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United by Discrimination

Paul A. Djupe

April 21, 2017

By Paul A. Djupe

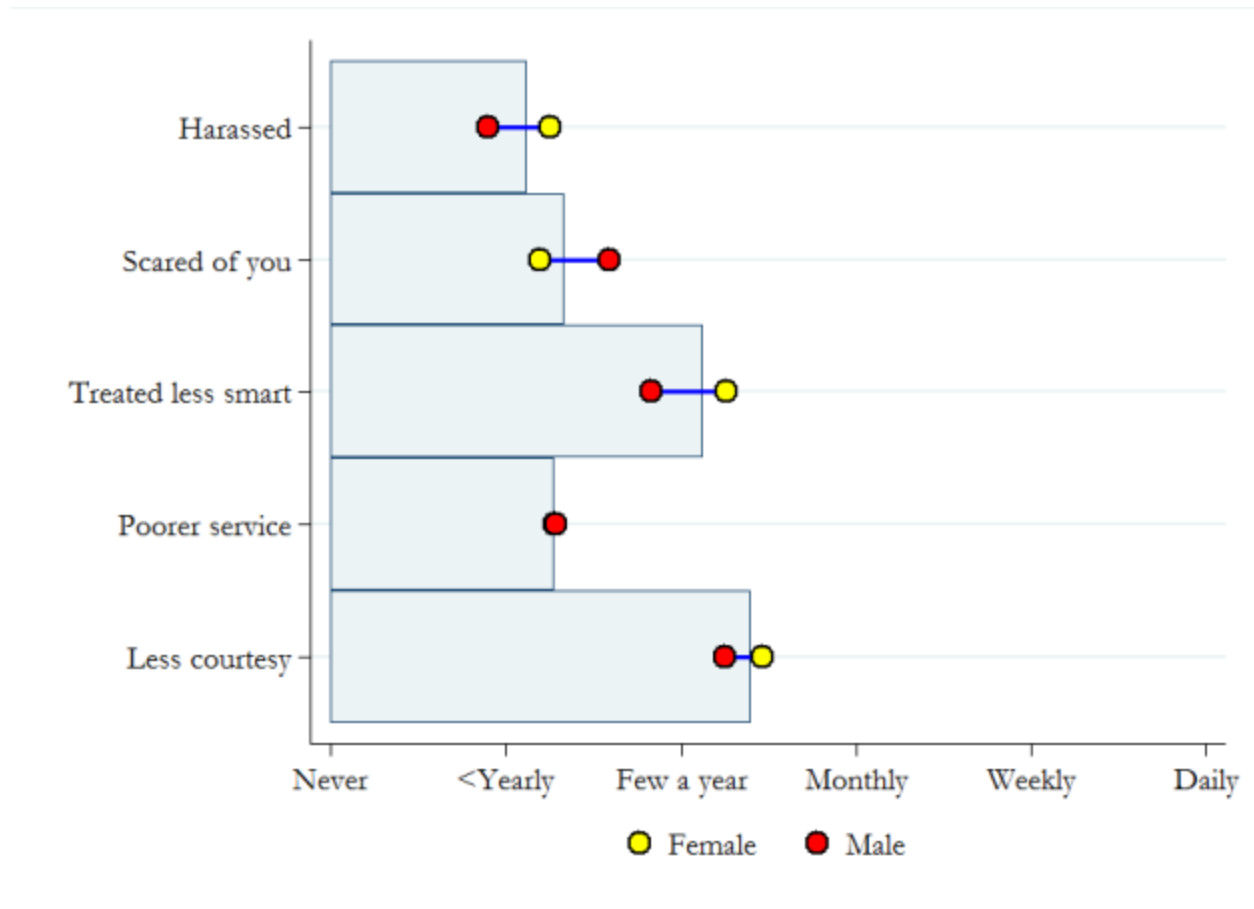
Today at 1:30, right after the Academic Awards Convocation, a group of students met in front of Swasey to peacefully demonstrate about what they view as the administration not doing enough to protect students from harassment as well as react to the students who condone those acts. As I understand it, yet another student's door was defaced with swastikas and "Go back to Mexico" (among other threatening actions). This student joins the small, but growing number of students (~30)[1] who have been harassed this year for being perceived as different in some way.

I have no comment about the role of the administration in handling this case, but stand (write?) with the students in front of Swasey and most likely everywhere else on campus to condemn such cowardly acts of intimidation. This is not the mark of a Denisonian.

