

Influence of Social Group Membership on Experiences of Prejudice  
at a Private Christian University

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## Abstract

Prejudice is a powerful and invasive social phenomenon that can produce discrimination, harassment, and unfair treatment. Due to the religious affiliation of a private Christian institution, the student body was of interest to examine the experiences of prejudice encountered while attending the school. The constructs of unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment were examined through a survey taken by 183 participants. Statistical tests were run to expose which social group was associated with a larger number of reported incidences of prejudicial actions. Results indicated that gender and age were associated with increased experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment. Findings fell in line with current research on the relationship between the faith professed by the student body and reported acts of prejudice.

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Prejudice and discrimination of all kinds are prevalent social forces both in history and in the modern world. Commonly, such interactions are studied by their relationship with race or gender. However, the countless –isms such as racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, and classism are prevalent. Due to the widespread consequences of such attitudes, much research has been conducted to examine this social phenomenon. Following a review of relevant literature, a study was conducted at a private university in order to better understand how biases such as racism and sexism interact with the Christian identification of the university’s population. Statistical analysis of the data revealed that age and gender were related to an increased number of reported experiences of unfair treatment and discrimination among the student body.

### **Literature Review**

Two of the constructs of prejudice measured by the current study are unfair treatment and discrimination. Prejudice is the umbrella under which these actions fall. Prejudice is an unfair idea that a person holds without facts to support it. These ideas can flow into the person’s behavior and manifest themselves in discrimination and unfair treatment. Thus, prejudice is the overarching paradigm that can be best observed through the actions (unfair treatment and discrimination) that accompany it. A common contributor to how someone is treated includes his or her race and ethnicity (Williams et al., 2008; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). There is a wealth of information in

past literature to support the proposition that race can contribute to a person being unfairly treated or discriminated against.

### **Influence of Race/Ethnicity**

Prejudice can appear in the public eye when issues involving police officers arise. Studies examining the police officer's dilemma are often conducted through a computer program that presents people of different races, typically white and black, in various situations with various objects in their hands. The participant, playing the role of police officer, must decide whether to shoot the individual given what object he or she is holding. Forty undergraduate students recruited from the University of Colorado, all but one of whom were white, participated in one such experiment. The video game incorporated a variety of backgrounds, five different poses, and four basic conditions which included white man unarmed, white man armed, black man unarmed, and black man armed. Participants were given 850 milliseconds to decide to shoot when the individual was armed and not to shoot when he was not. Upon completion of the task, results indicated that the person's race played a role in whether or not the participant decided to shoot due to implicit prejudice. Participants were quicker to shoot an armed individual if he was black than if he was white. Additionally, participants were quicker not to shoot an unarmed individual if he was white than if he was black (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2002). In a subsequent study conducted by the same experimenters but using different participants and a shorter allotted response time, results indicated that participants more frequently made the faulty decision not to shoot an armed person if that person was white versus if he was black (Correll et al., 2002).

To examine if expectations can affect the participant's actions in the police officer's dilemma task, Park and Kim (2015) modified the simulation. The aforementioned expectations are that of a biased white police officer who will perceive a black man as threatening. The theory is that participants acting as a white individual may adorn themselves with the white person stereotype of perceiving the black person as threatening. To examine the impact of such expectations, 152 students at a university in South Korea were recruited to participate in a study where not only was the race of the opposing, target individual manipulated, but so was the race that participant portrayed through their virtual character (Park & Kim, 2015). By allowing the participants to see the virtual arms that they were controlling, the race they were assigned could play a role in their decision whether or not to shoot. Results indicated that participants in the white police officer condition were quicker to shoot an armed black man than an armed white man, as well as being slower in deciding to not shoot an unarmed black man than an unarmed white man. However, for those in the black police officer condition, responses were slower across the board in making any type of decision for a black individual (Park & Kim, 2015).

In many situations involving race, the ambiguous nature of the situation can lend to implicit prejudice being revealed. An example of a real-life application is in the hiring process. A study by Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) utilized mock interviews with job applicants to examine how implicit prejudice can manifest in these situations. One hundred and ninety-four students completed a self-report measure analyzing their sentiments about hypothetical situations involving blacks before being instructed to

determine the competence of applicants to a peer-counseling program. Each participant was shown interviews of applicants that were delineated into conditions of clearly strong, ambiguous, and clearly weak. Race was an additional factor that alternated among conditions. While the strong candidates and the weak candidates were preferred or rejected regardless of race, the decisions made for ambiguous candidates demonstrated an influence of race. Results showed that for the ambiguous candidates, blacks were recommended less strongly than were whites. Participants also saw an applicant in the ambiguous condition as strong when the applicant was white but saw applicants in the same condition as weak when the applicant was black (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000).

To consider the impact of race on living arrangements, a group of researchers conducted extensive surveys inquiring about one's reaction to a substantial integration of various target races in his or her town (Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996). For example, white participants were asked to rate, on a Likert scale from strongly oppose to strongly favor, their response to living in a neighborhood with half their neighbors being black, Latino, or Asian. While the neutral responses were the highest, more people opposed such a living situation than those who favored it. The most intriguing finding of this study was the varying views among races toward one another. For instance, Asian participants were more opposed to living with Latinos than living with whites, and more opposed to living with blacks than living with Latinos. Among the minority groups, there was minimal resistance to living in a predominantly white neighborhood. Of all the races, blacks were the most discriminated against in that all races were the most opposed to living in a half-black neighborhood than any other scenario. However, black individuals were also the

most pro-integration, with whites being the most anti-integration. Further questions revealed that much of the cause of these sentiments is simple in-group bias. All groups expressed this bias, not just the groups that held the most anti-integration stances (Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996).

In addition to where one will live, race can also play a large role in whom one chooses to live with. Interracial marriage has been a controversial issue throughout history, and research suggests that conservative Christians are the least likely to approve of interracial relationships due to a desire to maintain racial purity (Perry & Whitehead, 2015). This notion led Perry and Whitehead (2015) to conduct a large-scale survey of 1,648 people composed of white individuals from 18 to 96 years old ( $M = 51.17$ ,  $SD = 16.48$ ). Questions inquired as to how comfortable participants would be if their theoretical daughter married someone of another racial group. These groups included blacks, Latinos, and Asians. Participants were also asked questions to gauge their adherence to Christian doctrine and their beliefs on whether or not America should promote Christianity in various venues. These questions measured what is referred to as Christian nationalism. As was hypothesized due to prior research, the higher on the Christian nationalism scale a participant scored, the more likely he or she was to be uncomfortable with the prospect of his or her imaginary daughter marrying someone of another race, in particular, blacks. However, white participants who reported frequently attending services, reading religious books, and praying were less likely to oppose interracial marriage. It was thus suggested that the intensity of religious devotion influenced one's attitude to the blending of the races (Perry & Whitehead, 2015).



