

Discriminating Measures: Response Formats in Measuring Discrimination

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Study Background



Violence against women and Black people has a very long history in this country that continues to this day. The recent highly public killings of Black people by police (and others) and the #MeToo movement brought into sharp relief to a much wider public these continuing injustices, and how much work is yet needed to address them.

While a cornerstone of many modern post-industrial societies like the United States is the stated belief in the equality of all people and the provision of equal opportunity for all, these events continue to point out major failings.

When we think of the factors that lead to such traumatic and violent behaviors enacted against people, there are a series of stages and reinforcing frameworks underpinning beliefs and behaviors that have been found to foster the violence we have seen.

Study Background



The ability to classify events into similar and dissimilar is at the core of human intelligence and consciousness. However, beyond this core ability, at societal and individual levels, there are many other factors that go into the development of unconscious bias and conscious prejudice (cognitive beliefs and emotional reactions to difference) and discrimination (behavioral reactions to difference).

Though a person's beliefs or feelings (their 'prejudice') may not directly affect how that person treats you, what they do to you, their actions, can have significant effects on you. It is their action, or inaction, that creates the discrimination we see in many areas of life, from education to jobs to healthcare.

Study Background



While social media giants may eventually prove us wrong with their creation of a ‘hive mind’, controlling what people think or feel may well be impossible. In the 1950s and 1960s, extensive social science research documented that changing people’s behaviors can change their attitudes and feelings. As a result, the legal agenda turned to controlling undesirable behaviors because they could be observed, have direct consequences, and could be documented for legal purposes. Hence, the U.S. began to develop laws at the federal, state, and local levels that, combined with court rulings, began to outlaw behaviors that reflected discrimination, with the hope that changing behaviors could lead to a change of hearts and minds.

These laws and rulings prohibit discrimination in such areas as employment, housing, voting rights, education, health care and access to public facilities. They also proscribe discrimination on the basis of an individual’s identities, including race, age, sex, nationality, disability, or religion (legally defined ‘protected class’ identities).

Study Background



Discrimination is a legal term that defines actions that can have an adverse impact on a person due to their identity characteristics. While discrimination that reaches the legal threshold may be less common, people may still encounter events that they experience as discrimination.

Experienced discrimination has received empirical attention across many fields, although its measurement has varied based on different types of discrimination (e.g., race-ethnicity or gender discrimination). As a result, the ability to compare the nature and extent of various forms of discrimination is limited.

This study focused on developing a measure for self-reported discrimination that would be consistent across different forms of discrimination and allow empirical comparisons to be made. We conducted an experiment to examine how response formats affect prevalence reports of discrimination.

Study Purpose



When thinking about measuring experiences with discrimination, we can identify a number of situations/contexts in which discrimination takes place (education, employment, housing, healthcare, etc.). To quickly assess experience across a number of elements, we have a choice of formats – dichotomous choices like a yes-no format (YNF) or multiple response format (MRF – ‘select all’).

Previous research has demonstrated that the YNF tends to yield higher endorsement frequencies than MRF - see Dillman, Smyth, & Christian (2006) and Thomas & Klein (2006). When comparing formats in their validity, YNF tends to have a higher validity, but it also tends to take respondents longer to complete.

To explain the differences between formats, Callegaro et al. (2015) advanced the hypothesis that the YNF has a higher rate of endorsement than MRF due to acquiescence bias. However, Thomas & Barlas (2017, 2018) in a series of studies found better support for the salience hypothesis – more salient events (more recent or more extreme events) are more likely to be endorsed in the MRF and that events more varied in salience will be endorsed with YNF.

Method

Study Design – Reasons for Discrimination

In this study, we created an array of 7 reasons for discrimination:

- 1 your gender or gender identity**
- 2 your race or ethnicity**
- 3 your religion or religious beliefs**
- 4 your age**
- 5 your sexual orientation**
- 6 your immigration status**
- 7 a disability (such as physical, visual, hearing, learning, etc.)**

Study Design – Contexts for Discrimination



We then defined 8 possible contexts where discrimination could take place:

- 1. Being hired for a job**
- 2. Being promoted within a job**
- 3. Getting an adequate education**
- 4. Getting a loan to buy a vehicle (car, truck, etc.)**
- 5. Getting a loan to buy a place to live (house, condo, etc.)**
- 6. Renting a place to live (apartment, house, etc.)**
- 7. Receiving adequate health care when needed**
- 8. Interacting with police or legal authorities**

