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Prejudice and Discrimination in U.S. Graduate Geography Programs: Reports from Domestic and International Students

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Prejudice and Discrimination in U.S. Graduate Geography Programs:
Reports from Domestic and International Students

Karen C. Johnson

B.A., Central Connecticut State University, 2013

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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At the
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2016

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2016

APPROVAL PAGE

Masters of Arts Thesis

Prejudice and Discrimination in U.S. Graduate Geography Programs:
Reports from Domestic and International Students

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2016

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on domestic and international students and their experiences of discrimination and prejudice while enrolled in graduate geography programs in the United States. This is an issue that relates to three important and interrelated trends in graduate education in the United States: increasing numbers of international students; growing efforts to reduce and eliminate discrimination and prejudice in higher education; and rising awareness of the role that academic “climate and culture” play in sustaining or changing current patterns of participation by students of diverse backgrounds. A web-based survey was developed and used to collect data from 420 students in doctoral and master’s programs in 41 states. The survey was designed to collect both, information about the types of prejudice or discrimination students experienced, and the setting in which experiences occurred. Just under a fifth of the respondents reported experiencing instances of prejudice and discrimination. The types reported revolved around gender, race, sexuality, national origin and a range of other categories. These were reported in the context of interactions with advisors, other faculty, and others students, as well as in other ways within the department, the university, and the community outside the university. The most interesting finding was that the greatest number of experiences involved interactions with other students and within the community outside the university. These findings suggest the value of addressing prejudice and discrimination within student cohorts and the local community.

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Prejudice and Discrimination in U.S. Graduate Geography Programs:

Reports from Domestic and International Students

Overview

This study focuses on the comparative experiences of U.S. domestic and international students in graduate geography programs and their experiences of discrimination and prejudice. Both are important issues and relate generally to the broad topic of academic “climate and culture”—how disciplines and departments are organized and develop as communities around shared values and beliefs that may privilege some members and disadvantage others. It builds upon a growing body of research that focuses on the experiences of faculty and students in graduate and undergraduate geography programs. This research has focused on perceptions of the work and study environment of graduate students, career plans and aspirations, mentoring practice, the support of early career faculty, and the experiences of foreign-born students among other issues (Scheyvens, Wild and Overton 2003; Solem and Foote 2004; Alberts 2008; Collins 2008; Foote et al. 2008; Foote and Solem 2009; Theobald 2009; Monk, Foote and Schlemper 2012; Alberts and Hazen 2013). The role of prejudice and discrimination has been highlighted as one of the major factors in shaping student experiences (Pulido 2002; Mahtani 2004; Solem, Lee and Schlemper 2009).

This paper builds especially on the work of Solem, Lee and Schlemper (2012) who studied how graduate students enrolled in masters and doctoral geography programs perceive the social and academic climate of their departments. In that article, issues of diversity, gender, tolerance and equity arose in discussions of climate and culture. Here I used a web-based survey to pursue these issues in greater detail focusing on how issues of prejudice and discrimination arise in interactions with the: student’s advisor, other faculty, other students, as well as in the

department itself, the university beyond the department, and the community where the university is located. The questions are how domestic and foreign-born students compare in terms of their experiences of discrimination and prejudice including what types of discrimination and prejudice they experience, from whom, and in what settings these experiences arise.

Theoretical Context

These questions are related to three important and interrelated trends in graduate education in geography in the United States: increasing numbers of international students; growing efforts to reduce and eliminate discrimination and prejudice in higher education; and rising awareness of the roles that “climate and culture” play in sustaining or changing current patterns of participation by students of all backgrounds.

It is the first issue that motivated the larger research project of which this study is part. Its aim was to compare the experiences of domestic and international students in U.S. geography programs and to identify areas for improving the quality of programs for both groups. I was particularly interested in how the experiences of international students may diverge from their domestic peers. This is because higher education is becoming increasingly globalized and universities are increasingly competing worldwide for students and faculty. If the needs of these foreign-born students are not well-served by their graduate programs, they may leave the U.S. to study elsewhere, meaning the potential loss of talented geographers capable of helping lead the discipline in the future.

Issues of international students and faculty are beginning to receive increased research attention in geography and other disciplines. To date, this research has focused on disparities in the ways international academics are treated by colleagues and institutions and some of the

anxieties these individuals face in relation to language, cultural values, cross-cultural transition, political beliefs, educational expectations, and legal status (Manrique and Manrique 1999; Abel 2002; Collins 2006; Germain-Rutherford and Kerr 2009; Association of American Geographers 2016); these concerns mirror issues identified in other research on the international migration of non-academic professionals (Mills 1994; Tichenor 1994; Castles and Davidson 2000; Iredale 2001; Meyer 2001).

Concern has also focused on the prejudice and discrimination that foreign-born students face, a problem they sometimes share with their domestic peers. Indeed, the reason for focusing on these issues in this article is that nearly a fifth of all the students that responded to the survey indicated that they had experienced some form of prejudice or discrimination in their work. Given recent events of discrimination, prejudice, harassment and violence on U.S. college campuses, it seemed worthwhile to explore in greater detail the responses that I received in the survey.

For domestic students these issues have been highlighted by a number of high-profile protests and court cases involving discrimination and harassment. Many of these have focused on issues of gender equity, sexual violence, and the treatment of women in higher education at all levels (Bystydzienski and Resnik 1994; Cooper and Stevens 2002; Vargas 2002). Currently, there are over 200 Title IX sexual assault investigations underway by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (Chronicle of Higher Education 2016) and lawsuits have been filed against many universities over long-standing patterns of gender discrimination. Recent protests at the University of Missouri, Yale University, the University of Oklahoma, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and other campuses have served to keep issues of race and ethnicity in the spotlight as continuing points of friction on many campuses. The treatment of

LGBTQ students and students with “undocumented” citizenship have also been in the news. Foreign-born students face these and other types of prejudice. Racial, ethnic and religious animosity has often been directed against Muslim students and those from nations in the Middle East. Students from other parts of the world can face similar racial prejudices and stereotyping.

Sometimes, these prejudices are expressed as overt acts of sexism, racism, ableism and other types of discrimination (Lim and Herrera-Sobek 2000; Pulido 2002; Mahtani 2004). But, in university settings where overt racism is often “called out,” prejudice and discrimination are sometimes expressed indirectly. The term “microaggression” is now applied to a wide range of these verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Sue 2010). The term “neo-racism” also applies to this type of indirect racism—words, actions and attitudes which appear on the surface to be non-racist or anti-racist, but simply cloak underlying racist beliefs (Lee and Rice 2007; Cantwell and Lee 2010).

It is important to remember that prejudice and discrimination can appear in many different settings and contexts—between students, advisors and other faculty within a department; among students themselves; by staff, administrators and faculty in the larger university community; and by people in the neighborhoods, towns or cities that surround the university. This survey was designed, in part, to consider these different contexts. For example, students may find their department home to be free of prejudice, but may experience it elsewhere on campus or in the local community. So the question is not only whether foreign-born and domestic differ in their experiences of prejudice and harassment, but also what types they experience and in what contexts.

All of these issues are part of what has come to be termed academic “climate and culture,” climate referring to the social and interpersonal characteristics of a work environment

that shape faculty, student and staff behavior, and culture being the underlying values, beliefs and ways of doing things that are passed on from one generation to the next in a department or university. Hurtado et al. (2008) argues that there are four key elements that define a university's climate and culture. The first is its historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, the "norms embedded in campus culture, traditions, policies, and historical mission" (Hurtado et al., 2008, 206). The second element is a campus's structural or compositional diversity in terms of its inclusion of previously underrepresented groups. The third and fourth elements, however, really touch on how campus climate can promote or inhibit change at a personal level. These are the psychological element, or how people perceive diversity issues and support them within the university, and the behavioral element which encompasses intergroup interactions and the extent to which students, faculty, and staff act upon organizational values.

These issues of climate and culture are important because they help to explain why some issues of prejudice and discrimination are so persistent in academic life, and why they are so difficult to change. It suggests that issues related to the treatment of domestic and foreign-born students, as well as attitudes about gender, race, nationality and sexuality, can come to be embedded in the life of an institution in ways that are difficult to change. Hurtado's framework also helps to explain why positive efforts made in one or two areas may be undercut by resistance or lack of interest in another. For example, an institution may have success in changing its historical legacy and take strides in supporting structural diversity, but these efforts may be undercut by lack of psychological and behavioral support. The results reported here provide a sense of some of the psychological and behavioral issues that continue to be faced by students in graduate geography programs.

