions of the climate provided by faculty, staff, and administrators. Figure 6 highlights substantial differences, by race, in students' responses to questions about the administrations' posture

toward diversity. Figure 7 (see next page) illustrates students' reports of faculty, staff, and administrators making disparaging comments concerning various sub-populations. In comparison with the data on peers making disparaging remarks (Figure 2), students are much less likely to

hear such comments from faculty and staff than from their fellow students. However, it is notable that 35% of students indicated hearing at least one discriminatory comment directed at women. Twenty-two percent heard such comments concerning race.

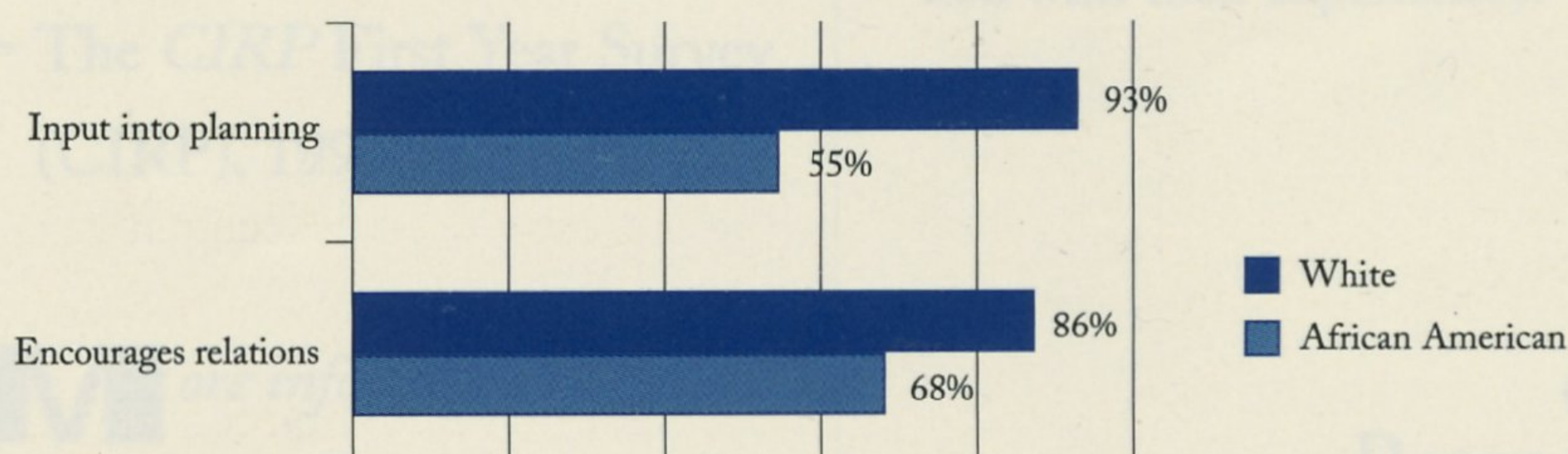


Figure 6. Percentage of students reporting that members of their race have input into campus planning and that the administration encourages positive race relations on campus.

"The majority of respondents expressed pleasure with their social, academic and overall experiences at ECU."