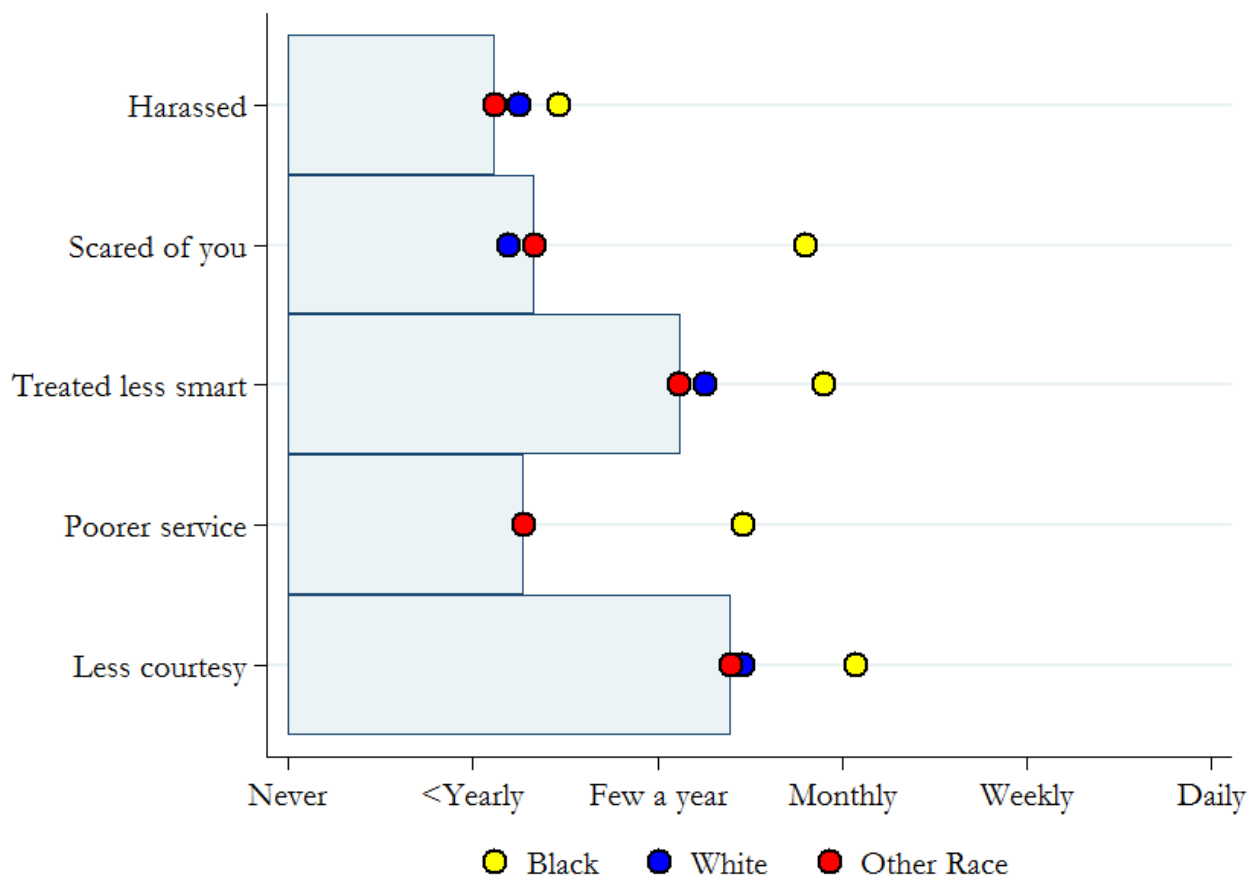
What I can do is highlight the extent of these experiences among students, which serves to emphasize our common humanity, that many of us have felt the sting of discrimination in its many guises. We at 127 sought to capture these experiences through surveys questions administered in our March survey.[2] We asked, "In your day-to-day life how often have any of the following things happened to you?" The responses were scaled from 1=never to 6=almost daily. The questions concerned:

- You are treated with less courtesy or respect than other people.
- You receive poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores.
- People act as if they think you are not smart.
- People act as if they are afraid of you.
- You are threatened or harassed.

Let's be clear: **We do not know where these experiences happened or happen – it could be Denison and it could not.** The average responses (shown with the blue bars in the figure below) to these items are sadly not "never" and they differ systematically by gender – women tend to report greater frequency of these experiences than men, with the exception of the report of someone being scared of them and receiving poorer service than others. Being treated as less smart than others and with less courtesy is experienced several times a year, on average.



It is not surprising that these experiences also differ considerably by race. As the figure below shows, black students far and away report a greater frequency of discriminatory experiences (the blue bars are, again, the sample average). Black Denisonians report monthly experiences of others being scared of them, being treated as less smart, receiving poorer service, and being treated with less courtesy. This is not the same set of experiences as other non-white students, whose experiences mirror white students (right around the sample mean).



Reports to these survey questions do not mean that everyone has experienced them equally, with the same frequency, or understand these experiences in the same way. But, nearly everyone reports that they have experienced some form of discrimination in some measure (save harassment which is relatively uncommon). I would think that everyone who has been through any of these experiences, which is most of us, would not want others to join that club, would help spread the norm that treating others like this is not acceptable, and would report members of our community who refuse to adopt basic standards of decency and mutual respect.

Paul Djupe is a local cyclist who happens to have taught political science at Denison since the Harry Potter series was published. You can learn more about his work at pauldjupe.com.

Notes

1. In MyDenison, follow the tabs: Campus Resources » Campus Climate Watch » Campus Incidents.
2. In the March 2017 survey there were 580 respondents, it was a bit too female (65%), had a near accurate percent white (73%), and had a relatively even spread among class years.