Method

The data reported here were collected as a part of a larger study designed to compare domestic and foreign-born students in U.S. graduate geography programs with respect to their: 1) reasons for pursuing graduate education; 2) experiences while in graduate school; and 3) future career plans.¹ The full questionnaire included 13 questions about the first topic, 39 about the second, and 20 about the third. Questions about discrimination and prejudice were included under the second topic and were organized into six sections. Most of these were posed as Likert-scale questions about the student's experiences: in the department as a whole, with the student's advisor, with other faculty, with other students, in the university (beyond the department), and in the community where the university is located. Each of these sections included a closed question about whether the student had experienced prejudice and discrimination and, if "yes," a form opened asking respondents to describe the experience(s) (Table 1).

In the survey, prejudice or discrimination was defined as, attitudes or conduct that are based upon an individual's race, color, ethnicity, religious creed, age, sex, marital status, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, genetic information, physical or mental disabilities (including learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, past/present history of a mental disorder), veteran status, prior conviction of a crime, workplace hazards to reproductive systems, gender identity or expression, or membership in other protected classes set forth in state or federal law that excludes an individual from participation, denies the individual the benefits of, treats the individual differently, or otherwise adversely affects a term or condition of an individual's employment, education, living environment or participation in a University program or activity. Discrimination includes failing to provide reasonable accommodation, consistent with state and federal law, to persons with disabilities.

Table 1: Survey questions about prejudice or discrimination. Respondents selecting “Yes” were prompted to provide written examples.

In the Department: In regard to the department and curriculum of your current program, have you faced prejudice or discrimination?

By Advisor: In regard to your advisor in your current program, have you faced prejudice or discrimination?

By other Faculty: In regard to other faculty (apart from your advisor) in your current program, have you faced prejudice or discrimination?

From other Students: In regard to other students in your current program, have you faced prejudice or discrimination?

In the University, but outside your Department: In regard to the university beyond your department, have you faced prejudice or discrimination?

In the Community: In regard to the community where your university is located or where you live, have you faced prejudice or discrimination?

A web-based survey was developed using the Qualtrics software system. The survey was designed to send invitations and reminders by email and collate responses in a spreadsheet. Links to the survey were emailed to geography graduate students at the University of Connecticut for the purpose of testing the email component of the survey software, evaluating the functionality of response-dependent questions, and obtaining feedback regarding the survey’s clarity in wording. Changes were made to ensure the proper function of response-dependent questions. Wording was added to clarify that similar questions applied to different aspects of the graduate student’s program. Finally, hover tips defining prejudice and discrimination were used for every question that asked about a student’s experience with prejudice or discrimination. The responses from graduate students enrolled in the geography program at the University of Connecticut were not included in the evaluation of responses for the subsequent study. The

survey was approved by the University of Connecticut's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on September 21, 2015.

Selection of Sample

Graduate students enrolled in graduate geography programs were the population to be surveyed. For analysis, my goal was to collect responses from between 75-100 domestic graduate students and 75-100 international students. Based on a 10-20 percent response rate for web-based surveys, this meant inviting between 1000-2000 graduate students to participate in the survey.

The 2013-2014 Association of American Geographers' *Guide to Geography Programs in the Americas* was used to identify major institutions that offered geography programs in the United States (Association of American Geographers 2014). To sample the population, I chose to pick, if possible, the two largest geography departments in each state: 1) the largest doctoral program; and 2) the largest master's program (not also offering the Ph.D.). The size of departments was determined by the number of full-time faculty.

Not all states have doctoral or master's programs in geography, and not all programs publish lists of student emails. In these cases, the two largest graduate programs (whether doctoral or master's) were sampled, provided email addresses were available for their graduate students. The point of this sampling was to gain a broad cross-section of master's and doctoral students from across the entire United States. Given the sampling constraints, there were 11 states where it was possible to include students from one doctoral and one master's program (California, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, Utah, and Virginia); 11 states where two doctoral programs were surveyed (Arizona, Colorado,

Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin); 2 states where two master's programs were surveyed (Alabama and New Mexico). In 16 states, only one university offering the doctoral degree was surveyed (Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia); and in 1 state (Nebraska) only one university offering the master's degree was identified. Nine states were not included in the survey because no graduate geography degrees are available there; emails were not available; or, in the case of Connecticut, because of potential conflicts of interest (Connecticut, Louisiana, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming).

Email Addresses

Publicly available email addresses of graduate students were gathered from Geography Department websites. The email addresses were compiled into seven comma-separated values (CSV) files compatible with the Qualtrics Mailer software. Altogether 2,148 graduate student emails were collected from 65 different graduate geography programs, 16 offering a Master's degree and 49 offering a PhD, in 41 different states.

Invitations and reminders to participate in the survey were sent between September 22 and October 16, 2015. A link embedded in the emailed invitation, when selected or clicked by the recipient, opened to the first page of the survey. Reminders to complete the survey were sent one week following the invitations. The survey was closed October 29, 2015.

Results

Responses to the full survey were received from 420 students studying in 62 universities in 41 states, as noted in the previous section. Of the total, 302 (72%) indicated they were United States citizens, 51 (12%) reported they were not citizens of the United States, 3 (1%) preferred not to answer, and 64 (15%) of the responses were missing or blank data (Figure 1). When asked about gender, 174 (42%) indicated female, 172 (41%) indicated male, 10 (2% percent) preferred not to answer, 1 indicated other, and 63 (15%) of the responses were missing or blank data (Figure 2). Responses were received from 251 (60%) doctoral students, 105 (25%) master's students, 2 indicated other, 1 preferred not to answer, and 61 (15%) were missing or blank data (Figure 3). The average age of respondents was 31.1 years. When asked about age, 202 (48%) were younger than the average age, 129 (31%) were older, 25 (6%) preferred not to answer, and 64 (15%) were missing or blank data (Figure 4).

When asked if they had experienced prejudice or discrimination, 82 (19.5 %) of the respondents indicated they had experienced or observed discrimination or prejudice in one or more of the six settings listed in Table 1. Respondents were not required, but were given the opportunity to give written examples of specific incidents of discrimination. If they wished, respondents could report experiences of prejudice or discrimination in more than one context, and of more than one type. Of the 82 respondents who indicated an experience of discrimination or prejudice, 58 (71%) provided written examples.

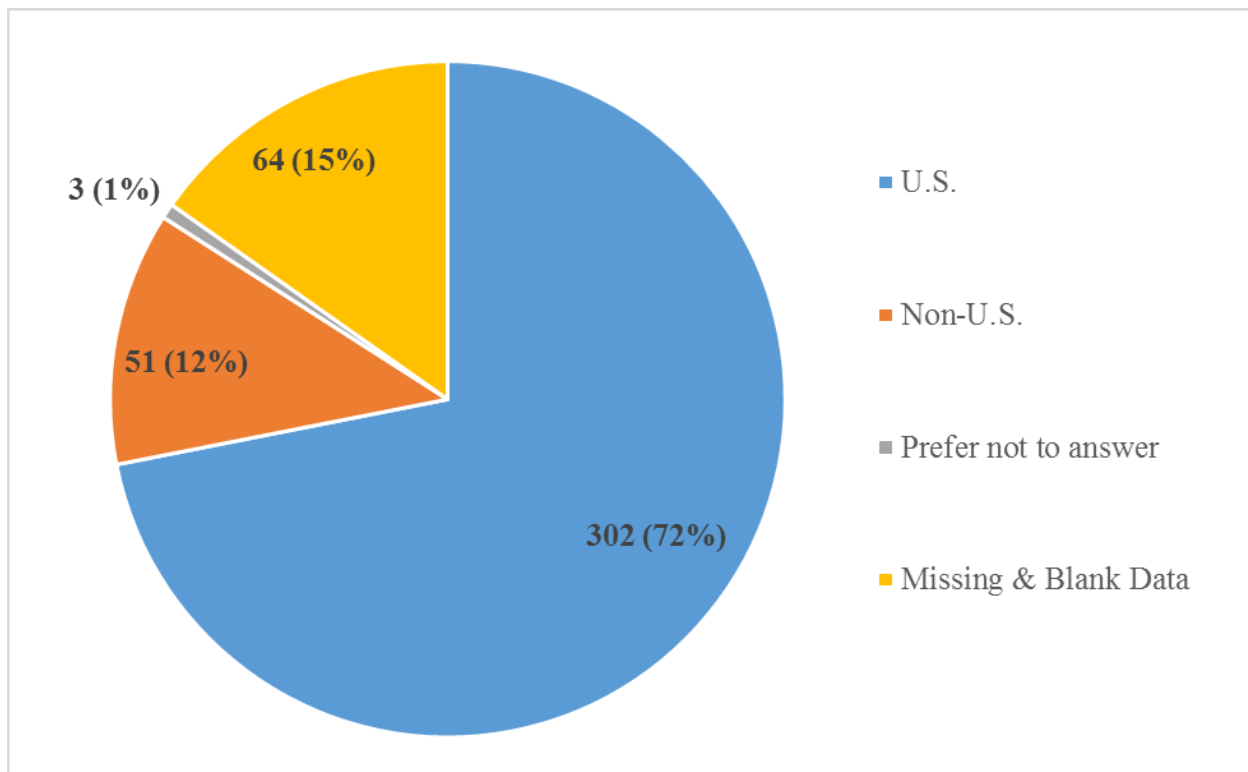


Figure 1. Percent of U.S. & Non-U.S. Citizens (Among all respondents)