The potential influence of racial and ethnic identification on one's encounters with unfair treatment and discrimination are observed in multiple realms. These include interactions with authority figures, educators, and peers, and experiences with pursuing work. While the influence of explicit prejudice is certainly possible, often these situations arise due to implicit prejudice. Since the population of the current study outwardly condemns prejudice, it is unlikely that students will report experiences whereby someone openly discriminated against them or treated them unfairly due to their race or gender. However, it is possible that the implicit prejudice can affect a person's actions and result in perceived discrimination or unfair treatment that is more subtle in nature. Given the propositions put forth by research, the experiences with unfair treatment and discrimination of the student body of a private Christian university are of interest. This interest stems from the potential theoretical link between religious affiliation and prejudicial attitudes, as can be seen in Perry and Whitehead's (2015) study.

### **Influence of Out-Group Dynamics**

Identification with a group can lead to prejudice through unfair treatment and discrimination. In one study, 123 white or black children between 7 to 11 years old were selected to take an implicit association test (IAT) covering attitudes toward racial and economic groups as well as an explicit measure of these attitudes (Newheiser & Olson, 2012). Regardless of race, children showed a preference for the in-group as seen by the explicit measure. After examining the IAT results, it was found that while white children in both white-majority and black-majority schools had implicit in-group preferences, black children did not (Newheiser & Olson, 2012). Further research on out-group

prejudices in childhood was conducted with 453 Dutch secondary school students (Stark, 2015). Friend structures, gathered through asking the children who their best friend was, were examined in order to understand the dynamic among the students. Analysis of these friendships revealed that at the beginning, the majority students had more negative attitudes toward the minority students than the minority students did about the majority students. A student with an extreme negative attitude toward an out-group student was less likely to select as a best friend another in-group student who was close friends with an out-group student. However, students doing so stemmed not out of a desire to avoid the out-group member, but more from a desire to become friends with their friends' friends. Through this process, in-group students with a higher prejudice would be likely to continue to befriend each other and thus exclude the out-group members in consequence (Stark, 2015). The biggest contribution such a study makes to the understanding of prejudice and its development is the social constructs, such as friendship formation, that can contribute to its development. Even with adolescents around the ages of 12 or 13, social factors lead to in-group preference and out-group isolation (Stark, 2015). Out-group isolation is an instance of unfair treatment while in-group preference is an example of discrimination. Both of these constructs are the focus of the current study.

Furthermore, in Oostenbroek and Over's (2015) experiment, 96 children ranging from 4 to 5 years old observed three actors performing a variety of actions. Each child was assigned to a certain group that corresponded to the color of scarves worn by the actors. The actors in various groups performed actions before prompting the child to

perform the action however he or she would like. Results demonstrated that not only did the 5-year-old children fail to copy the behavior of the out-group, they actually contrasted their behavior with that of the out-group actor. In the neutral condition, these children were more likely to imitate the individuals, given the rationale for the experiment that children are natural imitators. These findings show that children will respond differently to an out-group member than to a neutral individual (Oostenbroek & Over, 2015).

Williams (2001) proposed a theoretical ramification of out-group influences that could provide insight into current societal events. One such hypothesis is that as an in-group member perceives competition, real or symbolic, increasing between his or her group and the out-group, the beliefs about the out-group will change. In particular, constructs such as benevolence and integrity are likely to decrease. On the other hand, if perception of cooperation, real or symbolic, increases for an in-group member, then the benevolence and integrity of the out-group members increases (Williams, 2001). This proposition could provide grounds for issues such as the debate over illegal immigration. If a group of Americans, as the in-group, perceives illegal immigrants, the out-group, as competition for jobs, then they are more likely to see illegal immigrants in a harsher light than they would otherwise. This sentiment can manifest through unfair treatment and discrimination toward the out-group.

An additional characteristic of in-group and out-group issues centers on a phenomenon known as out-group homogeneity, which is the tendency of people to see members of the out-group as more similar than he or she sees members of the in-group (Linville, Fischer, & Salovey, 1989). One experiment analyzed such a tendency

mathematically through the use of surveys on various characteristics of college students and the elderly. The sample consisted of 30 undergraduate students and 30 elderly individuals (Linville et al., 1989). Analysis of these responses disclosed that consistent with the theory of out-group homogeneity, participants rated their group as more variable and differentiated than they perceived the out-group. Not only did in-group members perceive their group as more varied, they also saw them in a more favorable light than the out-group. For example, the college students would perceive college students as friendly with more difference between subjects whereas they would see the elderly as less friendly and all equally so (Linville et al., 1989).

The basis for much of out-group homogeneity resides in stereotypes about a specific out-group. One study considered this influence and its ramifications by instructing participants to take the perspective of an out-group member (Linville et al., 1989). All participants were shown pictures of a cheerleader and asked to write about a day in her life. Half the participants were instructed to take her perspective in doing so, the other half was instructed to avoid any stereotypical influences in their writing. Upon completion of this element, participants were then asked to rate themselves on a few characteristics considered typical for a cheerleader. Results supported the hypothesis that taking the perspective of an out-group member will influence the individual's view of himself or herself. Participants asked to take the perspective of a cheerleader rated themselves as more attractive, a trait often associated with cheerleaders, than those who were asked to suppress any stereotypical thoughts. These results were supported in additional tests using professors, the elderly, and African Americans (Galinski, Wang &

Ku, 2008). The flexibility of this procedure demonstrates the strength that out-group homogeneity and stereotypes have on human beings. In particular, the role that stereotypes have in perpetuating discriminatory actions.

Likewise, homophily, the tendency to connect with people similar to oneself, plays a role in the phenomenon of out-group differences. Since those in the out-group are seen as different and alien, one will likely not choose to pursue a friendship with such a person. In Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Smith's (2015) study, this development was observed through asking 78 white individuals, ranging from 18 to 30 years old ( $M = 24.48$ ,  $SD = 3.69$ ), to rate a group of people presented in photographs. Each photograph contained a pair of people, with some containing an inter-racial couple and others not. Participants were asked to rate each white individual pictured as to how comfortable he or she is with other groups as well as a variety of characteristics commonly associated with the race of the other person in the picture. Results supported the hypothesis that the inter-racial couples pictured were rated as being more comfortable around those of other cultural groups. Results did not support the idea that the white individuals would take on characteristics generally associated with the other race pictured. However, results did indicate that participants with higher implicit prejudice against blacks had lower quantities of affiliative remarks to the whites pictured with their black friend versus the whites pictured with a white friend (Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Smith, 2015).