Study Design – Time Frame for Discrimination



Because the relative salience of an event could be affected by the length of time a person considers (and may be affected by either a YNF or MRF), we created 3 time periods for a person to consider:

- 1 Have you EVER personally experienced discrimination against you because of [reason] in any of the following situations?**
- 2 In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced discrimination against you because of [reason] in any of the following situations?**
- 3 In the past year, have you personally experienced discrimination against you because of [reason] in any of the following situations?**

Study Design – Fielding



For our initial investigation, we had 3,193 respondents (adults 18+) from Ipsos' KnowledgePanel[®], the largest probability-based online panel in the U.S.

Field Period: 4 Sept. to 3 Oct., 2020.

Mode of Administration: Web-based questionnaire.

Average length of interview (LOI): 4.7 minutes.

Study Design – Random Assignments



Format: We randomly assigned respondents, half to the YNF and half to the MRF. Independently, we randomly assigned respondents to time frame – Ever, Past 5 years, Past year

Format	Ever	In last 5 years	In past year	Total
Yes-No Format	484	527	570	1,581
Multiple Response Format	494	531	480	1,505
	978	1,058	1,050	3,086

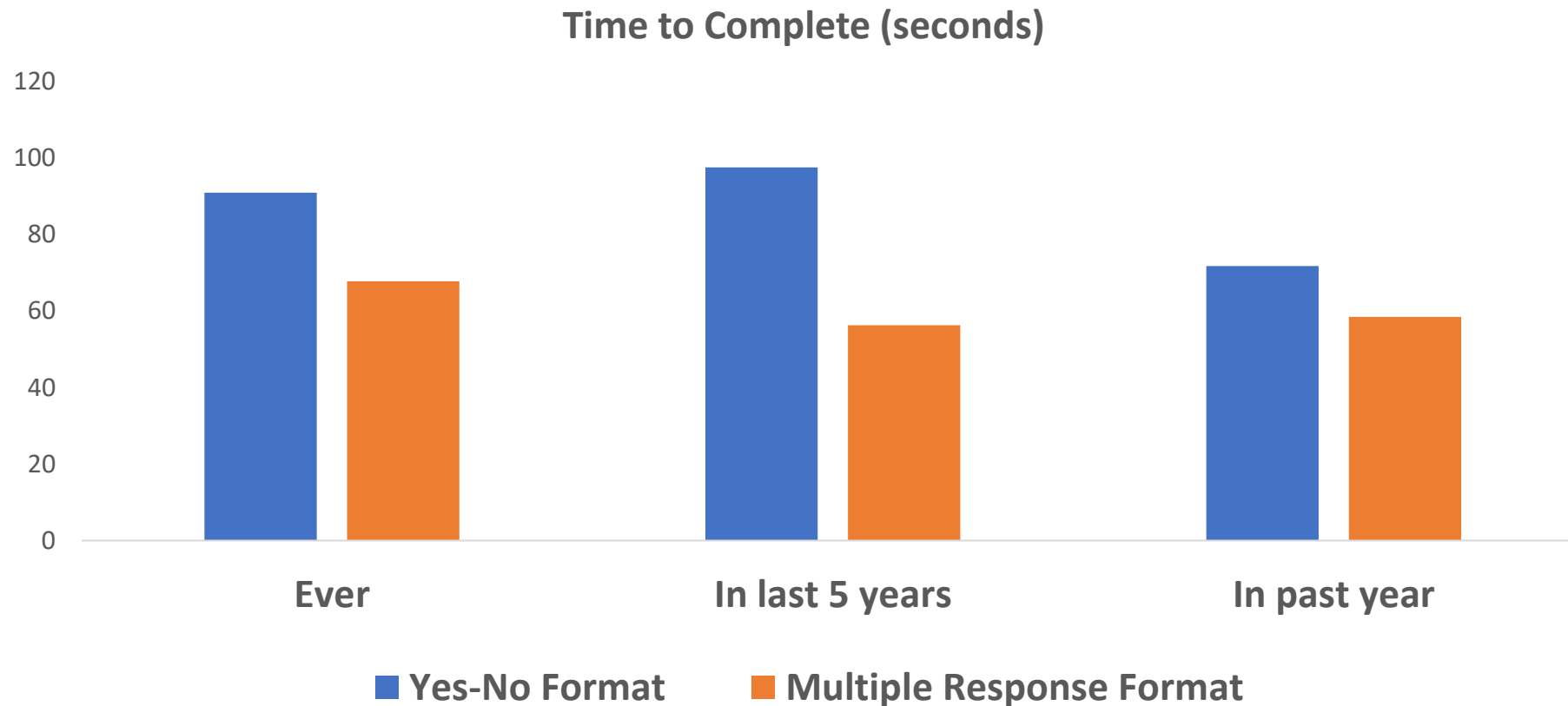
Reason Assignment: Finally, respondents were randomly assigned 3 of the 7 possible reasons for discrimination to consider for the 8 events.