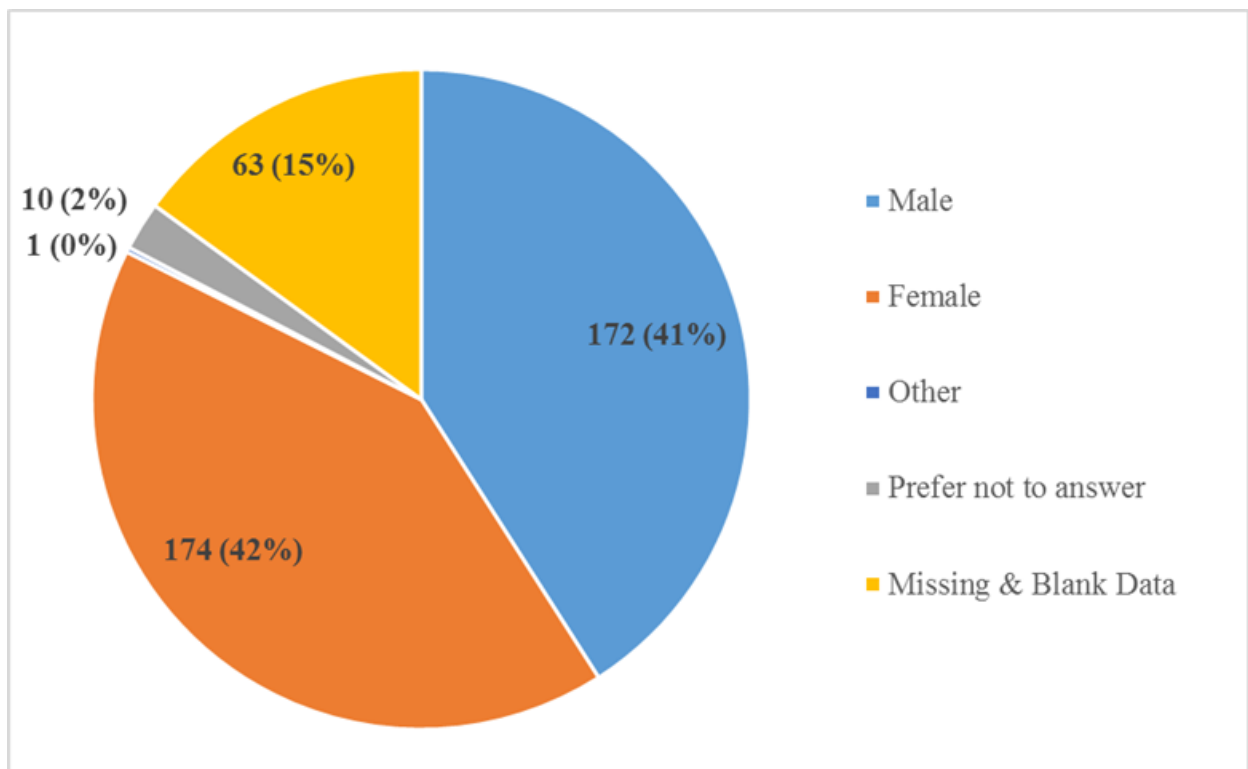


Figure 2. Percent of Male & Female (Among all respondents)

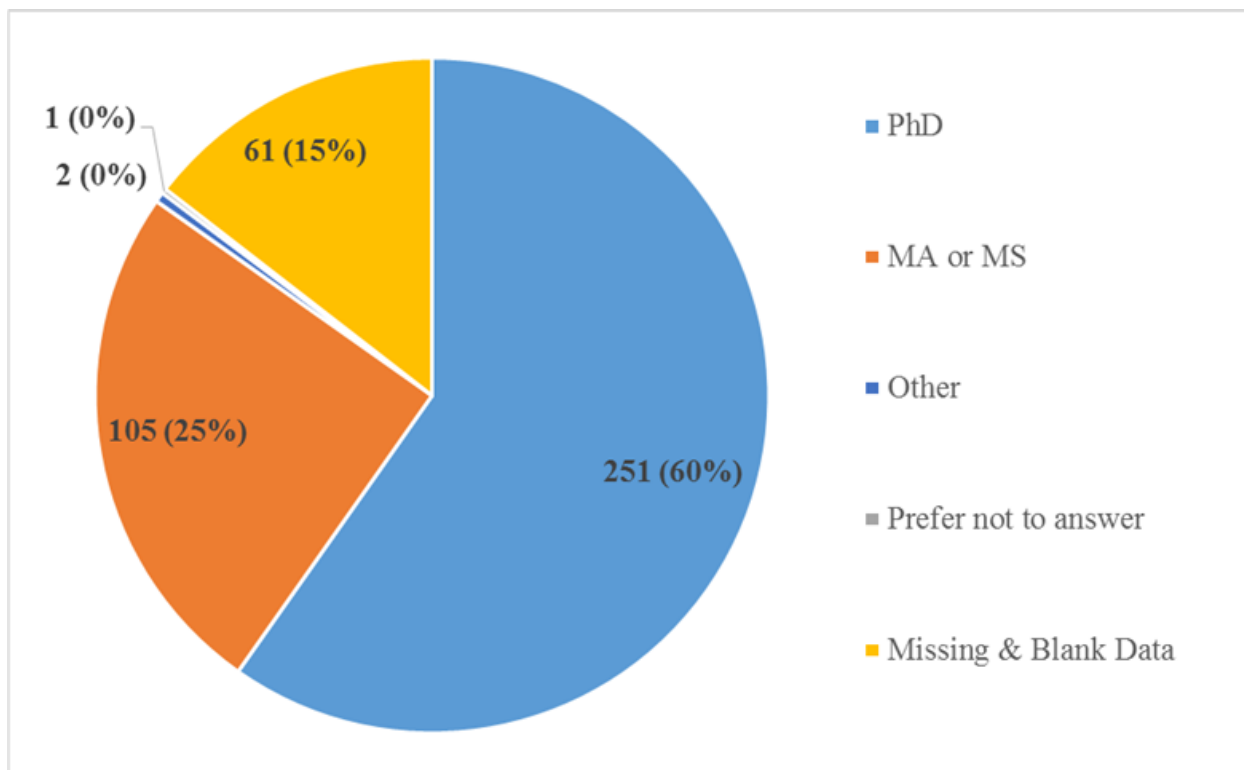


Figure 3. Percent Phd & Master's Degrees (Among all respondents)