Categorizing people as part of one's group or part of a different group can cause prejudice to appear through unfair treatment and discrimination. While these constructs can be due to explicit prejudice whereby someone treats another unfairly solely due to

that person's race or sexual orientation, this phenomenon can also be seen as a result of implicit prejudice. Sometimes, the cultural values one has been brought up in will influence that person to unfairly treat another, even when he or she is not aiming to do so (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). This unfair treatment and discrimination can be observed for a variety of demographics including race, gender, age, disability status, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Banchevsky, Westfall, Park, & Judd, 2016; Crisp & Turner, 2009; Doane & Elliott, 2015; Clobert, Saroglou, Hwang, & Soong, 2014). In a private Christian university whose student body is primarily heterosexual, evangelical Christians, out-group dynamics could emerge. Building on past research, it would be expected that those in the minority status, such as the homosexual students or those believing a different doctrine than Christianity, would experience unfair treatment or discrimination due to being part of the out-group. These experiences could stem from explicit prejudice through bold confrontations such as insults, or from implicit prejudice through more subtle exclusion. The experiences of such students inspired the study of the university's population.

### **Influence of Religion**

An individual's religious affiliation can affect his or her likelihood to be both a victim of prejudice through unfair treatment and discrimination as well as to perpetrate these deeds. As Jackson and Hunsberger (1999) suggest, fundamentalism of any type of religion can be dangerous and lead to prejudicial attitudes. Fundamentalism refers to a belief system whereby believers insist that their faith alone represents ultimate truth and thus the correct relationship with God. The aim of their study was to examine

fundamental Christians and their prejudice toward out-group members who reside in a different faith system than they do. Two-hundred and ninety-one university students in Canada completed a questionnaire evaluating religious fundamentalism, Christian orthodoxy, attitudes toward varying groups, and religious group identification as measured through Crocker's Collective Self-Esteem Scale. Results indicated that, as expected, religious fundamentalism and Christian orthodoxy were related to positive attitudes toward the in-group (Christians or believers) and related to negative attitudes toward the out-group (atheists or non-believers). Additionally, further analysis showed that higher religiosity, as measured via religious fundamentalism, Christian orthodoxy, and religious group identification combined, predicted more extreme views of the two groups. In-group bias became more pronounced as in-group members were rated even more positively, and out-group members were rated even more negatively. Alternatively, participants with a lower score on the religiosity scale had a positive opinion of all groups in question (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999).

As discussed above, conservative Christian views can be associated with prejudice (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999). This observation led to the hypothesis that Eastern religiosity, such as Buddhist and Taoist thought, would support lower prejudice than Western type religiosity such as Christianity, especially fundamental conservative Christianity. To test this idea, a sample of 3,555 individuals throughout Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan who identified as Buddhist, Taoist, Catholic, or Protestant Christian completed surveys covering religiosity levels and morality viewpoints (Clobert et al., 2014). Religiosity was measured through items assessing participants' perception of their

religiosity, as well as the frequency with which they pray, attend services, and related practices. Viewpoints on moral issues were measured through items assessing how wrong a participant believed various circumstances were. These surveys aimed to reveal one's prejudice toward those of different religious groups and toward those practicing a homosexual lifestyle. As was hypothesized, all religious groups exhibited an association between religiosity and anti-gay prejudice. This association was strong for Catholics and Protestants and weak for Buddhists and Taoists. For all religions examined with the exception of the Taoists, the relationship between religiosity and anti-gay prejudice was significant, though small,  $\beta = 0.06$ . In addition, interreligious prejudice, which is prejudice from individuals in a faith system toward those in a competing faith system, was associated with higher religiosity levels for both forms of Christianity, Catholic and Protestant, but not for the East Asian religions of Buddhism and Taoism. Thus, this study supports the hypothesis that Christians exhibit an increased amount of prejudice toward those whose views contradict with their own or who live a lifestyle often seen as unbiblical (Clobert et al., 2014).

The population to be examined for the current study is the student body of a private Christian university. Research suggests that individuals in this faith system may exhibit higher levels of prejudice than people outside of that system. However, keeping in mind the themes of the Bible, this study seeks to consider the dynamic between Christianity and prejudice in a different manner. Since the Bible advocates against prejudice, it is anticipated that participants' reports of perceived unfair treatment and discrimination will yield minimal differences in score between races and genders.



However, if prejudice is demonstrated, it is expected to occur for those in an opposing religion or homosexuals, as supported by research.

### **Consequences**

Prejudice and its constructs can have extensive consequences for the victim. Not only can unfair treatment or discrimination affect one's outward well-being, such as being denied a job or specific housing and thus reducing financial stability, but it can also have a profound impact on the person's emotional well-being. A group of 2,437 Latino adolescents was surveyed to examine their general emotional state and its relationship to acts of discrimination (Ríos-Salas & Larson, 2015). The elements comprising emotional health included depressive symptoms and self-esteem. Perceived discrimination was also studied through items questioning experiences with various racial groups as well as opinions of racial issues in general. Results demonstrated a relationship between depressive symptoms and perceived discrimination. Participants who reported more societal and interpersonal discrimination also scored higher on the depression scale. The link between impaired mental health and perceived discrimination speaks to the internal consequences one suffers as the target of prejudice or discrimination. However, due to the correlational nature of the study, it is also possible that those with higher scores of depression would perceive potentially ambiguous interactions as discrimination or unfair treatment (Ríos-Salas & Larson, 2015). Regardless, the wounds previously described are the psychological rationale for why prejudice is harmful and malicious. The impact it has on its victims is unhealthy and thus reveals the immoral nature of such behavior.

The painful experience of discrimination is not restricted to certain racial or ethnic groups and can even affect various religious groups. One such group that was studied through self-report measures was atheists, a group that professes no religion nor a belief in god (Doane & Elliot, 2015). A study was conducted with 960 atheists with a mean age of approximately 44. The surveys utilized with these participants evaluated perceived discrimination, both personal and group, atheist identification, and well-being, which included self-esteem, life satisfaction, negative affect, and physical well-being. As was the case with the Latino participants examined in the prior study, there was a negative correlation between perceived discrimination and well-being. In addition, there was a positive correlation between atheist identification and well-being. Due to this effect, atheist identification could be a potential coping mechanism to combat effects of discrimination and thus elevate one's psychological and physical well-being (Doane & Elliot, 2015). While prejudice and discrimination are harmful to the individual targeted, stronger identification with the group can relieve some of the pain and encourage the individual.

The consequences of prejudice and thus unfair treatment and discrimination reveal the real-life implications of the current study. Examining the experiences of prejudice that students at a private Christian university endure day to day can allow for the situation to be remedied if need be. If prejudice scores are low and indicate a lack of unfair treatment and discrimination occurring, then future research can be conducted on the population to examine why they are not experiencing these problems in order to replicate the solution in populations that are.

