

College Students' Perceptions of Classroom Accommodations

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Introduction

The number of college students seeking accommodations has significantly increased in recent years (Holmes & Silvestri, 2019). Faculty willingness to provide accommodations depends on factors such as ease of providing the accommodation (Byrd, 2011), administrative support (Sayle, 2017), and understanding of the disability (Krentel, 2008). Faculty and college students share some of the same biases. For example, peers and faculty are more skeptical when the disability is not visible (Colella, 2001). Peers are especially concerned when they perceive that the accommodations create an unfair advantage for students with disabilities (Paetzold et al., 2008). Peers tend to be the least understanding of psychological disabilities and most tolerant of physical ones (Smart, 2016), believing that academic accommodations are more appropriate for students with cognitive and physical disabilities than psychological ones (Carpenter & Paetzold, 2013; Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2019).

Our study examined college students' perceptions of the type of disability and the type of accommodation. We hypothesized that college students would be more favorable about classroom accommodations for physical disabilities versus emotional disabilities. We also hypothesized that entitled students would evaluate accommodations most harshly.

Method

Participants:

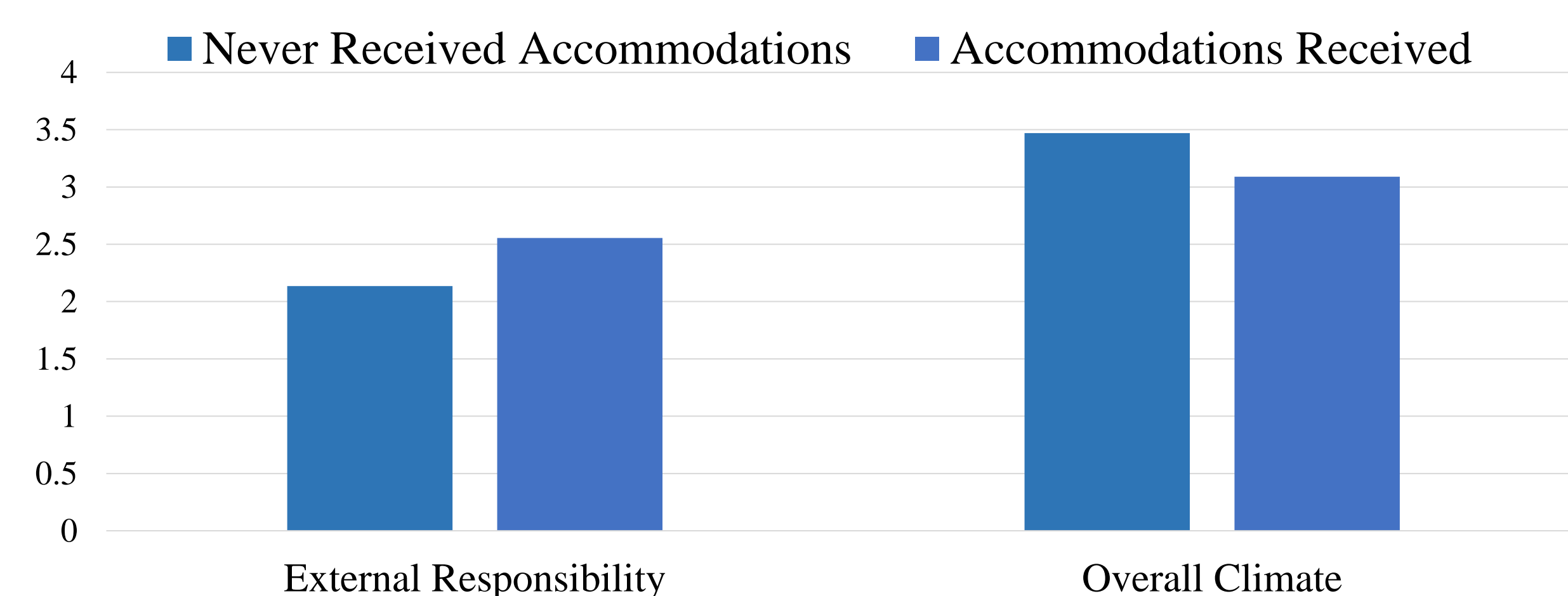
Participants ($n = 99$) were college students with a mean age of 21.03 ($SD = 2.22$). Most of the participants were Caucasian (72%), with 10% being African-American and the remainder were other ethnicities. About half were men (55%) and about half were women (45%).

