

The relationship between education and levels of prejudice concerning race, sexual orientation, and mental health

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Abstract

Research has shown that individuals have implicit negative beliefs and attitudes about the blameliness and helplessness of mental health persons (Teachman et al., 2006). In addition, Arndt and Bruin (2006) found that in the U.S., there are traces of prejudice and discrimination towards gay men and lesbians by university students. That being said, research has indicated that higher education is linked to decreasing one's prejudice views towards ethnic groups (Stevens, 2019). Thus, this study will examine if higher education will do the same towards other societal biases, like mental health and sexual orientation. I compared explicit and implicit bias of freshman to that of seniors. An explicit paper survey and the Implicit Association Test (IAT) was used in the study. Results indicated that freshman reported significantly higher explicit and implicit prejudice toward homosexuals as compared to seniors. No significant differences were found for racial or mental health prejudice.

Introduction

- Research has shown that higher education is correlated to lower levels of bias concerning race
 - Higher education is linked to decreasing one's prejudice views towards ethnic groups (Stevens, 2019)
 - Wodtke (2016) with data from the General Social Survey (GSS), found that when compared to Whites with poor verbal abilities, Whites with higher verbal abilities are less likely to have negative attitudes towards Blacks, more likely to support integration, and have a higher chance in noticing discrimination towards Blacks
- Possibly higher education can render the same results towards other societal biases like mental health and sexual orientation.
 - A survey of college students implicit and explicit biases regarding mental health indicated implicit negative beliefs and attitudes about the blameliness and helplessness of mental health persons (Teachman, Wilson, & Komarovskaya, 2006)
 - A survey of students at the University of Gauteng, South Africa, found strong negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays (Arndt & Bruin, 2006)
 - However, they also found that there are traces of prejudice and discrimination towards gay men and lesbians by university students in the U.S. as well.
- Hypotheses
 - I hypothesize that the seniors surveyed at LaGrange College will show significantly less implicit and explicit bias than the freshman class concerning the topics of racism, sexual orientation, and mental health.

Materials & Methods

Participants

- The study included 72 participants.
 - Average age = 19.92 (range 18 – 24)
 - 36 were freshman and 36 were seniors44 were female, 27 were male, and 1 did not identify exclusively as male or female
 - 60 were White, 9 were Black, 2 were Latinx, and 1 marked "Other"

Materials

- The explicit bias measures were selected with permission from previous research (Axt, 2017)
 - Race Prejudice ($\alpha = 0.68$, $n = 12$)
 - Sexuality Prejudice ($\alpha = 0.76$, $n = 10$)
 - Mental Health (MH) Prejudice ($\alpha = 0.68$, $n = 8$)
 - Example: "It would not bother me if my new roommate was a homosexual."
- The scale used to measure implicit bias was the Implicit Association Test (IAT) created by Harvard University (Race IAT, Sexuality IAT, Mental Health and Harmful IAT)

Methods

- Researcher first associated the computer number with a participant number for identification purposes before participants enter the room
 - The participant numbers were also transferred onto the explicit survey by the researcher
- Researcher then pulled up each IAT survey in separate tabs
 - Tabs were set up in order from left to right for each participant and order was randomized
- Participants were filled out an informed consent form
- Researcher read the instructions and informative material on how to go through the tasks
- Participants then began the explicit survey and dropped their survey in a privacy box when done
- Participants then began the IAT and were instructed to leave the results open in a browser tab when completed
- Researcher then debriefed the participants from a predisposed script