### **Research Question**

Given the complexity of issues of prejudice and the many facets that can comprise it as discussed previously, the focal point for the following study is the everyday experiences of prejudice, as seen through unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment, that students at a private Christian university encounter. The research question asks How much prejudice, operationalized as unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment, is encountered day to day? In addition, Of the demographics of race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and disability status, which social group perceives the most prejudice? Since biblical teachings command followers to love others and treat people respectfully, the everyday prejudice experienced is hypothesized to have no significant difference in score between the various groups. However, it is hypothesized that due to out-group differences, students who reject Christianity or who profess a sexual orientation other than heterosexual will score the highest for perceived unfair treatment and discrimination.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Participants included the undergraduate student body at a private Christian university. Due to the unique religious identification of the university and many of its students, the population presented an interesting angle to study prejudice and its manifestations of unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment. Participants were recruited by means of a posting on the Department of Psychology webpage as a psychology activity. Psychology activities are required for every undergraduate

psychology course. They count for five points toward the student's final grade. However, there are numerous opportunities throughout the semester for such activities, making this survey an option rather than a requirement. Participants came from various demographic backgrounds, though the distribution of the demographics was skewed. For instance, Caucasians were largely overrepresented while African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Asians and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and individuals identifying as other were extremely underrepresented. Caucasians made up over 80% of the sample as can be seen in Figure 1. Males were another social group that were not adequately represented. Females made up over 80% of the sample as can be seen in Figure 2. The religious affiliation of the sample was extremely skewed but unlike the race and gender misrepresentation, the homogeneity of religious identification was intentional. The largely Christian identification of the students at the university was of particular interest for this study. Of the options of Christian: Protestant, Christian: Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Agnostic/Atheist, and other, the overwhelming majority of the participants identified as Christian: Protestant. Not surprisingly, given the belief system of Protestant Christianity, the sexual orientation of the sample was almost entirely heterosexual as 169 participants identified as such while only one identified as other. In addition, 136 participants reported no disability while 34 reported having a disability. Lastly, ages of participants ranged from 18 to 27 years old with 20 years old being the most common ( $M = 20.14$ ,  $SD = 1.565$ ).

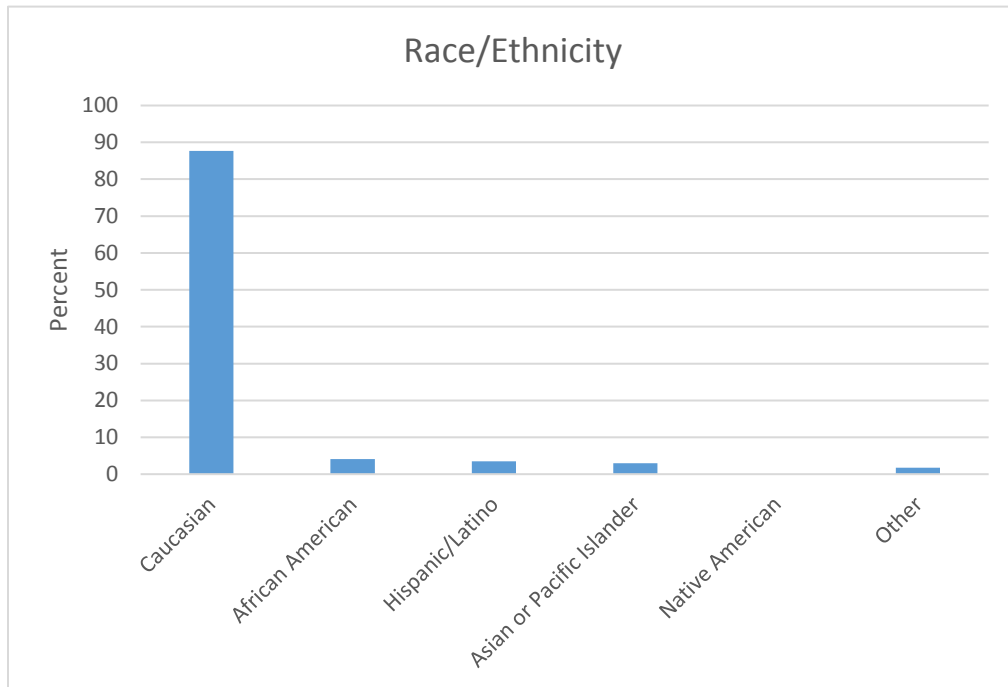


Figure 1. Percentage of races/ethnicities identified by a sample of college students

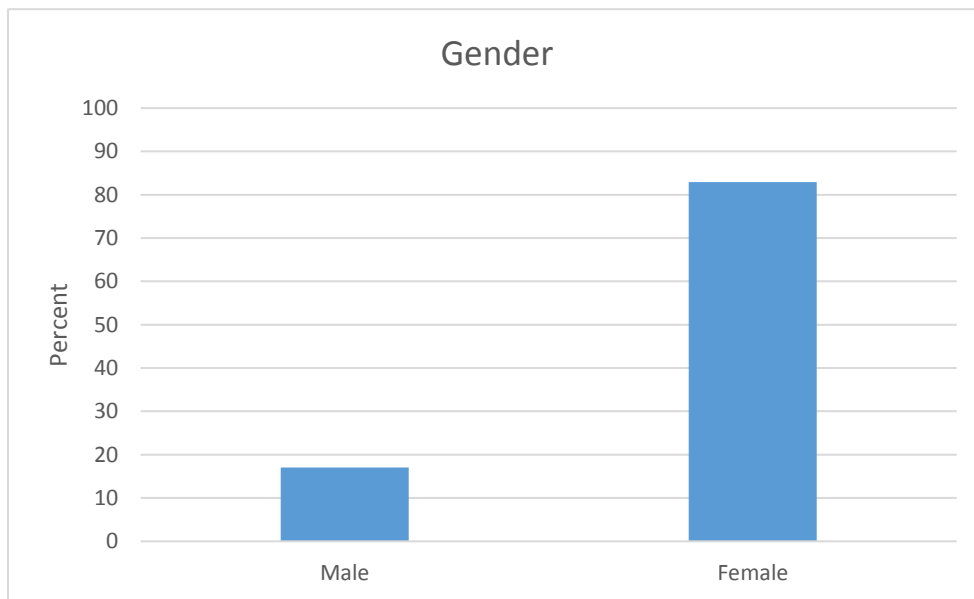


Figure 2. Percentage of genders identified by a sample of college students

**Measures**

This study consisted of an adaptation of the Measuring Discrimination Resource created by David Williams (Williams, 2012). Williams compiled a variety of statistically valid questions with Cronbach's alphas of 0.91, 0.73, and 0.84 respectively for the constructs of unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment (Williams, 2012). As calculated via SPSS, Cronbach's alpha for the modified scale used for the current study is 0.70, 0.59, and 0.95 for unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment respectively. An example of an item from the unfair treatment construct is "You are treated with less courtesy than other people are" (Williams, 2012), with the potential responses being never, less than once a year, a few times a year, a few times a month, at least once a week, and almost every day. The follow-up to the prompt questioned "What do you think is the main reason for these experiences?" (Williams, 2012). Responses included your gender, your race/ethnicity, your age, your religion, your sexual orientation, or a physical disability. An example of a question from the discrimination construct is "How often do you feel that you have to work twice as hard as others to get the same treatment or evaluation?" (Williams, 2012). The responses remain the same as the unfair treatment construct with the addition of the option "not applicable." These questions were also followed by an examination of the participant's belief as to why these events happen. Lastly, the harassment construct included items such as "How often do your supervisor or coworkers make slurs or jokes about women?" (Williams, 2012). Response options were consistent with the discrimination construct format. The unfair treatment construct consisted of 15 questions, and the discrimination and harassment constructs both

consisted of three questions. The range of scores possible for the unfair treatment construct is 15 to 90, for discrimination is 3 to 18, and for harassment is 3 to 18.

