

Demographic Analysis of Bias and Privilege at a Small Midwestern University

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Abstract

This study explored how students responded to four scales related to bias and white privilege on a small, predominantly white, midwestern campus. Four research questions were examined: 1) which racial group has the most bias directed towards it 2) are there any gender differences in racial bias 3) do individuals have biases towards one or all racial groups 4) how do individuals respond to the white privilege scale? All questions were designed to examine how majority and minority groups responded to questions. Asians were found to receive the most racial bias. Males were found to hold more racial bias. Additionally, having one group-based bias was predictive of having a bias toward the other minority groups. Majority and minority responses to the white privilege scale will be discussed.

Keywords: bias, white privilege, campus climate

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"If you don't feel you belong here your time will be almost wasted. You will not have the motivation or desire to do things because you feel you don't belong" (Campus Assessment Working Group, 2003, p. 4). There is a need for campus climate to be welcoming for all students. One factor that can influence one's perception of climate is the prevalence of discrimination, bias, and white privilege on a college campus. When a student perceives their campus's climate to be negative, students are more likely to leave their institution; negatively impacting retention efforts (Woodford & Kulik, 2014). Considering this, the purpose of the current study was to examine perceptions of a variety of racial/ethnic groups and white privilege at a predominantly white, small midwestern university. Specifically, rates of self-reported bias toward others, perceptions of privilege, and willingness to self-report on such topics were examined.

Race and Ethnicity

Race, ethnicity, and white privilege all have the potential to affect campus climate for the whole campus as well as for individuals. Sun (1995) defines race as the way we categorize humans by their biological features. It is important to note that the categories of race and the concept of race itself is socially and systemically constructed. The concept of ethnicity is similar to race, but they are two separate concepts that often get confused. Ethnicity is categorized by one's heritage and is

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defined by the individual person. Snyder (2009) states ethnicity is linked to ancestry and kinship. Ethnicity is where an individual's culture, ideals, and traditions come from (Snyder, 2009).

Despite their differences both can result in bias and discrimination toward others. Snyder (2009) notes that certain European ethnic groups have more power and privilege than Asian, Black, or Latinx ethnic groups. This power difference can cause a sense of powerlessness in minorities and can make individuals feel like the target of prejudice (Snyder, 2009). These ingrained beliefs in our society are hard to get rid of and can cause individuals to think, speak, or feel ill towards races and ethnicities that are not their own. These same ill feelings can become part of the campus climate and can make minority individuals feel unsafe and possibly unable to acclimate.

Bias

Every person has the potential to experience or perpetrate bias, unintentionally or intentionally, towards another individual. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2018) defines bias as a "predisposition for or against something." Tatum (2017) gives an example by explaining that humans often consider two categories: "us" and "them." This categorization can lead to misunderstanding and divides between groups. Division and categorization of people have the potential to lead to feeling unwelcome and a reduced sense of belonging at college.

On average 20% of Black individuals and 15% of Latinx individuals endure bias on predominately white college campuses (Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015). These rates of students subjected to bias show the reality that many students of color face on predominately white campuses. Being subjected to race and ethnicity bias can produce difficulties for students in higher education (Cabera & Nora, 1996). Specifically, minority students have a harder time acclimating to social settings and succeeding in academics when prejudice (a negative attitude towards another individual (APA, 2020)) and discrimination (unfair treatment towards individuals based on identities they hold (APA, 2020)) are present (Cabera & Nora, 1996).

White Privilege

Kendall (2002) defines white privilege as systematic benefits white individuals receive because they resemble the dominant social group. When looking at predominately white institutions white privilege is often shown by the university officials displaying white language, dress, and culture as the standard at an institution (Lemaire, 2002). Additionally, because there is a white majority on campus, there is often a lack of awareness for people of color and their experiences. This can result in decision makers making decisions, intentionally or unintentionally, that create a less than inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff of minority populations, resulting in minorities feeling disregarded on their campuses (Lemaire, 2002). In addition, white privilege may make minority individuals feel like their voices, opinions, and identities are valued less on their campus.

White privilege can also affect how an individual views oneself and the

people around them. If not recognized, this can cause white people to feel a sense of superiority over minority groups. Kendall (2002) states that if privilege is not acknowledged and accepted it can lead to the silencing of minorities, the belittling of people of color's worth, and the illusion that white people and their actions are the norm. It is important for white students to address white privilege and its effect on campus climate because if students do not address their privilege, they can make other students feel uncomfortable and potentially engage in racial bias.