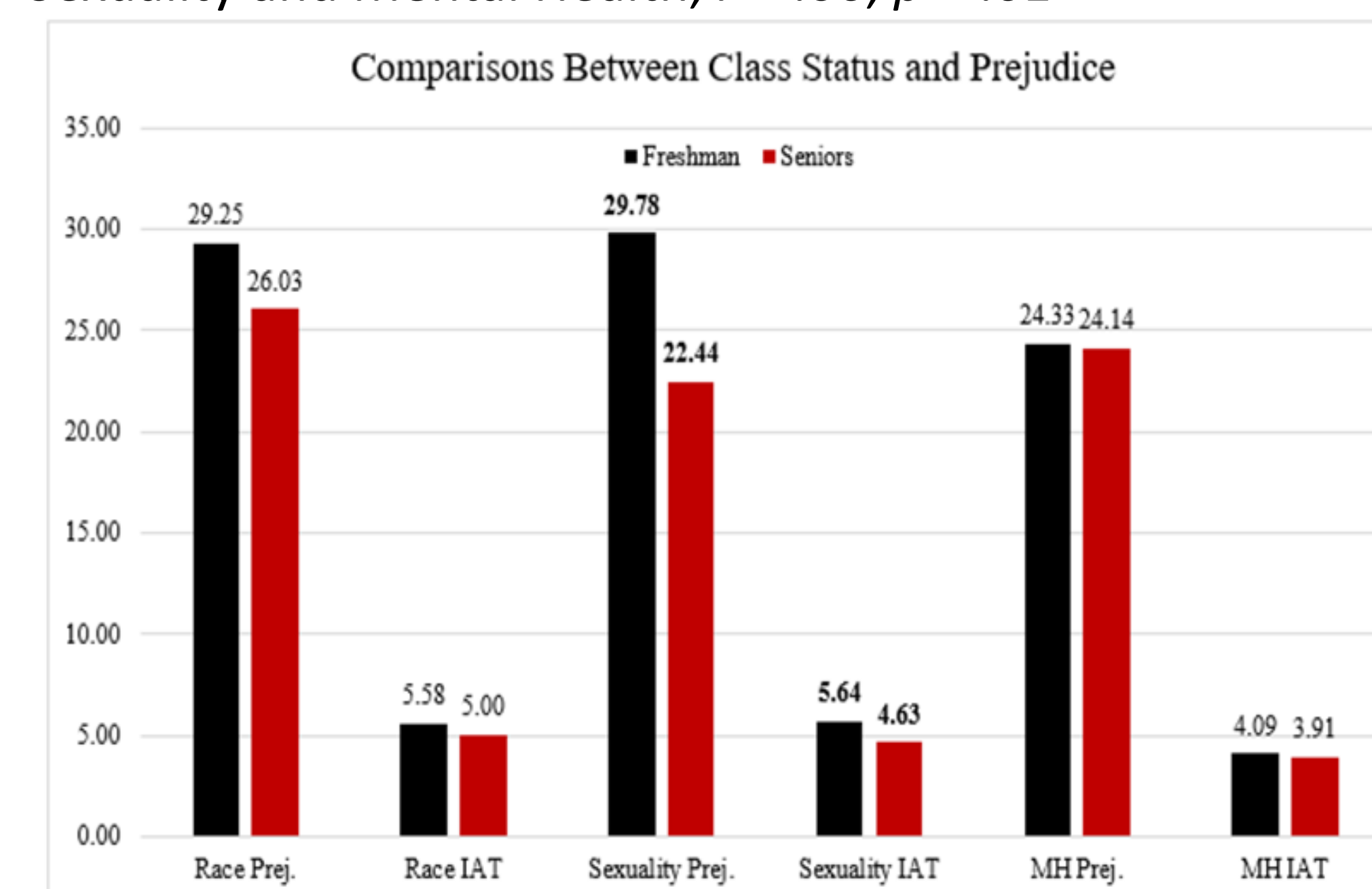
Results

Correlations Between All Variables of Interest

	Race Prej.	Race IAT	Sexuality Prej.	Sexuality IAT	MH Prej.	MH IAT	Age	Class Status	GPA
Race Prej.	1.00								
Race IAT	.30*	1.00							
Sexuality Prej.	.64**	.27*	1.00						
Sexuality IAT	.14	.18	.30*	1.00					
MH Prej.	.53**	.28*	.60**	.06	1.00				
MH IAT	.18	-.03	.07	-.01	.06	1.00			
Age	-.13	-.19	-.35**	-.30*	.04	-.01	1.00		
Class Status	-.19	-.20	-.40**	-.31**	.01	-.09	.94**	1.00	
GPA	.18	-.03	.25*	.18	.02	.13	-.35**	-.41**	1.00

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

- The explicit and implicit measures of race were significantly correlated, $r = .30$, $p = .01$
- The explicit and implicit measures of sexuality were significantly correlated, $r = .30$, $p = .01$
- The explicit and implicit measures of mental health were not significantly correlated, $r = .06$, $p = .61$
- The three explicit measures of prejudice were all highly significantly correlated
 - Race and Sexuality, $r = .64$, $p < .001$
 - Race and Mental Health, $r = .53$, $p < .001$
 - Sexuality and Mental Health, $r = .60$, $p < .001$
- The IATs were not significantly correlated with each other
 - Race and Sexuality, $r = .18$, $p = .14$
 - Race and Mental Health, $r = -.03$, $p = .82$
 - Sexuality and Mental Health, $r = .06$, $p = .61$



Note. Compared means between genders for all variables of interest. Bolded text denotes $p < .05$ for independent samples t-test on that variable.

- There was a significant difference between freshman and seniors concerning homosexual prejudice.
 - Freshman reported significantly higher explicit prejudice of homosexuals, $t(70) = 3.73$, $p = .000$
 - Freshman had significantly higher IAT scores indicating more implicit homosexual prejudice, $t(69) = 3.05$, $p = .003$
- There was no significant difference between freshman and seniors concerning racial prejudice for either the implicit or explicit measure.
- There was no significant difference between freshman and seniors concerning mental health prejudice for either the implicit or explicit measure.

Conclusion

- Results showed no significant difference between freshman and seniors concerning race and mental health prejudice
 - May imply the possibility that new generations may not hold such ideals of prejudice.
- However, freshman held a significantly higher explicit and implicit prejudice towards homosexuals than seniors
 - This may suggest that the LGBTQ movement may still be relatively new to some and is not as well accepted.
 - In addition, this sample came from a private Methodist college, thus, the levels of prejudice towards the LGBTQ community may be different than that found at a public institution that holds no religious affiliation.
 - This seems especially relevant given the current divisions related to LGBTQ issues within the Methodist church.

Limitations

- Population size ($n = 72$)
- Social desirability effect on explicit survey
- Sample from a small, religiously affiliated college

Future Research

- Examine higher degree levels (i.e. master's degree and doctoral) to see if prejudice measures decrease or remain stable throughout even higher education.
- Examine how higher or lower income families may affect measures of prejudice.