Due to the specific population of focus and for reasons of statistical validity including low Cronbach's alphas, the measure underwent modification before it was released. The survey was revised by first removing any sections that did not have an available Cronbach's alpha, or had too low of a Cronbach's alpha to be considered reliable. In addition, select questions were reworded to better fit the sample. Since the aim of the study was to examine the participants' experiences at the private Christian institution, the researcher did not want students including past encounters in their responses. To ensure this, questions were modified to better target the experiences in question. For example, one of the original questions from Williams' scale asked, "Have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened or abused by the police?" (Williams, 2012). Since the structure of that question could easily bring up answers not of interest for this particular study, it was corrected to the following, "Have you ever been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically threatened or abused by the Liberty University police?" This modification is indicative of the overall changes made to the survey.

### **Procedure**

Following IRB approval, the survey was made available to the university's student body through Qualtrics. After a 15-day period, the survey was closed and data were collected. The data initially contained responses from 183 participants but was narrowed down to 170 after incomplete responses were removed. In order to see

differences in scores on all constructs between genders, racial groups, and groups of various disability statuses, independent sample *t*-tests were conducted. To examine these same differences among ages, religions, and sexual orientations, one-way ANOVAs were run.

## **Results**

### **Harassment**

All analyses run over the construct of harassment revealed no statistically significant findings. There were no differences in harassment scores by race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or disability status. The construct of harassment only consisted of three items and measured how often individuals observed certain issues of prejudice such as racial slurs.

### **Unfair Treatment**

When examining the mean difference between men's and women's perceived unfair treatment, an independent sample *t*-test revealed no significant difference between men ( $M = 40.09$ ,  $SD = 7.09$ ) and women ( $M = 38.38$ ,  $SD = 5.55$ ) in the unfair treatment construct,  $t(35.4) = 1.83$ ,  $p = 0.076$ . Equal variances cannot be assumed for these tests, as Levene's test for equality of variances was significant, causing the adjusted degrees of freedom to be used. Results can be seen in Figure 3.



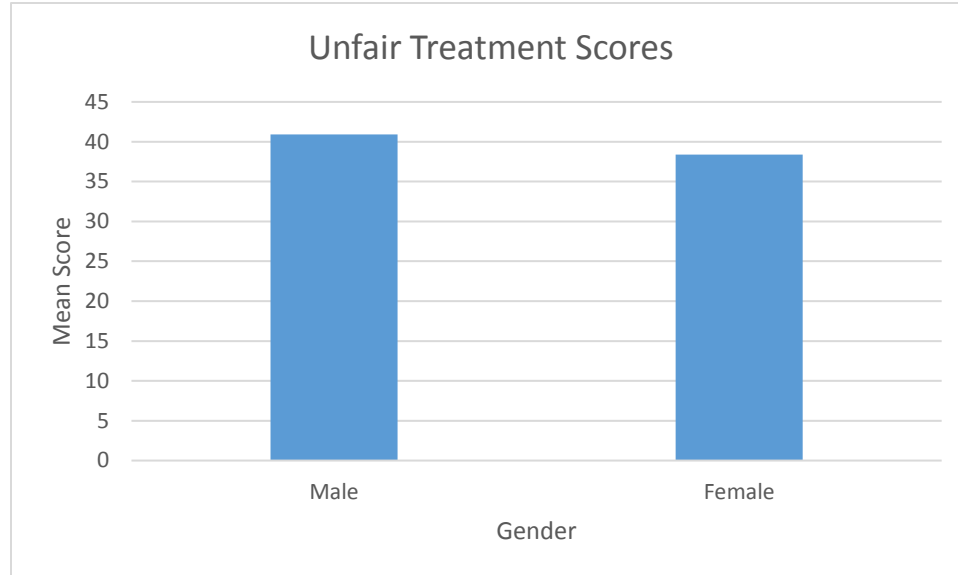


Figure 3. Unfair treatment scores based on gender in a sample of college students

Due to the underrepresentation of minorities, participants identifying as black/African American, Latino, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, or other were grouped together and then compared against the Caucasian majority. An independent samples *t*-test revealed no significant difference between the majority ( $M = 38.65$ ,  $SD = 5.87$ ) and minority groups ( $M = 40.00$ ,  $SD = 6.13$ ) in the unfair treatment construct,  $t(25.44) = -0.916$ ,  $p = 0.368$ . Equal variances were not assumed due to a significant result with Levene's test for equality of variances. Results can be seen in Figure 4.

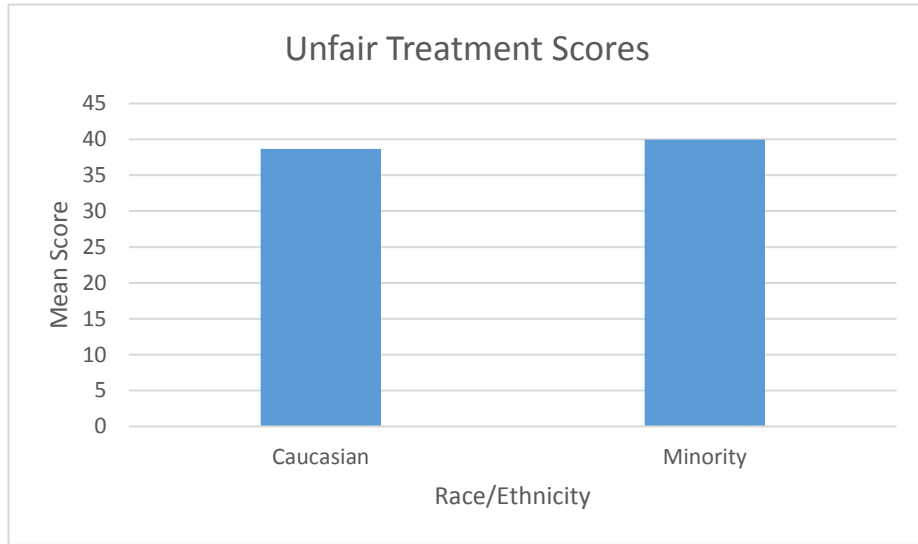


Figure 4. Unfair treatment scores based on race/ethnicity in a sample of college students

An identical procedure was carried out to examine those of disability status, including sensory impairment, mobility impairment, learning disability, and mental health disorder against those without any such diagnosis. Levene’s test for equality of variances was significant. For the unfair treatment construct, those with a disability ( $M = 39.5, SD = 7.18$ ) did not significantly differ from those without ( $M = 38.64, SD = 5.55$ ),  $t(43.36) = 0.65, p = 0.52$ . Results can be seen in Figure 5.