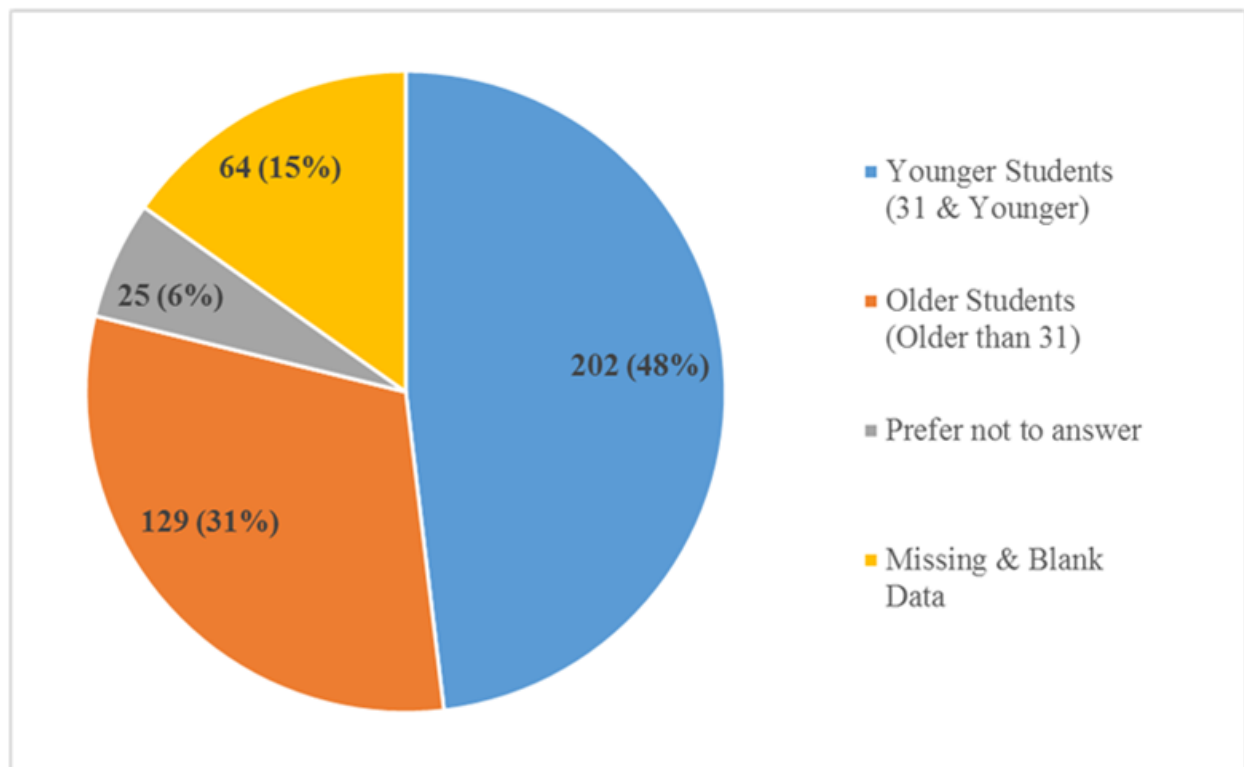


Figure 4. Percent of Each Age Group (Among all respondents)

Classification of Comments

Written comments made by respondents were sorted and classified into sixteen different categories. Sometimes, respondents mentioned two, three, and in one case four different experiences or types of discrimination in a single written comment. Each experience or type was tallied separately, meaning that the total number of comments tallied in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 is larger than the total number of respondents. The sixteen categories in order of the frequency of comments were: gender, race, sexual (or perceived sexual) orientation, national origin, hostile environment, class, religion, failing to provide reasonable accommodation, ethnicity, physical or mental disability, non-traditional student status, age, marital status, retaliation, lack of diversity, and lifestyle (Figures 5 and 6-histograms by the number of comments and by the number of respondents). Not all respondents provided written examples. In Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5, the category “Unspecified” provides a count of respondents who indicated prejudice, but did not provide written examples. In the following sections I discuss the comments by category, in order of the number of participants who indicated prejudice or discrimination in each class.

TABLE 2. Citizenship Status: Type and Number of Comments about Discrimination by Context/Setting.

Context or Setting of Reported Experience

Type of Discrimination	In Department		By Advisor		By Other Faculty		By Other Students		In University		In Community							
	US (20)	Non-US (2)	N/A† (0)	US (9)	Non-US (0)	N/A† (1)	US (29)	Non-US (2)	N/A† (0)	US (18)	Non-US (4)	N/A† (1)	US (28)	Non-US (4)	N/A† (0)			
Citizenship (no. of respondents in each category)*																		
Gender	8			6		1	13	1		10			6	1				
Racial	2			1			3			2		1	3	2				
Sexual Orientation	1			1			1			2			3	1				
National Origin		1						1			1	2	1	2				
Hostile Environment							1			4			1					
Class	2						2			2								
Religion										1			4					
Failing to Provide Reasonable Accommodation	2						1											
Ethnicity							1						1	2				
Non-Traditional Student Status	2						1			1								
Physical or Mental Disability	1						1			1								
Age	2																	
Retaliation							1											
Marital Status	1												1					
Lifestyle							1											
Lack of Diversity													2					
Unspecified	6	1		2			8			6	3		8	1				
Total	27	2	0	10	0	1	34	2	0	29	4	0	21	4	1	33	6	0

* When written comments mentioned more than one type of discrimination (sometimes 2 or 3 and in one case 4 types), they were tabulated under all relevant categories. This means that the total number of reported experiences (at the bottom of the table) is generally larger than the number of respondents listed at the top.

† N/A includes students who selected "Prefer not answer" when asked about their citizenship.

TABLE 3. Gender Status: Type and Number of Comments about Discrimination by Context/Setting.
Context or Setting of Reported Experience

Type of Discrimination	In Department		By Advisor		By Other Faculty		By Other Students		In University		In Community							
	Gender (no. of respondents in each category)*																	
	Female (14)	Male (6)	N/A† (2)	Female (7)	Male (2)	N/A† (1)	Female (22)	Male (7)	N/A† (2)	Female (17)	Male (8)	N/A† (2)	Female (12)	Male (10)	N/A† (1)	Female (18)	Male (12)	N/A† (2)
Gender	6	2		6	1		12	2		9	1		2			6	1	
Racial		2			1		1	2		1	1		1	2		2	3	
Sexual Orientation			1			1			1		1	1		1			3	1
National Origin		1						1		1				3		1	1	1
Hostile Environment								1		2	2			1			1	
Class	1	1						2		1	1			1				
Religion											1			1		3	1	
Failing to Provide Reasonable Accommodation	2						1						2					
Ethnicity							1						1			2		
Non-Traditional Student Status	2						1			1								
Physical or Mental Disability	1						1			1			1					
Age	1	1																
Retaliation							1						1					
Marital Status	1															1		
Lifestyle							1											
Lack of Diversity																2		
Unspecified	5	1	1	1	1		5	2	1	5	3	1	5	3	1	6	4	
Total	19	8	2	7	3	1	24	10	2	21	10	2	13	12	1	23	14	2

* When written comments mentioned more than one type of discrimination (sometimes 2 or 3 and in one case 4 types), they were tabulated under all relevant categories. This means that the total number of reported experiences (at the bottom of the table) is generally larger than the number of respondents listed at the top.

† N/A includes students who selected "Prefer to not answer" or "Other" when asked about their gender.

TABLE 4. Degree Status: Type and Number of Comments about Discrimination by Context/Setting.

Context or Setting of Reported Experience

Type of Discrimination	In Department		By Advisor		By Other Faculty		By Other Students		In University		In Community	
	PhD (20)	MA/MS (2)	PhD (9)	MA/MS (1)	PhD (27)	MA/MS (4)	PhD (25)	MA/MS (2)	PhD (19)	MA/MS (4)	PhD (26)	MA/MS (6)
Degree (no. of respondents in each category)*												
Gender	7	1	7		12	2	9	1	2		6	1
Racial	2		1		3		2		3		5	
Sexual Orientation	1		1		1		2		1		4	
National Origin		1			1		1		3		3	
Hostile Environment					1		4		1		1	
Class	2				2		2		1			
Religion							1			1	2	2
Failing to Provide Reasonable Accommodation	2				1				1	1		
Ethnicity					1				1		1	1
Non-Traditional Student Status	2				1		1					
Physical or Mental Disability	1				1		1		1			
Age	2											
Retaliation					1				1			
Marital Status	1										1	
Lifestyle					1							
Lack of Diversity											1	1
Unspecified	7		1	1	6	2	8	1	7	2	8	2
Total	27	2	10	1	32	4	31	2	22	4	32	7

* When written comments mentioned more than one type of discrimination (sometimes 2 or 3 and in one case 4 types), they were tabulated under all relevant categories. This means that the total number of reported experiences (at the bottom of the table) is generally larger than the number of respondents listed at the top.