In this study, four subcategories of white privilege were examined: willingness to confront white privilege, anticipated costs of white privilege (perceived social costs to individuals), awareness of white privilege, and white privilege remorse. These concepts are important to address because on predominately white campuses, white privilege is common and can appear in several places.

Campus Climate

Campus climate is a tool used to evaluate how students, faculty, and staff view interactions on their campus (Grand Valley State University, 2018) and how those interactions meet individual's standards in regard to how well they feel their potential and needs are respected (University of California, 2014). Campus climate surveys can be used to examine dialogue, encounters, and academic interactions with staff, faculty, administration, and students, which is important when assessing an individual's comfortability on campus.

Oaks (2017) states that when addressing campus climate, it is important to address psychological climate. Psychological climate differs from campus climate because it focuses on how an individual student sees campus climate, whereas campus climate looks at a multitude of peoples' feelings about the campus. Thus, it is important to address the psychological climate for those of minority groups may be vastly different from the average score.

Campus climate is also important because it can influence a student's success. Hurtado (2005) found that students with positive encounters with peers and positive attitudes of their campus environment tended to thrive in college. Specifically, they performed higher in areas of problem-solving, perspective taking, and they had increased interest in social issues at their university. On the other hand, students who see their institution's campus climate as negative and have experienced negative encounters with peers can experience negative impacts on their college experience. Individuals are at a greater risk of having lower grade point averages and lower graduation rates when they are exposed to racism on their campus (Brown et al., 2005).

Current Study

In the current study, self-reported perceptions of racial/ethnicity bias toward three minority groups and white privilege on a small college campus was collected. Five exploratory questions were examined related to perceptions of bias toward minority groups on campus:

R1) Which minority group receives the greatest amount of bias on this campus?

R2) Do gender differences in perceptions of bias exist on this campus?

- R3) Does having a bias toward one group, increase the likelihood of holding a bias toward multiple minority groups?
- R4) How does perceptions of bias relate to self-reports of white privilege?
- R5) On a predominantly white institution, how would participants respond, or neglect to respond to a white privilege survey?

Method

Participants

For this study, 128 individuals consented to participate, of those 121 completed the survey materials. Participants for this study were students from a predominately white (88.8%), midwestern campus. Participants ranged in age from 18 - 57 ($M = 21.33$). The gender of the participants was predominantly female (48.2%), followed by 36.5% male, 2.2% nonbinary participants, and 13.1% chose not to respond. A majority of the participants identified racially as white (84.4%). The rest of the participants had assorted racial and ethnic identities: 4.9% of participants were Black, 1.6% Native American, 1.6% Hmong American, 0.8% Pacific Islander, 2.5% Asian (not Hmong), 5.8% identified as Latinx, and an additional 5.8% preferred not to respond. Of this sample, 3.3% identified as being biracial by selecting more than one of the previously listed categories.

Measures

The Modern Racism Scale. This survey is made up of six items designed to assess racial bias toward Black individuals using a six-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree (Simeoni, 2005). An example item from this survey is, "Black Americans should not push themselves where they are not wanted" ($\alpha = 0.78$).

The Modern Ethnicity Bias Scale. This survey is made up of 12 items designed to assess ethnicity bias towards Hispanic individuals using a seven-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree (Segrest et al., 2006). An example item from this survey is, "Hispanics are taking advantage of their minority status" ($\alpha = 0.90$).

The Anti-Asian American Prejudice Scale. This survey is made up of 25 items intended to assess an individuals' potential prejudice towards Asian populations using a six-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree (Lin, 1999). An example item from this survey is, "Asian Americans enjoy a disproportionate amount of economic success" ($\alpha = 0.90$).

The White Privilege Attitudes Scale. This survey is made up of 28 items designed to assess attitudes towards white privilege using a seven-point Likert response scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = not applicable (Pinterits et al., 2009). The survey is made up of four subcategories: willingness to confront privilege, anticipated social costs of addressing privilege, awareness of privilege, and remorse of privilege, alphas = 0.91, 0.85, 0.81, and 0.92, respectively.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via email and the campus participant pool. In the consent statement it was outlined that, "participants will be addressing some potentially sensitive topics regarding their personal feelings on race." Given the sensitive nature of the topic, it was decided that demographic questions should be asked first, following consent, in order to examine possible trends in attrition rates based on the types of questions being asked.