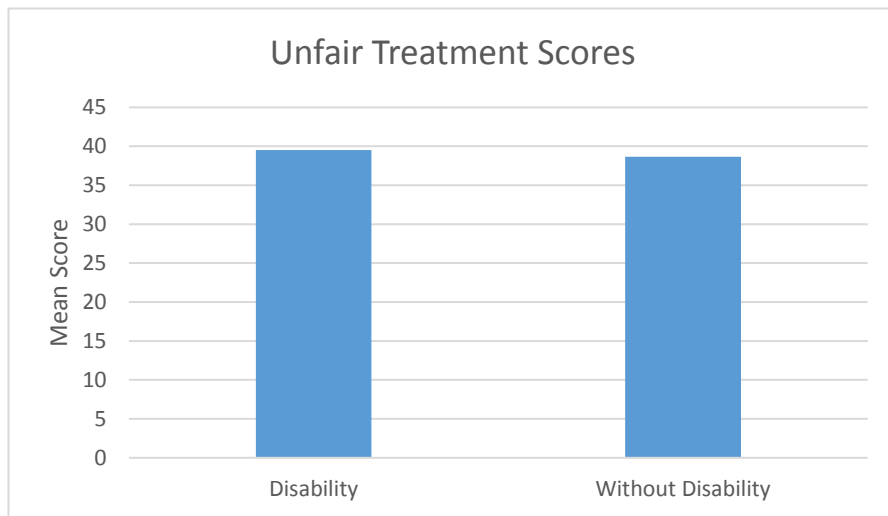
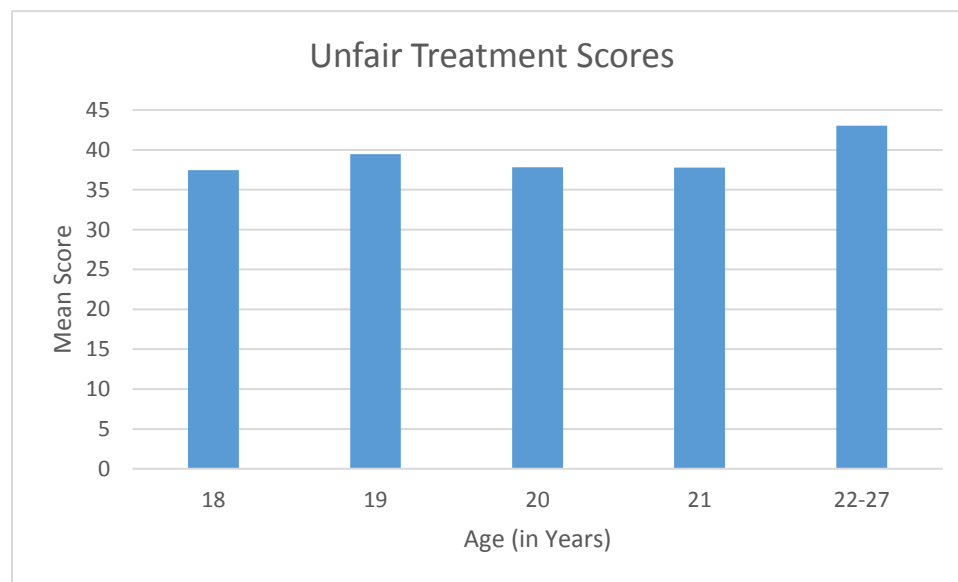


Figure 5. Unfair treatment scores based on disability status in a sample of students

Due to the minimal number of participants identifying as 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 years of age, those ranging from 22 to 27 were merged into one group and compared against 18, 19, 20, and 21 year olds. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated a main effect for age in that participants in the oldest age group, 22 to 27, reported higher unfair treatment scores than all other age groups reported,  $F(4, 165) = 3.467, p = 0.009$ , but only at the level of significance for 18 ( $p = 0.046$ ), 20 ( $p = 0.010$ ), and 21 ( $p = 0.018$ ). These results can be seen in Figure 6.



*Figure 6.* Unfair treatment scores based on age group in a sample of college students.

Statistical analyses could not be conducted for religion or sexual orientation due to the fact that less than ten people constituted alternative groups in both. The institution utilized is a predominantly Christian-populated school, which was reflected in the sample and thus did not allow for statistical examination of these particular demographic characteristics.

### Discrimination

An independent sample *t*-test was run to examine the discrimination scores between men and women. Levene's test for equality of variances was significant, thereby adjusting the degrees of freedom in the analysis. As seen in Figure 7, men ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ) reported statistically significantly higher discrimination scores than women ( $M = 3.9$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ),  $t(35.82) = 2.47$ ,  $p = 0.019$ . Thus, it appears that men were higher in perceiving discrimination at the private, Christian university than women were.

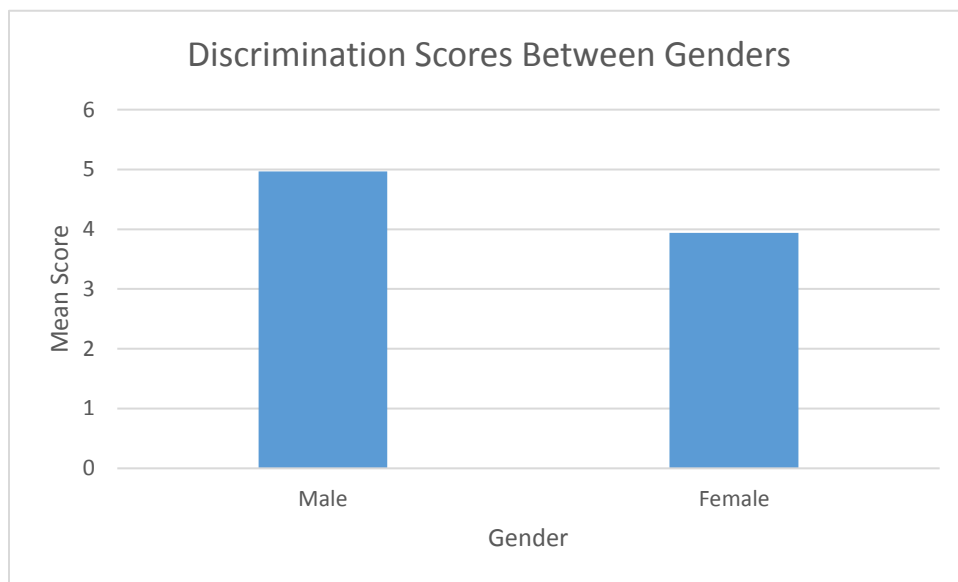


Figure 7. Mean score on the discrimination construct between men and women in a sample of college students.