Results

Results – Time to Complete



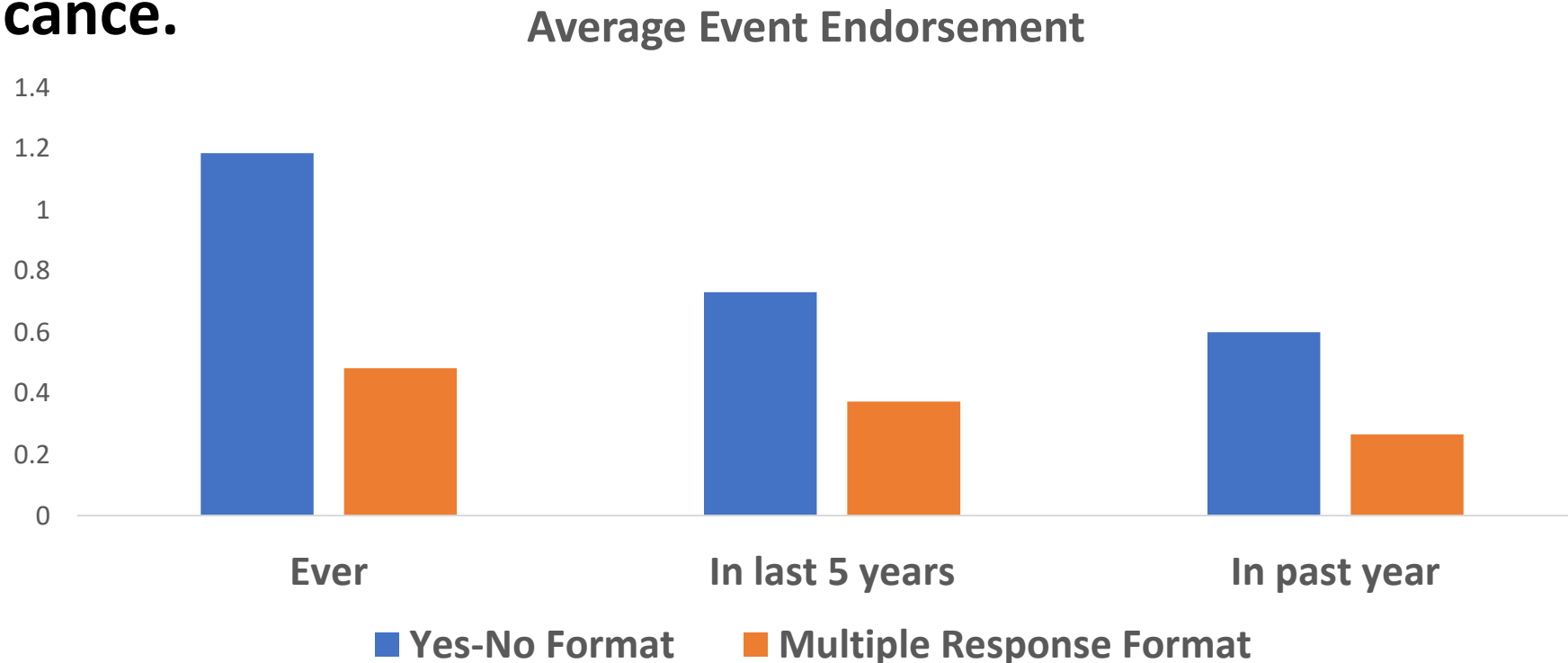
As we have found previously, the YNF takes longer to complete ($p < .001$). In addition, 'Ever' took longer overall than 'Past year' ($p < .05$).