TABLE 5. Age Status: Type and Number of Comments about Discrimination by Context/Setting.
Context or Setting of Reported Experience

Type of Discrimination	In Department		By Advisor		By Other Faculty		By Other Students		In University		In Community							
	Age (no. of respondents in each category)*																	
	Above Avg. (11)	Below Avg. (10)	N/A† (1)	Above Avg. (9)	Below Avg. (1)	N/A† (0)	Above Avg. (15)	Below Avg. (14)	N/A† (2)	Above Avg. (13)	Below Avg. (13)	N/A† (1)	Above Avg. (8)	Below Avg. (13)	N/A† (2)	Above Avg. (16)	Below Avg. (13)	N/A† (3)
Gender	4	4		7			7	7				7	3	1	1	4	2	1
Racial	1	1		1			1	1	1			1	1	1	1	2	2	1
Sexual Orientation	1			1			1					1	1	1		2	2	
National Origin		1					1					1		2		2		1
Hostile Environment									1	1	2	1		1			1	
Class	1		1				1		1	1		1			1			
Religion											1					2	2	
Failing to Provide Reasonable Accommodation	2						1						1	1				
Ethnicity								1					1			1	1	1
Non-Traditional Student Status	2						1			1								
Physical or Mental Disability	1						1				1		1					
Age	2																	
Retaliation									1				1					
Marital Status	1															1		
Lifestyle								1										
Lack of Diversity																2		
Unspecified	2	5		1	1		3	5				2	7	2	6	1	4	1
Total	17	11	1	10	1	0	17	15	4	16	15	2	9	14	3	18	16	5

* When written comments mentioned more than one type of discrimination (sometimes 2 or 3 and in one case 4 types), they were tabulated under all relevant categories. This means that the total number of reported experiences (at the bottom of the table) is generally larger than the number of respondents listed at the top.

† N/A includes students who selected "Prefer to not answer" when asked about their age.

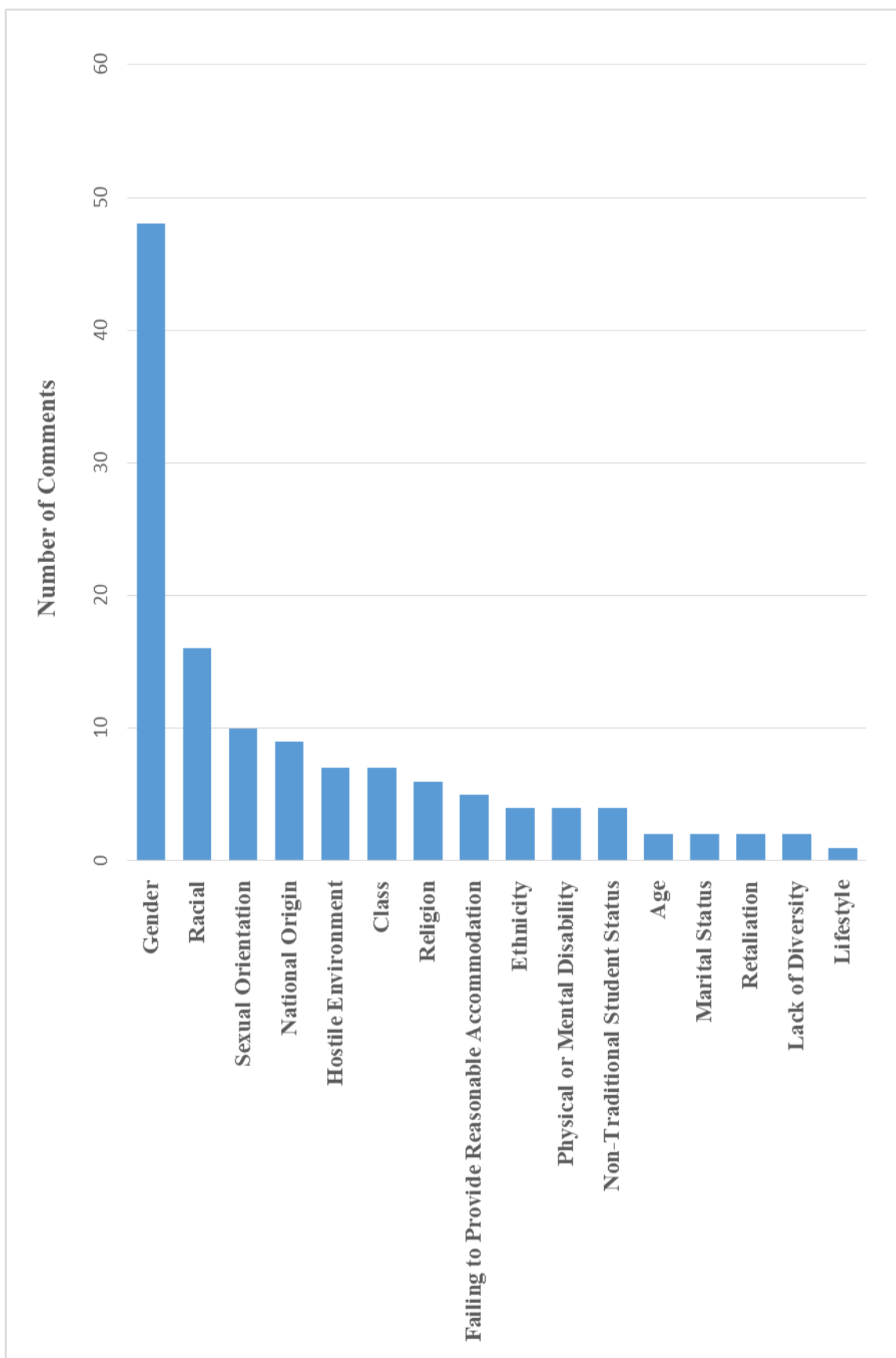


Figure 5. Comments about Prejudice or Discrimination, by Type (in Order of Frequency)

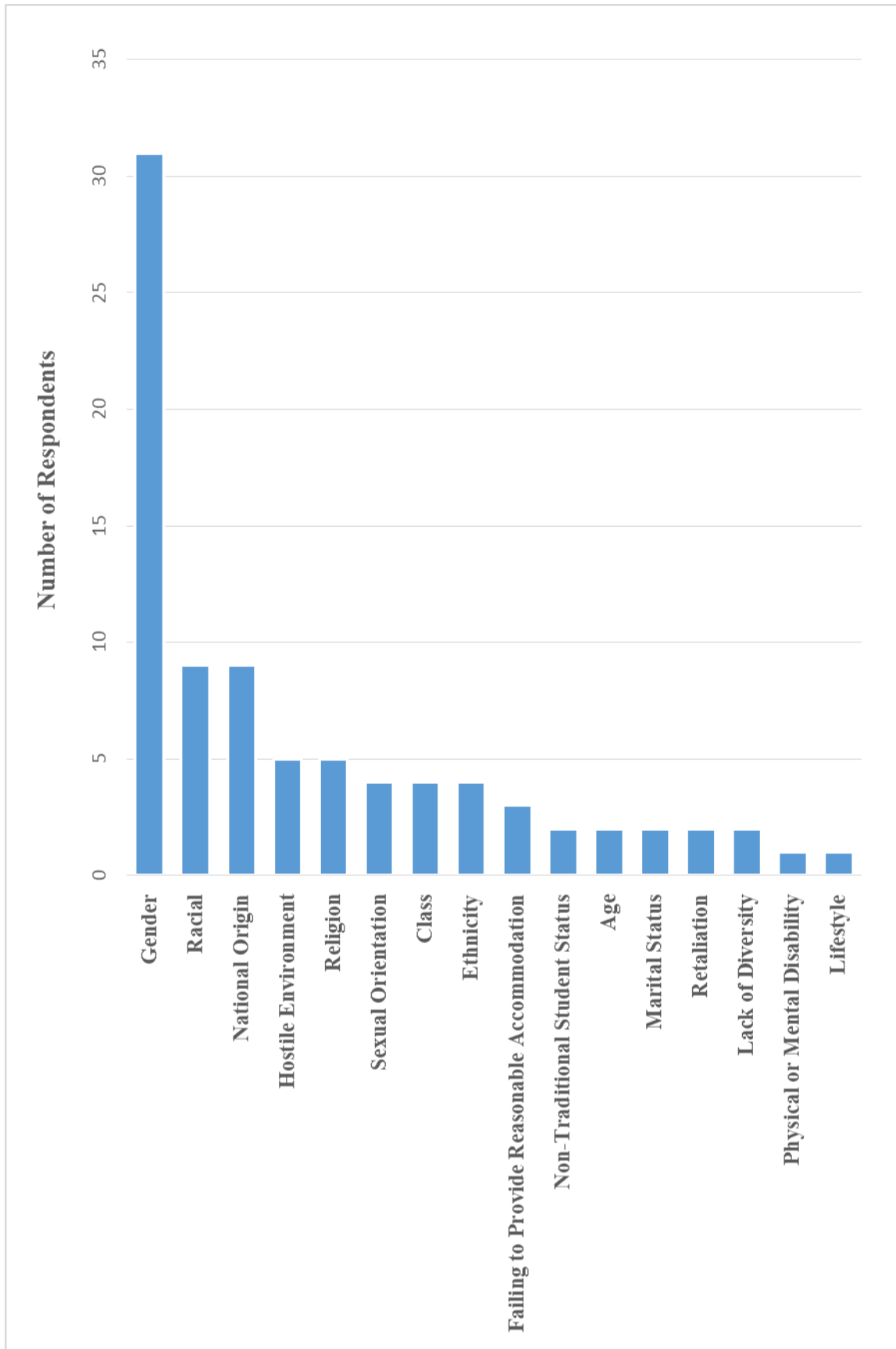


Figure 6. Respondents Indicating Prejudice or Discrimination, by Type (in Order of Frequency)

Gender

Gender prejudice or discrimination was the most often reported experience overall--48 comments by 31 participants. It was also the most frequent type across most subcategories of the sample including United States citizens (45 comments), women (41 comments), doctoral and master's students (43 and 5 comments), and among both age groups. Typical comments were:

People in the lab assuming that I am dumb because I am a female and blonde. I am not given as many responsibilities/tasks as others

My advisor prefers to meet with me in a professional setting and talks specifically about my work. But with his male students, he goes to get a beer, hangs out with them, and that level of camaraderie leads to joint work. I don't know if this is actually discrimination or just personality differences.