After grouping together African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Asians and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and other into the minority racial group, an independent sample *t*-test on discrimination scores was run. This test indicated no significant difference between the majority ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ) and the minority groups ( $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 3.02$ ) in the discrimination construct,  $t(21.44) = -2.00$ ,  $p = 0.059$ . These

results can be seen in Figure 8. Equal variances could not be assumed so analyses were conducted with adjusted degrees of freedom.

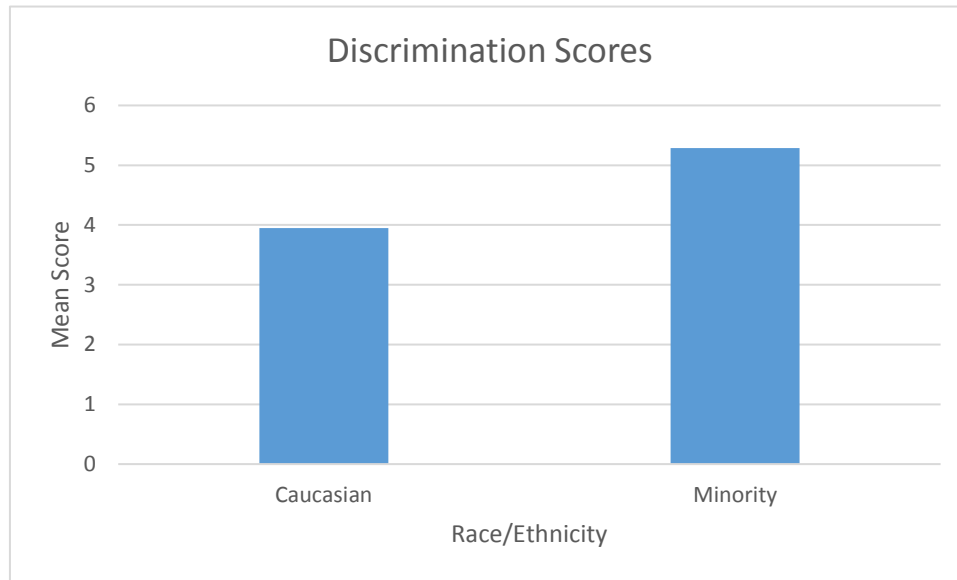


Figure 8. Discrimination scores based on race/ethnicity in a sample of college students

Grouping was also required for examination of disability due to the lack of participants identifying as disabled. Therefore, those with a reported disability were grouped together and compared to those without. Equal variances were not assumed due to a significant result on Levene's test for equality of variances. The discrimination construct revealed no significant differences between those with a disability ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ) and those without ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ),  $t(45.89) = 1.38$ ,  $p = 0.176$ . These results can be seen in Figure 9.

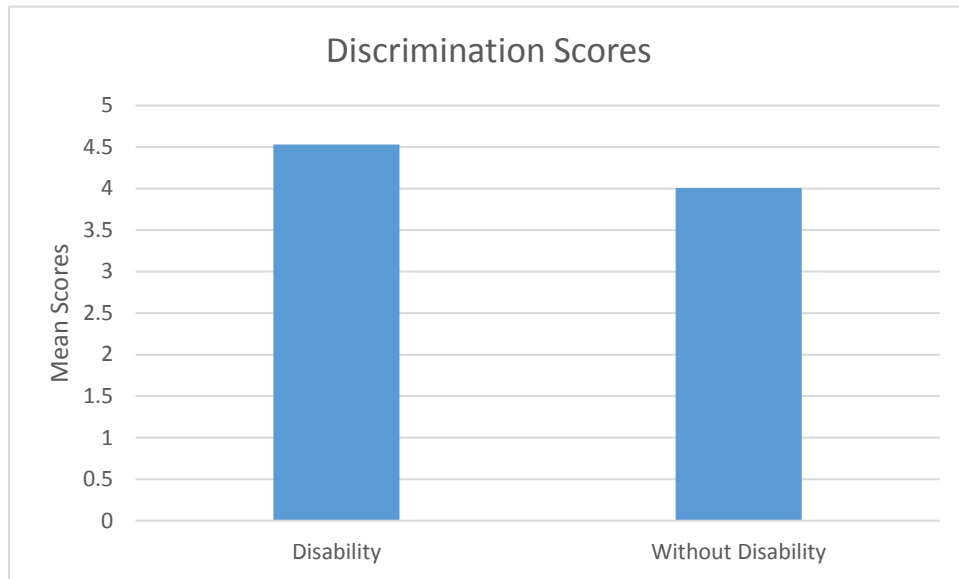


Figure 9. Discrimination scores based on disability status in a sample of college students

Prior to running a one-way ANOVA, participants identifying as 22 to 27 years old were grouped together and compared to those identifying as 18, 19, 20, or 21. No significant differences were found among age groups in the discrimination construct. Results can be seen in Figure 10.

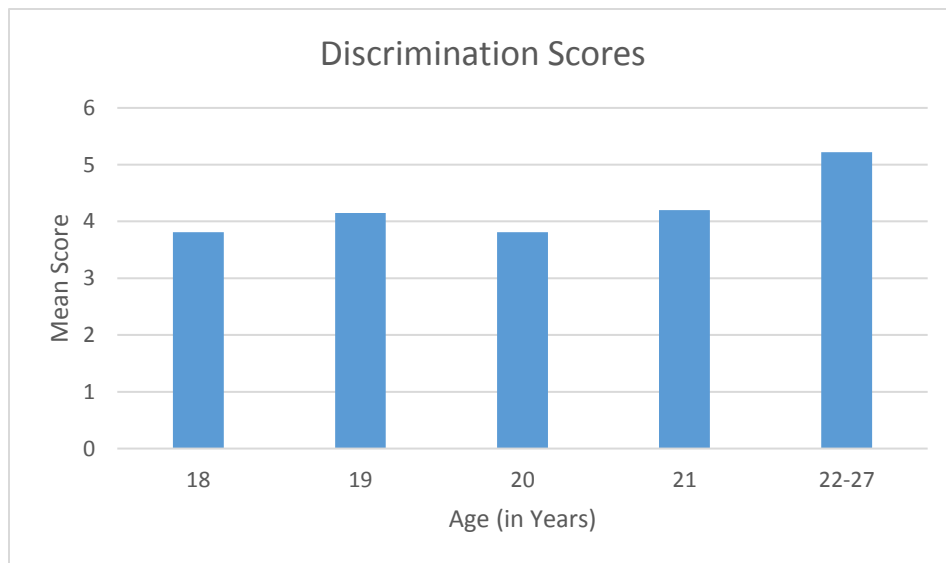


Figure 10. Discrimination scores based on age group in a sample of college students

As with the unfair treatment construct, statistical analyses could not be conducted for religion or sexual orientation due to the fact that less than ten people constituted alternative groups in both.