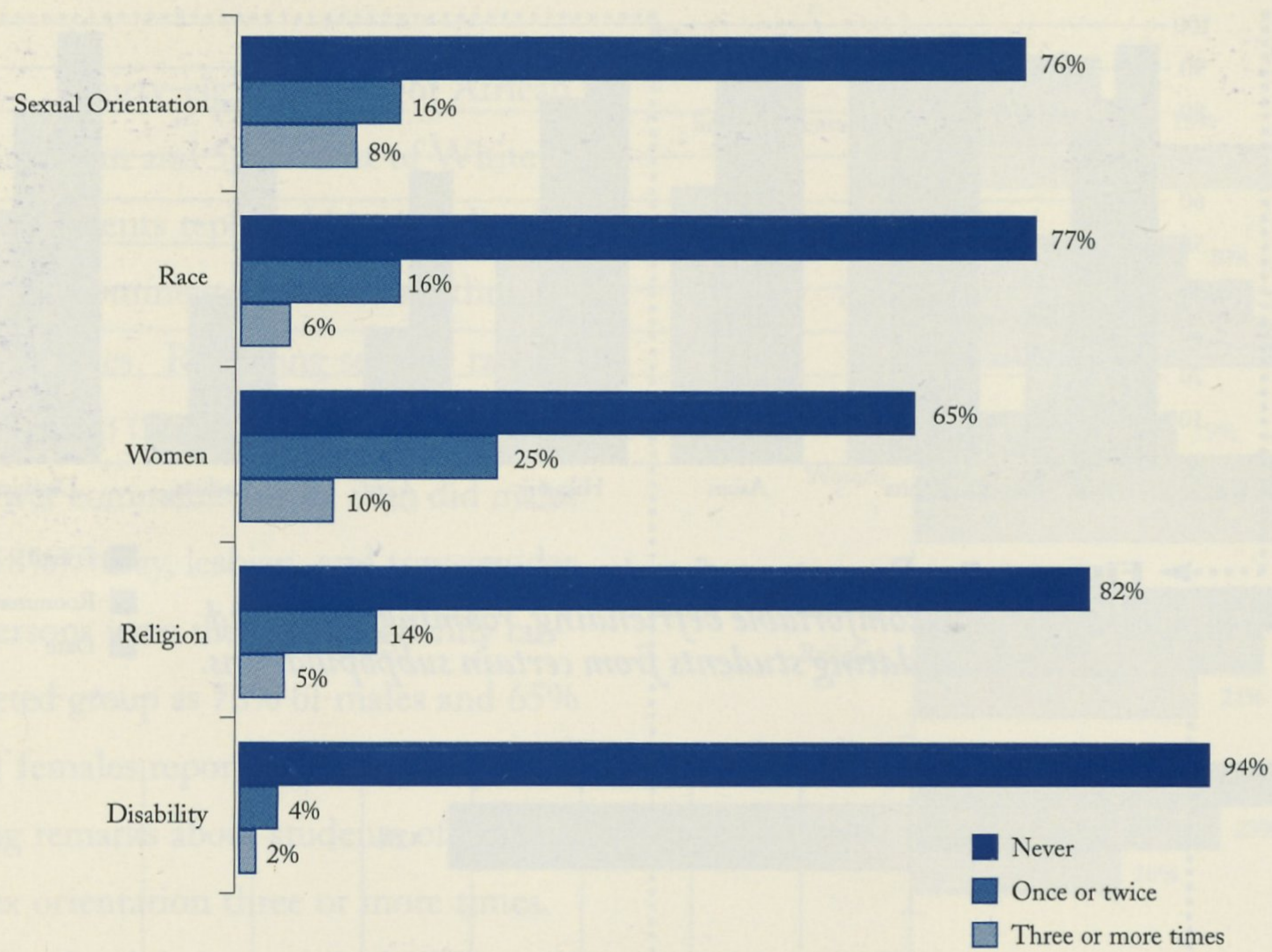


Figure 7. *Students were asked how often they have heard members of faculty, staff, or administration make insensitive or disparaging remarks about the above groups of people.*

Discussion

To be sure, the information reported here merely scratches the surface of the status of the climate for diversity at East Carolina University. However, it is clear that certain tensions and divisions exist between groups based on race, sex, disability, and lifestyle. On the other hand, many students report increased acceptance of differences while at ECU. The following questions are designed to promote more discussion to enhance the climate for diversity at ECU.

?: *What do these data suggest concerning the status of intercultural relationships at ECU?*

?: *What practical implications can be drawn from these data to improve the climate for diversity?*

?: *What role should faculty, administrators, staff, and students play in promoting increased understanding and appreciation of cultural differences?*

?: *How can academic and out-of-class experiences at ECU promote intercultural understanding?*

?: *What additional information would be helpful for gaining a better understanding of ECU's climate for diversity?*