One faculty member continually discriminates against female graduate students that are not their advisees. This professor is dismissive of other female graduate students and refuses their participation in classes. When female graduate students try to participate during class or as the course requires, the professor insults them personally.

I had a former office mate who was very disrespectful and I believe this is because I am female. Other women in the department have had the same problem.

While I really like the place I live, it's practically impossible to be a female in this society and not be yelled at, catcalled, or approached by strange men who say inappropriate and offensive things. I regret to say this has happened to me here and everywhere I've lived.

Although most of the comments in this category were made by women, some were made by men. An example is "It's American higher ed and I'm a white man -- it was largely (entirely?) positive prejudices, rather than adverse ones".

In terms of where these experiences occurred, they were reported in regard to the department (8 comments), a student's advisor (7 comments), other faculty (14 comments), other students (10 comments), the university (2 comments), and the community (7 comments). Gender

discrimination was the most common experience reported in all these areas except regarding the university (beyond the department).

Race

Racial prejudice or discrimination was the second most often reported experience overall-16 comments from 9 participants. The comments were made more often by U.S. citizens, male respondents, and doctoral students, but were more evenly distributed among the two age groups. Racial discrimination was the most common type of discrimination reported by men, overall.

Typical comments included:

Only by one faculty member in particular, who disagreed strongly with my research interests because they were based on my lived experience. This faculty member continuously degraded my research, and by default me as a woman of color, and treated me as less than the other students she worked with. I am not the only woman of color who has experienced this treatment from this particular faculty member.

Students are generally unwelcoming to colleagues of color

Campus police questioned my legitimacy on campus at 8am during spring break at a designated campus bus stop (I was waiting for the bus)

My presence in stores has been questioned. People have mistaken me for a store worker because of the color of my skin

There was also one comment about reverse discrimination:

“Because I am a white male, I have been given less opportunities and for funding and mentoring. I am not considered a valuable demographic.” At the same time, one of the strongest comments describing racial discrimination was submitted by a male student who is not a person of color: “I have been witness to countless utterances and acts of racism. While not being a person of color myself, the environment is one of hostility and discrimination toward people of color from the US...”

In terms of where these experiences occurred, they were reported in regard to the department (2 comments), a student’s advisor (1 comment), other faculty (3 comments), other

students (2 comments), the university (3 comments), and the community (5 comments). No comments describing racial bias were reported in regard to a student's advisor.

National Origin

National origin was the fourth most often reported experience overall--9 comments from 9 participants. The comments were made more often by non-US citizens, men, doctoral students, and older students. Overall, discrimination relating to national origin was the most common type of discrimination reported by non-US citizens. Typical comments included:

I am the only student in the department who does not receive full tuition scholarship despite having good performance. Despite being here for a semester, other students come in and receive scholarship. I thought there are priorities but I have asked why I am not receiving scholarship no reasonable answer has been given to me.

DURING MY FIRST SEMESTER I HAD SOME PROBLEMS TO EXPRESS MY IDEAS IN ENGLISH. ONE PROFESSOR DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH PATIENCE TO HEAR MY ENGLISH, AND IN SEVERAL TIMES I FELT HE DID NOT PAY ANY ATTENTION ON MY IDEAS.

If you don't have a wonderful English, some American students just don't pay attention on you.

I don't know to what extent this can be considered 'discrimination' as such, but I've definitely felt like I'm not treated as US graduate students would be. An F-1 visa precludes me from working off-campus, and many of the on-campus jobs are part of a 'work study' program, which requires the worker to be a US citizen. Finding work when I've needed it has been very challenging. I've often participated in paid medical studies on campus as a source of additional income as a result. International students are often treated as homogenous by the university, and I've sat through a number of condescending talks about how "liberal education" in the US is different (and implicitly superior) than other countries' education systems.

I was in a local music store and my daughter and I were the only customers and the clerk started playing the stereotypical chink song over and over. . . . Lots of other examples. . .

Again, there was one report of reverse discrimination: “Tried taking a computer science class, the Anglo students were discriminated against as it was an Indian professor and 90% Indian students. Speaking with past Anglo students they echoed the same discrimination.”

In terms of where these experiences occurred, they were reported in regard to the department (1 comment), other faculty (1 comment), other students (1 comment), the university (3 comments), and the community (3 comments). In regard to the experiences in the university, national origin discrimination was tied with race (discussed above) as the most common experience overall. No comments describing national origin discrimination were reported in regard to a student’s advisor.

Hostile Environment

Hostile environment was tied with class (discussed below) as the fifth and sixth most often reported experience overall--7 comments from 5 participants. All the comments were made by U.S. citizens in doctoral programs. Men submitted more comments than women and more comments were received from younger students than older students. Typical comments were:

As at the departmental level, faculty are purposely or willfully unaware about the very real challenges of trying to live on the pathetic stipends of which we are provided. The presumption that I have class or family wealth, access to resources to supplement pay as a TA / Instructor, and don’t have to work extra / outside jobs to survive is part of this blindness. This causes stress and untold hardships in lives of poor and working-class students. Distributing a summer stipend equally amongst student who have funding / family wealth and students who don’t have funding / work two jobs replicates the injustices of the dominant society and is part of the reason that graduate students are predominately white / international and upper- / upper-middle-class. . . Furthermore, I have been witness to countless utterances and acts of racism. While not being a person of color myself, the environment is one of hostility and discrimination toward people of color from the US. And the assumption that diversity is addressed by accepting wealthy international students illustrates how disconnected academics are from reality.

On more than one occasion I have had fully-funded, extremely wealthy graduate students attempt to bully me and other working-class / poor students in an attempt to get us from not applying for a grant that they felt they were entitled too.

Some of these comments overlapped with issues of gender and sexuality:

Sexual and gender based unprofessionalism and harassment - in addition to an environment of misogyny and gender based hostility my engagement in department has been consistently met with derision.

Upon talking about my fears and hesitations about conducting my doctoral fieldwork in a hostile environment (with regards to my sexuality), a member of my dissertation committee from outside my department made some statements that could be perceived as discriminatory and homophobic.

The state and state legislature of the state I reside in has been openly hostile to the LGBTQ community. This includes being denied the right to marry (in the past), and I have had difficulties obtaining my right to health insurance and dental insurance (even last week) through my same-sex marriage.

It is important to note that most of the comments about a hostile environment were reported in regard to other students, particularly when the unfriendly atmosphere results in enduring feelings of animosity, as this comment from a PhD student indicates:

When I joined my department's Diversity Committee, in which we sought to shift the culture of the department to make the space more comfortable for diverse graduate students, I noticed a marked difference in the way some of my peers treated me. They judged the work I was doing for the committee, judged my legitimacy, even judged what my body represented on that committee and in the department. Since this particularly hostile time in the department, I have never felt the same about my peers or the grad student community.

In terms of where these experiences occurred, they were reported in regard to other faculty (1 comment), other students (4 comments), the university (1 comment), and the community (1 comment). In regard to students' experiences with other students, comments about a hostile environment were the second most common type of discrimination reported. No

comments describing a hostile environment were reported in regard to the department or a student's advisor.

Religion

Religious discrimination was the seventh most often reported experience overall--6 comments from 5 participants. All comments describing religious discrimination were reported by U.S. citizens, but were evenly divided between men and women, doctoral and master's students, and both age groups. Comments included:

Some nonreligious graduate students are vocally (although indirectly) demeaning to those students with religious beliefs.