Results – Impact on Overall Reports of Discrimination

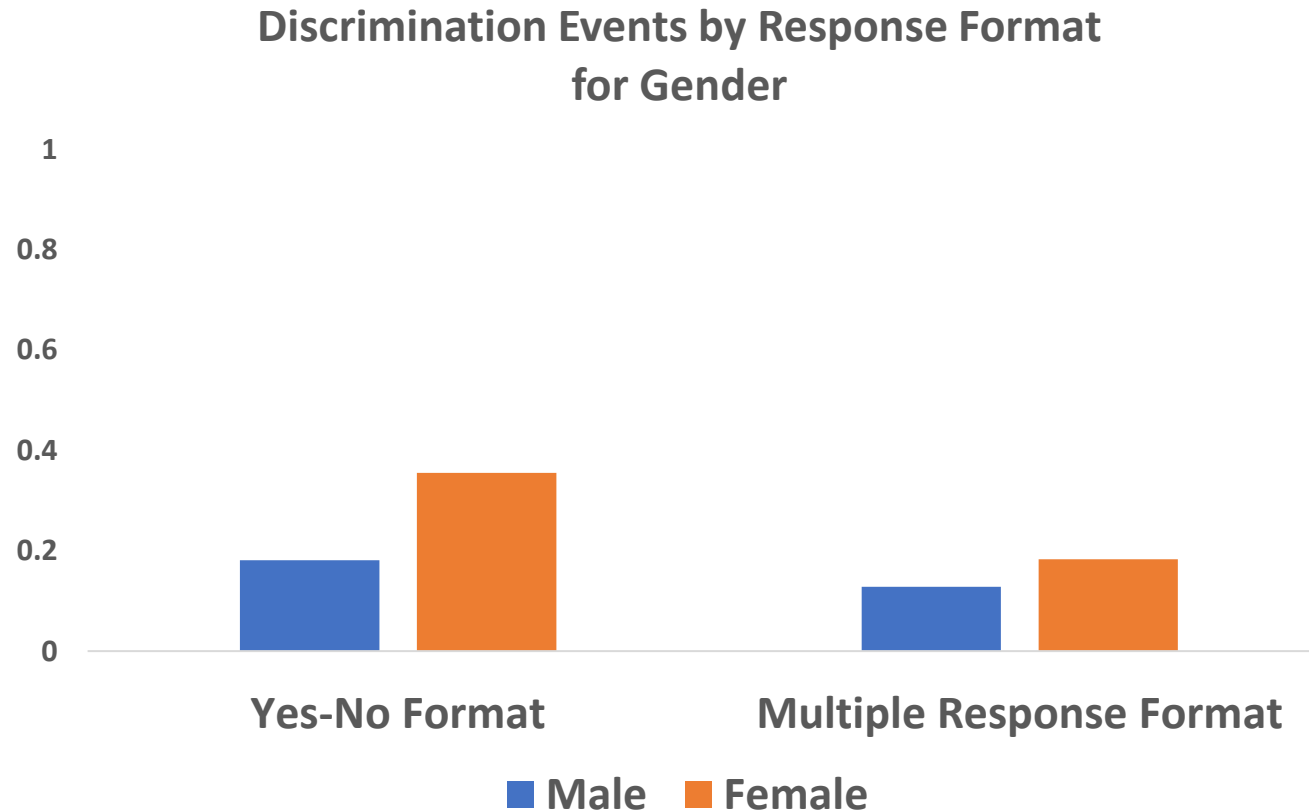


As found in other research comparing YNF and MRF, for each time period considered, the YNF led to higher rates of endorsement ($p < .001$). In addition, ‘Ever’ had a significantly higher rate of endorsement ($p < .001$), difference between ‘Last 5 years’ and ‘Past year’ did not reach significance.



