The Temporal Discrimination Effect: An Audit Study in Academia

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ABSTRACT: Through a field experiment set in academia (including 6,548 professors), we show that decisions about distant future events are more likely to generate discrimination against women and minorities than decisions about near future events. In our study, prospective doctoral students sought access to faculty either today or next week, and students’ names were randomized to signal race and gender. Caucasian males were granted access to faculty 26\% more often than women and minorities when making requests for next week and received more and faster responses to their requests, but this discrimination was essentially eliminated in requests for access today. Our identification of a “temporal discrimination effect” is consistent with the predictions of construal-level theory, and it implies that subtle contextual shifts can dramatically alter discrimination against women and minorities.

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