Participants were then asked to complete the three surveys relating to racial bias. The order of these surveys was randomized for participants. All participants were then asked to respond to the White Privilege Attitudes Scale. This scale was presented last as the researchers viewed this topic to potentially be the most challenging for participants to respond to, and most likely to result in participant attrition. Participants were then thanked for their time and received course credit for participating.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine how students on a small midwestern campus responded to surveys regarding bias and privilege. In order to compare the levels of bias held between groups (RQ 1 & 2), a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted (see Table 1). To create equivalent scoring systems between the scales, participants who selected the middle option for the Modern Ethnicity Bias Scale (neither agree nor disagree) were removed from the analysis. Using a repeated-measures ANOVA, significant mean differences in the participants' ratings of the three racial biases were found, $F(1, 118) = 1385.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.92$.

Post hoc analyses on the three racial biases were conducted using Tukey's LSD. Participants reported significantly more racial bias toward Asians relative

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<u>Hispanic Bias</u>		
Overall	2.56	1.01
Male	2.93	1.06
Female	2.38	0.95
<u>Black Bias</u>		
Overall	2.24	0.91
Male	2.52	0.94
Female	2.04	0.83
<u>Asian Bias</u>		
Overall	2.95	0.66
Male	3.09	0.64
Female	2.87	0.63

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Self-Reported Racial Bias.

to Blacks or Hispanics. Additionally, participants reported significantly more racial bias toward Hispanics than Blacks. A set of t-tests were also conducted to investigate possible gender differences in the amount of reported bias. Men reported significantly more bias than women did toward Hispanics, $t(116) = 2.94$, $p = .004$, $r^2 = .07$, and Blacks, $t(115) = 2.89$, $p = .005$, $r^2 = .07$. Additionally, men reported only marginally significant more bias toward Asians than did women, $t(116) = 1.89$, $p = .061$, $r^2 = .03$.

A set of Pearson Correlation tests was examined to determine if having bias toward one group was predictive of having biases toward other groups as well (RQ3). It was found that if an individual were higher in bias toward one minority group, they were also likely to report higher levels of bias toward the other two racial groups as well (see Table 2).

Examining the relationship between racial group bias and the factors of white privilege (RQ4), two key findings were noted (see Table 2). First, bias towards racial minorities was negatively correlated with a willingness to confront white privilege, acknowledgement of one's own white privilege, and feeling remorse for one's own white privilege. Second, the perceptions of there being a cost to addressing the issue of white privilege showed a significant positive correlation with bias towards Asians and Hispanics. This relationship was found to be marginally reflected as well when examined with bias towards black people.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Hispanic Bias	-						
2. Asian Bias	.58**	-					
3. Black Bias	.82**	.50**	-				
White Privilege							
4. Willingness to confront	-.61**	-.34**	-.52**	-			
5. Cost to Address	.22*	.22*	.17	.04	-		
6. Awareness of	-.69**	-.31**	-.68**	-.69**	-.04	-	
7. Remorse for	-.35**	-.12	-.34**	.57**	.11	.42**	-

Table 2: Correlations for the Bias Scales and Four Factors of White Privilege.

* Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

In addition to examining the relationship between reported bias and perceptions of white privilege, the researchers also examined the frequency and types of responses (or lack thereof) for the white privilege scale. The percentage of responses, non-responses, and abstainer responses can be found in Table 3.

Discussion

When analyzing the results for bias on campus, it was found that, on average, responses to the survey were at the low end of the scale. This would suggest that the