Results – Impact on Endorsement - Gender

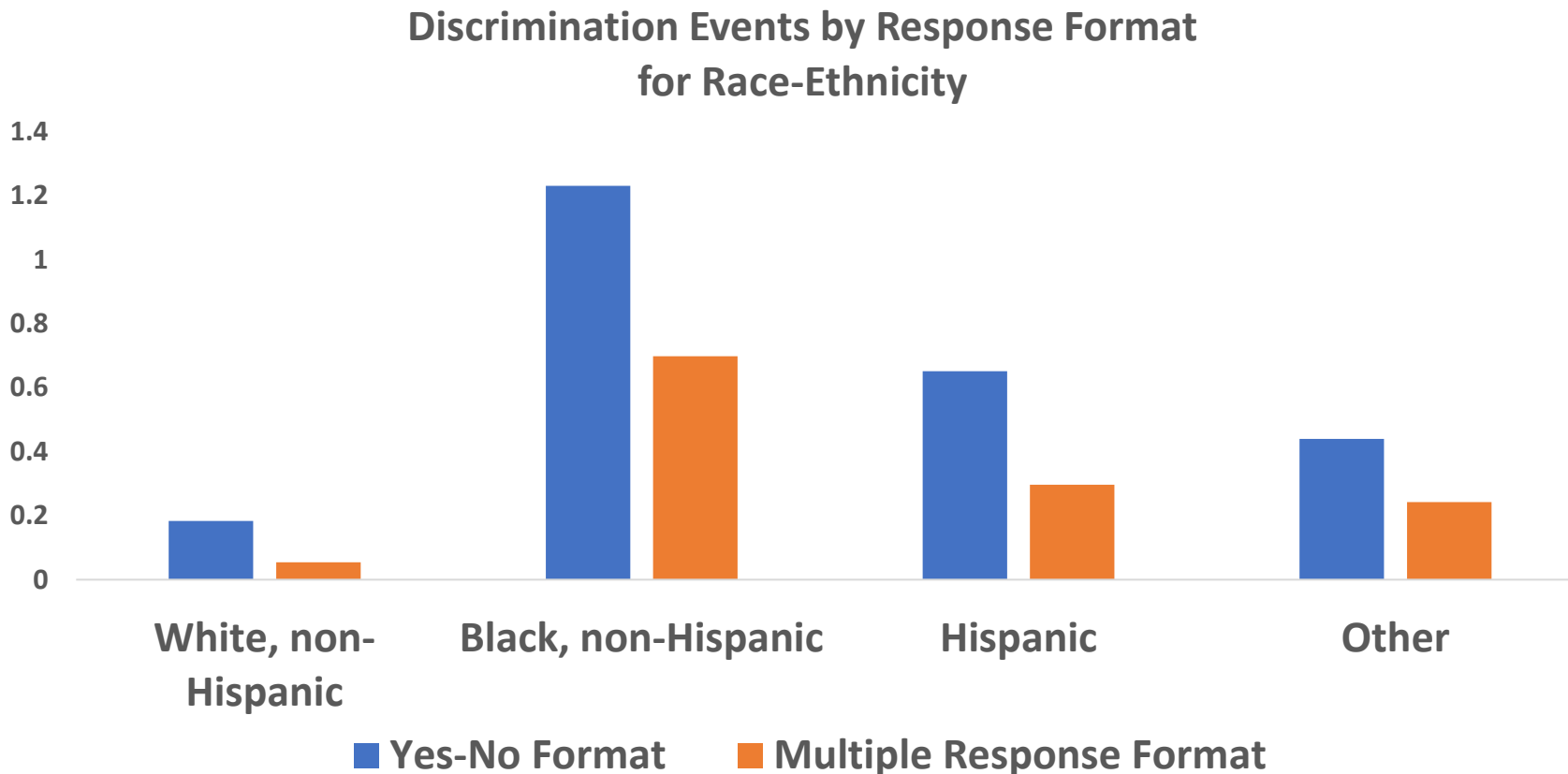
As we would expect, gender-related discrimination was much more likely to be reported for women than men, with the YNF having the highest endorsement rates.



Results – Impact on Endorsement – Race-Ethnicity



Also as expected, discrimination due to race-ethnicity was much more likely to be reported by Black participants than by Hispanics, and much more than that reported by White participants. And the trend is noticeable regardless of response format. Note also that reported discrimination is higher for Black participants than Women.



Discussion

Conclusions and Discussion



Use of a consistent response format can usefully be applied to measurement of discrimination.

Findings:

- **The YNF tends to pick up more reports of discrimination events, though it takes longer to complete that format.**
- **Prevalence rates ('ever') are generally higher than incidence rates ('in the last 5 years' or 'in past year').**
- **The measure can be used to compare the relative severity of discrimination, where we see that discrimination may be more experience by Black participants than Women.**

We are currently expanding this research to increase the number of cases and looking at impact of discrimination on both quality of life and long-term emotional reactions.

Thank you!

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