There is prejudice from a few, against those of us who have religious beliefs. It would be nice to have more tolerance towards people of faith, and allow a more open atmosphere for people to share their beliefs. Rather than attacking or snubbing people.

As a Catholic I've been on the receiving end of some snide comments and anti-religious sentiment.

I am not a member of the LDS [Latter-Day Saint or Mormon] church . . . I am a Hispanic woman

One student's comment set this issue in a broader political context:

Again there is anti-religion fervor. So there is prejudice among those that don't believe or have a faith, and they express their intolerance towards believers. When I write or try and talk to the Democrat leadership of the city, they immediately dismiss it. If it doesn't fit in their political belief system, then they have zero interest in listening. In this city they can get away with it, since the Democrat party is stronger than other political parties.

In terms of where these experiences occurred, they were reported in regard to other students (1 comment), the university (1 comment), and the community (4 comments). No comments describing religious discrimination were reported in regard to the department, a student's advisor, or other faculty.

Sexual (or Perceived Sexual) Orientation

Sexual (or perceived sexual) orientation was the third most often reported experience overall--10 comments from 4 participants. The comments were made more often by U.S. citizens and all were made by doctoral students. Five comments were submitted by respondents identifying as male and five by respondents indicating "other." More comments were submitted by older students than by younger students. Typical comments were:

Homophobic comments repeatedly addressed to me. / Discrimination of research topic. / Three different advisors and committees. / Filed complaint against department and they were found in violation of discrimination.

Two previous advisors were homophobic, forced me to change my topic, and dropped me as advisee when complaints were made with the department.

Repeated discrimination due to my sexuality and research interests.

Some students have not been open-minded or friendly in relation to my sexuality. Often not directly, but these type of attitudes and behaviors easily become gossip in the department, which can make the department (at least within the student community) seem unfriendly and uncomfortable.

Upon talking about my fears and hesitations about conducting my doctoral fieldwork in a hostile environment (with regards to my sexuality), a member of my dissertation committee from outside my department made some statements that could be perceived as discriminatory and homophobic.

I definitely don't face the worse of this as a cis-gendered gay man, but the homophobia in the city can be quite palpable. It is rare to see people showing outward non-sexual affection for others of the same gender, which is quite different to the places I've lived in previously. There is definitely an air of tolerance but not necessarily respect.

One comment indicated how attitudes toward sexuality in a community can affect all students:

Although I am straight, I have been the target of homophobic remarks shouted from passing cars. On another occasion a car full of intoxicated men stopped in the road (late at night) and attempted to fight me (before one of them decided it wasn't worth it and they left).

The comments were made across all six contexts: in the department (1 comment), by the student's advisor (1 comment), by other faculty (1 comment), by other students (2 comments), in the university (1 comment), and in the community (4 comments).

Class

Class discrimination was tied with hostile environment as the fifth and sixth most often reported experience overall--7 comments from 4 participants. All comments describing class discrimination were reported by U.S. citizens and doctoral students. Men submitted more comments than women. Older students and those who preferred not to indicate their age submitted all the comments. Typical comments included:

Geographers are blisteringly unaware of the lived experiences and limitations of poor and working-class people. The idea that we all come to a program with equal resources and access to resource is foolish at best and oppressive at worst.

At times, I have felt that other faculty members favor students who attended more prestigious universities for their undergraduate degrees. Though it was clear in my application to the program, I have never discussed the fact that I attended a community college before a four-year university with faculty members for fear that I will be negatively judged by that history.

I am a first generation college student from a working-class background. Though I struggle to adopt the language and mannerisms of the students and faculty around me, who tend to come from moneyed and educated backgrounds whether U.S.-born or international, I believe I am seen and treated as lower class/status in comparison with my peers, which affects the working relationships I am able to develop with them.

One student explained how she benefitted from her middle-class status:

I think I have been the beneficiary of things due to my confidence--something that comes from my socialization within white middle class America. I think in some ways I have been awarded particular advantages by my department because I am comfortable in this environment, and am able to embody particular norms of how to be an academic. . . There are also occasional incidences of sexism and misogyny, of course. That is pretty standard.

These comments were reported in the department (2 comment), other faculty (2 comments), other students (2 comments), and the university (1 comment). No comments describing class discrimination were reported in regard to a student's advisor or the community.

Ethnicity

Ethnic discrimination was mentioned in four comments by four participants. All of these comments were reported by women, and more were submitted by U.S. citizens, doctoral students, and younger students. These comments were:

On the first day of class, I introduced myself with an Anglo-"sounding" name (which is my actual name). The professor then proceeded to ask me what my real name was.

As a Native Hawaiian who has worked with student mentoring, I have noticed faculty and sometimes TAs from outside of Hawaii (usually from the continental US) still assume Hawaiians and local students are lazy and inarticulate. The whole [incident] really revealed some of the deep-seated fear and racism in some of our faculty and caused a lot of soul-searching for both graduate and undergraduate science majors who self identify as Hawaiian.

The local high school has a "Native American" mascot which they parade around in a gaudy feather headdress while the band members wear feathers and other "Indian" garb. The whole thing is deplorable and shows the ignorance and insensitivity of the community in regards to Native American people.

In terms of where these experiences occurred, they were reported in regard to other faculty (1 comment), the university (1 comment), and the community (2 comments). No comments describing ethnic discrimination were reported in regard to the department, a student's advisor, or other students.

Other Comments

The following types of discrimination were reported by fewer than four respondents. While the number of participants commenting about each of the following types of discrimination was small, the setting in which these experiences took place are of interest.

Failing to Provide Reasonable Accommodation. Six comments by 3 participants focused on failing to provide reasonable accommodation for physical, mental, or health issues or disabilities. One respondent referred to “a significant health crisis,” and one noted the university’s policy excluding graduate students from “paid medical and parental leave.” The respondent who referred to a physical or mental disability also commented on how she was treated by other students, “ableist statements; lack of understanding for, or planning, inclusive events.” In terms of where these experiences occurred, they were reported in regard to the department (2 comments), other faculty (1 comment), other students (1 comment), and the university (2 comments). No comments describing failing to provide reasonable accommodation or a physical or mental disability were reported in regard to a student’s advisor or the community.

Non-Traditional Student Status. Non-traditional student status was mentioned in 4 comments by 2 participants. The comments noted how a department assigns fewer responsibilities to “part-time non-traditional” doctoral students, and also described incidents where full-time students “do not socialize well” with part-time students or were “unpleasant” to older students. These experiences were reported in regard to department (2 comments), other

faculty (1 comment), and other students (1 comment). No comments about non-traditional students were made about a student's advisor, the university, or the community.

Age. Age discrimination was mentioned in 2 comments by 2 participants. The comments referred to "age discrimination during admission," and "unpleasant" treatment from other students. Both experiences were reported in regard to the department. No comments about age discrimination were reported in regard to a student's advisor, other faculty, other students, the university, or the community.

Marital Status. Marital status was mentioned in 2 comments by 2 participants. One comment referred to being questioned about her "seriousness with choosing to also get married and have children." The other comment referred to her lack of support from the community regarding her choice to pursue an education "while being in a long distance marriage." These experiences were reported in the department (1 comment) and community (1 comment). No comments describing marital status discrimination were reported in regard to a student's advisor, other faculty, other students, or the university.

Retaliation. Retaliation was mentioned in 2 comments by 2 participants. One respondent referred to the university's failure to protect her after she filed a complaint about a faculty member, and the other respondent described how her grade was lowered by a professor after she "reported to the Department Chair that he had assigned a significant, additional assignment due beyond our final exam." These experiences were reported in regard to other

faculty (1 comment) and the university (1 comment). No comments describing retaliation were reported in regard to the department, a student's advisor, other students, or the community.

Lack of Diversity. Lack of diversity was mentioned in 2 comments by 2 participants. Both comments were made in reference to the community, and one respondent added, "There has been some discrimination for jobs."

Lifestyle. Lifestyle was mentioned in 1 comment by 1 participant. The comment was made regarding other faculty, "I had one professor who didn't agree with my lifestyle choices and would point it out, frequently, in front of the class."

Discussion

It is disturbing that so many incidents of prejudice and discrimination were reported. Considerable effort has been made in recent years to address these issues in U.S. higher education. The fact that so many respondents still reported so many incidents indicates that efforts to reduce discrimination and prejudice have been, at best, only partially successful. Some comments about certain types of discrimination were expected. Those relating to gender, race, sexual orientation, national origin, and religion mirror those in society at large and have been the subject of considerable public attention and debate. But the range of experiences reported here spans many other categories of discrimination such as those related to ethnicity, physical and mental disability, non-traditional student status, and age.