	Disagree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Not Applicable	No Response
Willingness to Confront Privilege					
I plan to work to change our unfair social structure that promotes white privilege.	16.67 (10.53)	52.94 (68.42)	21.57 (10.53)	2.94 (5.26)	5.88 (5.26)
I'm glad to explore my white privilege.	16.67 (15.79)	39.22 (26.32)	32.35 (21.05)	5.88 (21.05)	5.88 (10.53)
Anticipated Costs of Addressing White Privilege					
I am anxious about stirring up bad feelings by exposing the advantages that Whites have.	29.41 (57.48)	30.39 (21.05)	31.37 (10.53)	2.94 (5.26)	5.88 (5.26)
I am anxious about the personal work I must do within myself to eliminate white privilege.	42.16 (36.84)	20.59 (26.32)	30.39 (26.32)	0.98 (5.26)	5.88 (5.26)
White Privilege Awareness					
Everyone has equal opportunity, so this so-called White privilege is really White-bashing. *	45.10 (26.32)	40.20 (68.42)	7.84 (0.00)	0.98 (0.00)	5.88 (5.26)
Plenty of people are more privileged than Whites. *	48.04 (31.58)	30.39 (52.63)	13.73 (10.53)	1.96 (0.00)	5.88 (5.26)
White Privilege Remorse					
I am ashamed of my White privilege.	35.29 (26.32)	23.53 (21.05)	31.37 (26.32)	3.92 (21.05)	5.88 (5.26)
I am angry that I keep benefitting from White privilege.	39.22 (15.79)	23.53 (26.32)	27.45 (31.58)	3.92 (21.05)	5.88 (5.26)

Table 3: Percentage of White Student and (Minority Student) Responses to the White Privilege Scale.

*Note: For the white sample $n = 102$. For the minority sample $n = 19$. There were 7 responses

* = Reverse coded items. This table is a condensed version of the results.

level of individual perceptions of bias held by individuals on campus is relatively low. Regarding the question of which racial group has the most bias directed towards it, Asian bias was found to be the most prevalent among students in the study. A reason for Asian bias being most prevalent among students may be because Asian students are highly regarded as model minorities and praised for their high-ranking academic skills (McGee, Thakore, & LaBlance, 2017). These stereotypes of Asian individuals having superior academic skills are embedded in American culture and may cause people to have ill feelings or bias towards Asian populations, particularly within academic settings.

This institution's results also showed that men, on average, reported higher levels of bias toward other racial groups than women did. Even though both groups displayed racial bias, on average, men had significantly higher amounts of Hispanic, Black, and Asian bias compared to women. This finding, in part, mirrors the findings found by Assari (2018) which showed that white men, relative to white women were more likely to have bias towards black people.

Additionally, it was found that reporting biased beliefs/attitudes about one minority group was positively correlated with reporting biases towards the other two minority groups as well. It is not known if reducing bias toward one group would also result in reductions of bias toward others, however, more general trainings about inclusivity and empathy toward others broadly may be an effective way to reduce

these biases.

White Privilege

The second focus of this study was to examine how participants would react to questions regarding issues of bias and white privilege. This was examined in two ways: 1) willingness to respond, and 2) strength of their reported attitudes. When examining participants' willingness to respond the first item that needs to be highlighted is that participating in this research project was an optional activity for students. There is no way to know how many students viewed the invitation to participate and opted not to participate and what their motives for not participating might have been. Nevertheless, a few interesting findings emerged from the data collected. To start with, five individuals chose to look at the consent form, but opted not to complete the study (their motives for opting out are unknown and these individuals are not included in the sample size). Similarly, four individuals consented to participate but declined to answer any items on the survey after giving consent. Additionally, three more answered the demographic questions but declined to answer any items related to bias or privilege. Of these three, all identified as white. An additional six individuals, who identified as white, declined to respond to the White Privilege scale items. In addition to choosing not to respond, there were many white participants that chose responses that allowed them to dodge the question such as "neither agree nor disagree" (NAND) or "not applicable" (NA). For the NAND option 13% - 32% of white students choose this response for the various white privilege items. Additionally, 1%-10% of white participants selected NA on the white privilege items. This result is especially intriguing considering the "not applicable" option was intended for minority individuals who may not feel that the questions would relate to them. The choice to select either NAND or NA or by not responding at all could potentially be explained by white individuals feeling uneasiness when discussing white privilege, also known as white fragility. White fragility is when white individuals are unable to tolerate racial stress, such as examining one's own whiteness, which can cause white individuals to engage in defensive actions (DiAngelo, 2011). Boatright-Horowitz and Soeung (2009) state that white people tend to deny the ideas of white privilege and can even consider white privilege conversations as attacks on their character, which may have been reflected in the NAND and NA responses.