### **Discussion**

When keeping in mind current research regarding the topics of prejudice and discrimination, results from the current study suggest unexpected conclusions. The men scored higher on the discrimination construct than the women, implying that the men perceive discrimination more. This possibility is contrary to popular thought since women have historically been at a disadvantage with numerous issues such as the right to vote, vocational opportunities, and harassment. In addition, research suggests that prejudiced attitudes and beliefs about women are imbedded into much of culture. For example, a study of 51 individuals asked to rate a person's picture for degree of femininity and likelihood of being a scientist revealed that the more feminine a person looked, the less likely he or she was to be a scientist (Banchefsky et al., 2016). The association between masculinity and the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) field demonstrates a gender bias against the capabilities of women (Banchefsky et al., 2016). The notion of which gender should pursue which career may have played a role in the finding whereby men perceived more unfair treatment and discrimination. Due to the awarded compensation for the survey, the likelihood that many male participants were psychology majors is high. Psychology, and specifically counseling, are thought of as feminine fields of study. Therefore, the men may have perceived these negative

experiences because they are not in a program perceived to be masculine, such as auto mechanics or mathematics.

Additionally, an analysis of age-related prejudice exposed an interesting finding. Those in the age group of 22 and older scored significantly higher on the unfair treatment construct than 18, 20, and 21 year olds. A potential explanation for this is that the traditional student would be between the ages of 18 to 22, assuming he or she entered college immediately after high school and graduated within four years. Those who are outside of that range may have taken time off after high school or are completing their degree in a longer time period than four years. Being surrounded by traditional students could make these individuals feel less intelligent or simply just isolated and out of place. Research on out-group influences has shown that those in a group will perceive members of their own group more favorably than they will perceive members outside the group (Linville et al., 1989). Additionally, people are less likely to initiate a friendship with an out-group member than an in-group member (Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Smith, 2015). Since the 22 to 27 year old participants are older than the typical student and thus the out-group, this element could contribute to their perceived unfair treatment.

Another demographic largely underrepresented in the current study were the minority ethnic groups. No significant differences were found between the Caucasian participants and all other ethnic groups in either the unfair treatment construct or the discrimination construct. The religious orientation of the school may have contributed to this result in a way consistent with biblical mandate. The Christian worldview dictates that everyone love their neighbor (Mark 12:31) and to treat others as one would



personally like to be treated (Matthew 7:12). If the students of this university, the majority of which do profess a Protestant Christian orthodoxy, were obeying the standards espoused in their holy book, then this finding should not be surprising. The study by Perry and Whitehead (2015) supports this conclusion since participants in that experiment who displayed devotion to their faith by reading the Bible, attending services, and praying, were far less likely to oppose interracial marriage within their own family than those that professed a Christian faith but were not as active in living it out.

Individuals with a disability, those of a religious view other than Protestant Christianity, and participants with a sexual orientation besides heterosexual were grossly underrepresented in this sample. Such representation does fit with the population of the university, which is a conservative Evangelical school and thus does not support homosexuality. Those with disabilities were underrepresented partially because of the small percentage of the student body that they make up. Statistical tests for these groups could not be run because of the miniscule number of people in those particular groups. Research does suggest individuals professing an alternative religion would experience more prejudice since Christians express out-group prejudice against those in other faith-systems (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999). In addition, Christians have been shown to be prejudiced against the gay community (Clobert et al., 2014). To further examine if this is the case at the private Christian school, a larger pool of people professing as any of these characteristics would need to participate in order for adequate representation to allow for statistical analysis.

The current study has allowed examination of how much general prejudice, measured through unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment, students in a private Christian university encounter on a day-to-day basis. Results indicate that men perceive more discrimination than women, and 22 to 27 year olds perceive more unfair treatment than younger age groups.

### **Limitations**

There are, however, limitations to the present study. One such limitation is the uneven representation in the demographic data. Females grossly outnumbered males, as did Caucasians compared to other races. Individuals with a disability were also severely underrepresented. A skewed sample may not adequately demonstrate the beliefs and experiences of the population as a whole. Another potential limitation is the necessity of removing the incomplete data. Those participants with incomplete data may have been alike in an unknown way that could change the results. For example, a participant may have stopped midway through the survey and thus contributed incomplete data because the topic was so emotionally laden due to ongoing experiences with unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment. If that were the case, then that individual would represent higher scores on all three constructs. Excluding that data could misrepresent the population by underreporting experiences with unfair treatment, discrimination, and harassment. Additionally, data were collected via a self-report survey which allows for error since participants may have either remembered incorrectly or intentionally answered in an untrue way due to a social desirability bias or a similar phenomenon.

Lastly, the external validity of the results is low since the sample was composed of university students from a private Christian school.

### **Future Research**

Based on the limitations to the current study, future research could incorporate a more heterogeneous sample so that analyses for all demographics could be run. Having a more heterogeneous sample would allow for a better evaluation of the hypothesis that the demographics that perceive the most prejudice in a private, Christian university are those with an alternative religious belief or those who identify as homosexual. Future research could also consider the specific reasons of why men and those above the age of 22 perceive the most unfair treatment and discrimination. Lastly, future research should incorporate a measure of adherence to the Christian faith and how that obedience influences one's experiences with unfair treatment and discrimination.

### **Implications**

Due to the harmful consequences of prejudice, discrimination, and unfair treatment, the implications of this study extend into many real-world situations. The finding whereby students above the age of 22 perceive more prejudice than younger students could persuade institutions to encourage acceptance of students from different age groups. More opportunities could be offered for the slightly older student who may have different needs and expectations than the younger student. Men perceiving more prejudice is meaningful in real life because it opposes common thought in regards to gender-related discrimination. The private, Christian institution can examine why the male students feel more targeted and work to remedy these situations.

Prejudice is a social phenomenon that has caused a great deal of pain and spurred action from those wishing to stop it. The mechanisms that drive it are complex and multifaceted, ranging from out-group homogeneity to implicit attitudes taught in childhood. A 39-item questionnaire given to a private Christian university's student body revealed that participants in a certain age group and gender exhibited higher scores in experiences of perceived unfair treatment and discrimination. The implications of these findings include the potential for the university to institute programs to aid the groups that perceive unfair treatment and discrimination while attending. The lives of these students are negatively impacted by their experiences of prejudice, justifying programs that the institution could implement to combat these feelings, such as better opportunities for older students.

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