

## Study finds that discrimination varies by gender and race

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Men are more likely to tolerate discrimination than women, however both sexes tend to accept prejudice against poorly educated immigrants and Arab-American airplane travelers, according to a study by the USC-Caltech Center for the Study of Law and Politics.

In a survey of more than 3,300 people, researchers at USC Gould School of Law and USC College found that both men and women are less willing to tolerate discrimination against the genetically disadvantaged. The study, to be published in June in *Political Research Quarterly*, also found tolerance levels between the sexes vary depending on whether or not their response is anonymous: men tend to understate, and women to overstate, their tolerance for discrimination when speaking to a live interviewer, as opposed to answering questions over the Internet.

Edward J. McCaffery, a USC law professor, who co-authored the study, said that an individual who sees nothing wrong with certain kinds of biases will often find others objectionable.

“Many political struggles of our time, in the United States as elsewhere, amount to clashes over the appropriate boundary between permissible and impermissible forms of discrimination,” McCaffery said. “We have found that, while discrimination in its traditional forms – based on race and gender – may be receding somewhat, discrimination in other domains, as based on appearance, persists. Here we found that people are more willing to accept discrimination against poorly educated immigrants, for example, than so-called genetic discrimination. Men are

more willing to accept discrimination, but both men and women converge when we did a telephone survey and there was a live interviewer – women became more, and men less, openly tolerant of discrimination.”

Respondents to both a telephone and an online survey were presented with five scenarios, each of which dealt with a form of discrimination targeting a distinct class of individuals: Arab-American airplane travelers, seriously overweight people, the genetically disadvantaged, poorly educated immigrants and African-American motorists.

All questions used the same format, first explaining a controversy and then providing a utilitarian statement in favor of discrimination followed by a consideration of justice. An overwhelming percentage of the respondents chose the equality position in every category.

Of the significant minority who chose to allow discrimination, the highest percentage of people in both the phone and web survey accepted discrimination against “poorly educated immigrants” (27.7 percent and 32.3 percent, respectively), followed by acceptance of discrimination against Arab-Americans (26.4 percent of phone respondents, 17.8 percent of online respondents).

On the other end of the range, respondents were least likely to accept discrimination against the genetically disadvantaged (6.7 percent of phone respondents, 3.2 percent of online respondents). Tolerance of discrimination against African-Americans (13.7 percent phone, 13.2 percent online) was statistically insignificant from acceptance of discrimination against seriously overweight people (15 percent phone, 13 percent online).

The study also revealed that, across all categories, a larger percentage of men than of women accept discrimination. For example, men on the

phone were 7.6 percent more likely than women to tolerate discrimination against the obese and 8.9 percent more likely to accept racial profiling of African-American motorists.

The magnitude of the sex difference was even higher among Web respondents. In the Web survey, men were 19.6 percent more likely to tolerate discrimination against the obese and 17.4 percent more likely to accept racial profiling.

These results suggested that live interaction on the phone – even with an interviewer trained to withhold reaction and remain impartial – encouraged respondents to adjust their answers. Specifically, women seemed to overstate and men seemed to hide their tolerance of discrimination on the relatively public medium of the telephone, as compared to the anonymity of the Internet. The tolerance disparity between men and women narrowed in contexts where a willingness to accept discrimination might appear socially desirable.

The “sex gap” – that is, the difference between the percentages of men and women accepting discrimination, as a percentage of their average – was smallest for Arab-American airplane passengers (8 percent) and greatest in regard to African-American motorists (28.9 percent), among those surveyed by phone.

“As a matter of practice, people morally opposed to discriminatory policies based on reviled forms of prejudice do not insist on equal treatment for everyone, in every context,” McCaffery said. “The surveys reported in this article validate this poorly appreciated fact in reference to several matters of political importance. In addition, they show that expressed attitudes toward discrimination vary by sex as well as context.”

Source: University of Southern California

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