Another interesting trend shown was the number of minority individuals who decided to answer white privilege items. Overall, when looking at the results minority individuals were more likely to respond to the white privilege items, and on a majority of items they were more likely to respond with agreeing or disagreeing answers instead of the other options. Even though minority individuals do not have white privilege, they chose to answer more frequently, and sometimes less neutrally than white students did. From the data that is collected we cannot determine why minority individuals scored this way. However, it is speculated that because they are minorities, they understand the dynamics of bias, privilege, and their impact on people. Perhaps minorities are more likely to be aware and remorseful about any privilege they have whether that be socioeconomic, able bodied, or gender privilege. This awareness of their privilege could have caused them to confuse their own

privileges with 'white privilege.' It also is possible that because they are minorities, they may just be more willing to be sorry about the existence of white privilege, not because they have it, but because it affects them systematically. Furthermore, minority individuals who are perceived to be white passing or have lighter skin may have thought more critically about their own white privilege, which may have affected the overall responses of minority individuals in this survey.

Limitations and Future Directions

There were many limitations of this study. Self-selection was the first major limitation that could have influenced the results of this study. As stated previously, averaged responses to the minority bias surveys were at the low end of the scale, suggesting that there was less bias held by individuals on campus. While these lower reports of bias seem positive, given the small sample size and the self-selection/ reported nature of this study, it is unrealistic to believe that the level of bias and subsequent discrimination that occurs would be as low. Students may have responded differently than their normal behavior in hopes to 'look better' on the survey. To attempt to understand who would be willing to participate in such a study (or not), demographics were assessed first. This allowed the researchers to identify a few attributes of participants before they quit the survey. However, this design decision may also have made participants more wary of the types of responses they selected for the subsequent measures of bias and white privilege than if the demographics had been assessed at the end, as commonly done in research.

Another limitation of this study was that the white privilege scale differed from the original study. In the original study, the white privilege scale ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* and did not have a NAND option. While this neutral option was not part of the original scale, the researchers were interested to see what percentage of students would take advantage of an opportunity to not express an emotional response to the white privilege items. In addition to the neutral option, due to a clerical error, there were only two agree options, instead of three agree options reflected in other 6-point Likert scales. This left participants with a disproportionate disagree to agree ratio (3:2) which might influence participant responses. Despite these alterations, the scale still maintained a high level of reliability, consistent with previous research.

For future studies, it would be beneficial to add qualitative and quantitative campus climate assessment questions to get a better understanding of how perceptions of bias and privilege relate to the perceptions of campus climate. Even though it has been outlined that campus climate has the potential to be affected by bias and privilege (Lemaire, 2002), it cannot be confirmed in the current study whether campus climate at this institution has been altered because of the privilege and bias displayed. However, it is possible to compare the results of the campus climate survey at this institution, with the results of the study. When analyzing the results of the most recent campus climate survey on this campus, underrepresented minority students expressed feeling lower senses of belonging and reduced perceptions of climate compared to their white peers (Greene, 2017). Furthermore, of those who participated, 31% of underrepresented minorities reported experiencing harassing behavior relative to only 12.9% of whites. This would suggest that despite

campus efforts to improve the climate, additional work regarding bias is needed.

In addition to tracking qualitative and quantitative campus climate assessments, longitudinal tracking would be beneficial for identifying shifts over time. Considering this, a long-term benefit of understanding the types of bias and beliefs about white privilege on a campus would be to help determine if campus efforts to reduce bias and privilege through trainings, courses, or other activities are effective at reducing bias and increasing awareness of white privilege. At the institution examined there are currently many efforts being implemented to reduce bias and create awareness and understanding of privilege on campus: hosting trainings, implementing equitable resources, providing safe spaces for marginalized populations, and giving people resources to help reduce their own prejudices. While such initiatives are well intended, it would be useful to track which efforts are most effective and warrant additional time/resources devoted to them in the future or on other campuses. Such data showing improvements of the overall campus climate, psychological climate for minorities, retention of students and staff, and increases in student satisfaction and performance would likely serve to encourage other campuses to be more intentional and willing to invest in such efforts as well.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to serve as a pilot study to analyze responses to white privilege and racial bias affecting a small, predominantly white, midwestern institution. This information provides more clarity of what biases exist on campus and how students will respond when asked about such topics. The next step is to assess campus climate and how it is affected by initiatives on campus. If this institution could get significant results showing that efforts are reducing bias and privilege and improving campus climate, other institutions could utilize our findings. This could cause a chain reaction of positive change nationwide that would hopefully leave minority students feeling more welcome on their campuses so that they can reach their full potential. Minority students deserve to experience equal opportunities that their white counterparts have in higher education, this research could help pave the way for that.

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