In looking at the results as a whole, twice as many women reported experiencing prejudice or discrimination as did men, despite being represented almost equally among all

respondents (Table 6). Comments referring to gender discrimination accounted for fifty-one percent of all the comments reported by women. In a working environment, it would not be surprising to find gender discrimination to this degree, but to find this type of discrimination, at this level, in an academic setting was somewhat startling. Men, on the other hand, reported racial discrimination most often.

Doctoral students and master's students were unevenly represented among those who experienced discrimination. Twenty-six percent of doctoral students and fifteen percent of master's students reported experiencing prejudice or discrimination (Table 6). The reason for this disparity in responses is unclear. The fact that doctoral students spend more time in graduate school may mean they have a greater opportunity to observe instances of prejudice and discrimination. The pressures to doctoral training may also make them more sensitive to these issues.

When comparing students by age, twenty-nine percent of older students and nineteen percent of younger students reported experiencing prejudice or discrimination (Table 6). Likewise, it would be reasonable to assume that comments from older students outnumbered comments from younger students in all aspects of their experiences, however, this was only the case in five of the six settings where prejudice or discrimination occurred. Oddly, in regard to the university, younger students outnumbered and reported more incidences of discrimination than their older counterparts (Table 5). Although uncertain, it is possible that the personal lives of younger students allow them to live on-campus, or at least take part in more of the university's events and social activities.

Table 6: Selected Characteristics of Respondents - Number and Percent Discriminated

	Number	Number Reporting Discrimination (%)
All respondents	420*	82 (19.5%)

By Characteristic

US Citizens	302	69 (23%)
Non-US Citizens	51	12 (24%)

Total 353

Male	172	26 (15%)
Female	174	52 (30%)

Total 346

PhD	251	66 (26%)
MA/MS	105	16 (15%)

Total 356

31 or Younger	202	39 (19%)
Older than 31	129	37 (29%)

Total 331

*The totals for the different characteristic do not match exactly, but some respondents chose not to answer, or chose an option that was not compared.

Although the types of prejudice and discrimination were perhaps unsurprising, where these experiences took place was one of the most interesting findings of this study (Table 7). By prompting respondents to localize their experiences to six different contexts, I was able to better localize the most problematic sites. The context in which respondents reported the fewest

negative experiences were with their own advisors. This is a good sign that students are able to find advisors who keep prejudices and discrimination to a minimum. On the other hand, the contexts in which respondents reported the greatest number of negative experiences were in the community outside the university, from other faculty, and from other students. This is an important finding because while universities can employ policies to reduce prejudice and discrimination among other faculty, they have less influence and less ability to implement change regarding the community and other students.

This somewhat unexpected finding does not fit easily into the theoretical literature that provides the foundation for this study. The four-element framework outlined by Hurtado et al. (2008) to analyze academic climate and culture does encompass intergroup interactions among students, faculty, and staff, but doesn't focus special attention on the sorts of experiences reported in this study. Indeed, students are perhaps the least likely of all groups included in Hurtado's framework to know or act upon "norms embedded in campus culture, traditions, policies, and historical mission" (Hurtado et al., 2008, 206), if only because they are part of this culture for only the short time in which they are enrolled as students.

Hurtado's framework does not address the issue of how academic climate and culture collide with those of surrounding communities. These issues of prejudice and discrimination can be conceived as part of traditional "town-gown" conflicts that sometimes arise between colleges, universities and their host communities. But such conflicts are usually framed in terms of universities expanding their campus footprints as they grow, residents of college towns feeling overrun by students as universities increase enrollment, or issues relating to shared resources and infrastructure. But issues of prejudice and discrimination can also be framed as a town-gown issue. The killing of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard in 1998 highlighted the

Table 7. Number of Respondents and Comments by Setting

	Department	Advisor	Other Faculty	Other Students	University (Beyond Dept.)	Community
Number of Respondents	22	10	31	27	23	32
Number Who Commented	15	8	23	18	14	22

violence faced by LGBTQ students in some communities (Parrott-Sheffer 2015). Recent political rhetoric targeting Muslims can spill over into academic environments (Manson 2016), and the Black Lives Matter movement has also drawn attention to the treatment of Black Americans as targets of violence (Cobb 2016).

Addressing students' experiences in the community is perhaps a still more difficult issue: how can a university influence prejudicial and discriminatory behaviors that are outside of its organizational control? This can potentially be a major issue on some campuses depending on the size of the graduate programs; the location of the university in rural, suburban or urban settings; the availability of on-campus housing; and attitudes of the local population. The result can be considerable interaction between the students and local residents who may be supportive, indifferent, or hostile toward the students. It is conceivable that a university's relationship with the local community can also affect the way students are perceived by people and businesses in the local area. Universities can possibly address such issues through community outreach programs. But, for the most part, outreach programs focus on communicating the value of the university's teaching, research and service to nearby communities, rather than issues of prejudice and discrimination, which are rarely addressed or only when a crisis arises. Nevertheless, my research suggests it may be useful to consider outreach efforts that address issues of prejudice and discrimination.

Reducing prejudice and discrimination among students may entail a significant effort from universities. While it is now common practice for universities to require all employees to enroll in regular trainings focused on issues of diversity, inclusion, and sexual harassment, more universities might consider following the example of California State University Northridge, which was “honored as a national role model of diversity” in 2015 (California State University Northridge 2015) and has several programs, some mandatory for all students, which are “important components of a campaign towards the elimination of sexual violence at CSUN” (California State University Northridge 2015).

Conclusion

Although this study confirms the findings of previous research in higher education, it also offers new insight into these issues. The results indicate that prejudice and discrimination focused on gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality and other factors are as much part of graduate study in geography as they are of higher education more generally. The categories of behavior identified in this study mirror those of the research cited in the literature review. The contribution of this study is to localize and, to some degree, to spatialize these prejudicial and discriminatory behaviors. At the broadest level, I found that these behaviors exist in all the contexts studied—with advisors, other faculty, and students as well as in the department, university and community. In this study, the contexts in which experiences of prejudice and discrimination were most common were within the community outside the university, between students and other faculty, and among other students. Given my findings, greater attention should be directed toward understanding and addressing prejudice and discrimination among students and within the community.

There are limitations to this study. The results presented here were part of a larger survey designed to compare the experiences of domestic and non-US citizens in American graduate programs. Although the survey gathered the data analyzed here, issues of prejudice and discrimination were not the principle focus of the questionnaire. Given the current findings, it would have been useful to add questions that would allow me to analyze the results in greater detail. The study was also constrained by the types of information publically available about graduate students and graduate programs, as I could only contact students whose email addresses were posted in university websites. Finally, self-selection bias is always an issue in a surveys like this one. That is, of the people invited to participate in a survey, those most likely to respond tend to be those who are interested in the topic or feel strongly—positively or negatively—about the issues being investigated. It is difficult to estimate how this bias might have affected the results of this survey. The six questions about prejudice and discrimination might have encouraged responses from students who had experienced such treatment—leading perhaps to over reporting. At the same time, the questions about prejudice and discrimination were embedded in a larger questionnaire about graduate student experiences that would seem to be less polarizing.

Efforts to improve geography graduate programs and education and future research should focus continuing attention on the factors that contribute to students' experiences of prejudice and discrimination. There are a number of ways in which this research project could be extended further. Perhaps the most direct strategy would be to expand the study to include a survey of undergraduates majoring in geography. Expanding the survey to undergraduates would allow comparisons between student experiences in bachelors, master's and doctoral programs. Do the same patterns of prejudice exist across all levels of higher education, or are

the patterns found in this project limited to graduate programs? At the same time, it is more difficult to survey undergraduates systematically because, unlike graduate students, email contact information is less often available. It would also be useful to gather more information from respondents, such as their self-perception of racial, ethnic and gender identity; whether or not they live on-campus; and the degree to which they participate in university events and social activities. Such information would allow for a more detailed examination of some of the issues explored in this study. Questions that specifically ask if diversity and sexual harassment policies and community outreach programs are in place would allow researchers to determine which, if any, programs are more effective than others at reducing toxic attitudes. And finally, considering the physical location of the university, such as whether the setting is urban or rural, the university's regional location, and the availability of transportation, would give researchers a wider set of characteristics from which to draw conclusions.

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¹ Other results from the study are being developed for other publications.