Materials:

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four versions of the survey. Each version described a college student with an accessibility issue (ADHD, generalized anxiety, moderate hearing impairment, or muscular dystrophy). Participants then rated 5 classroom accommodations for their appropriateness, fairness to the teacher, fairness to other students, and likelihood of being abused.

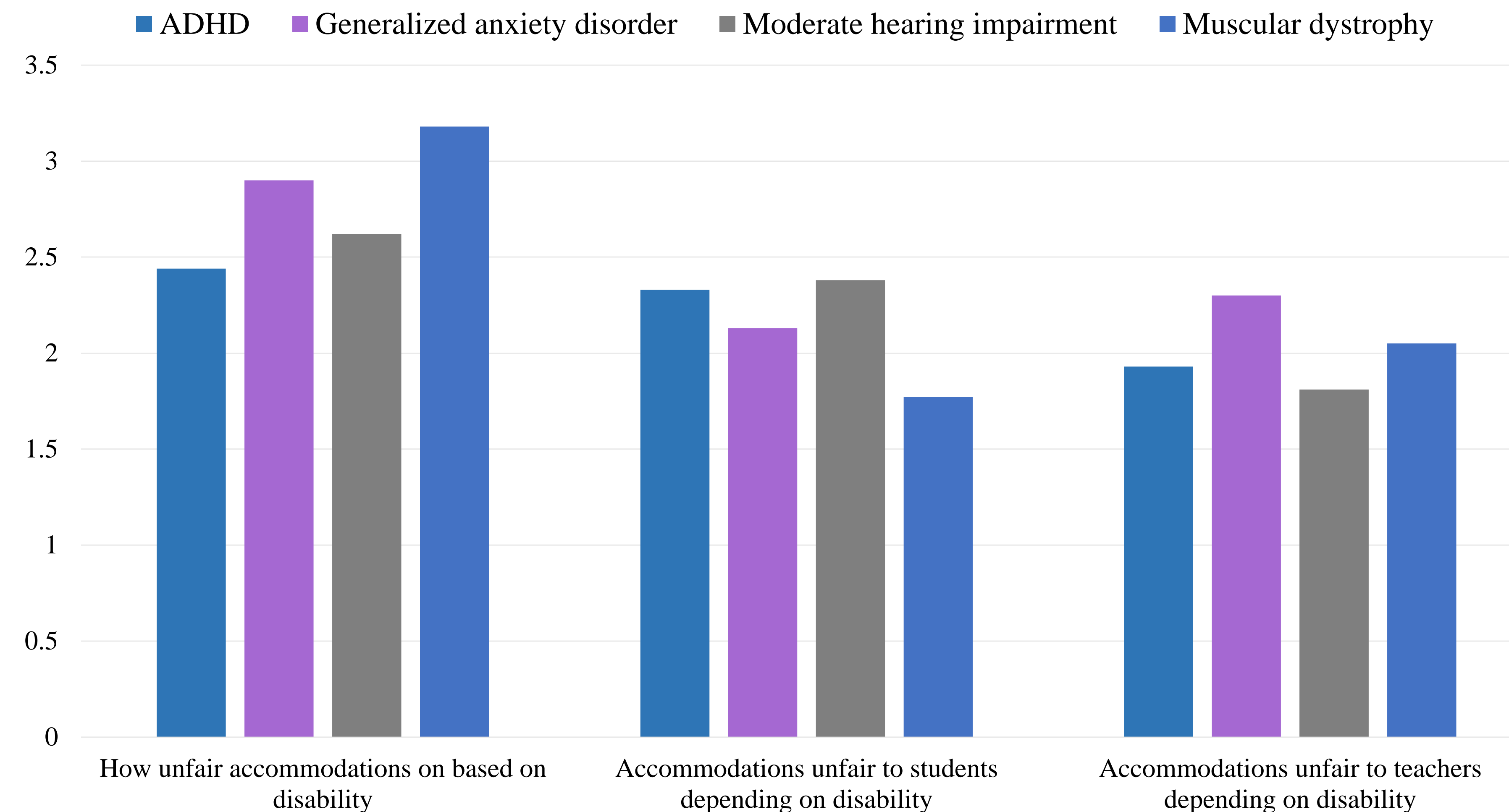
Participants also responded to scales to assess their perceptions of students needing accommodations (Baker et al., 2012), academic entitlement, (Chowning & Cambell, 2009), and entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004)

Accommodated Students



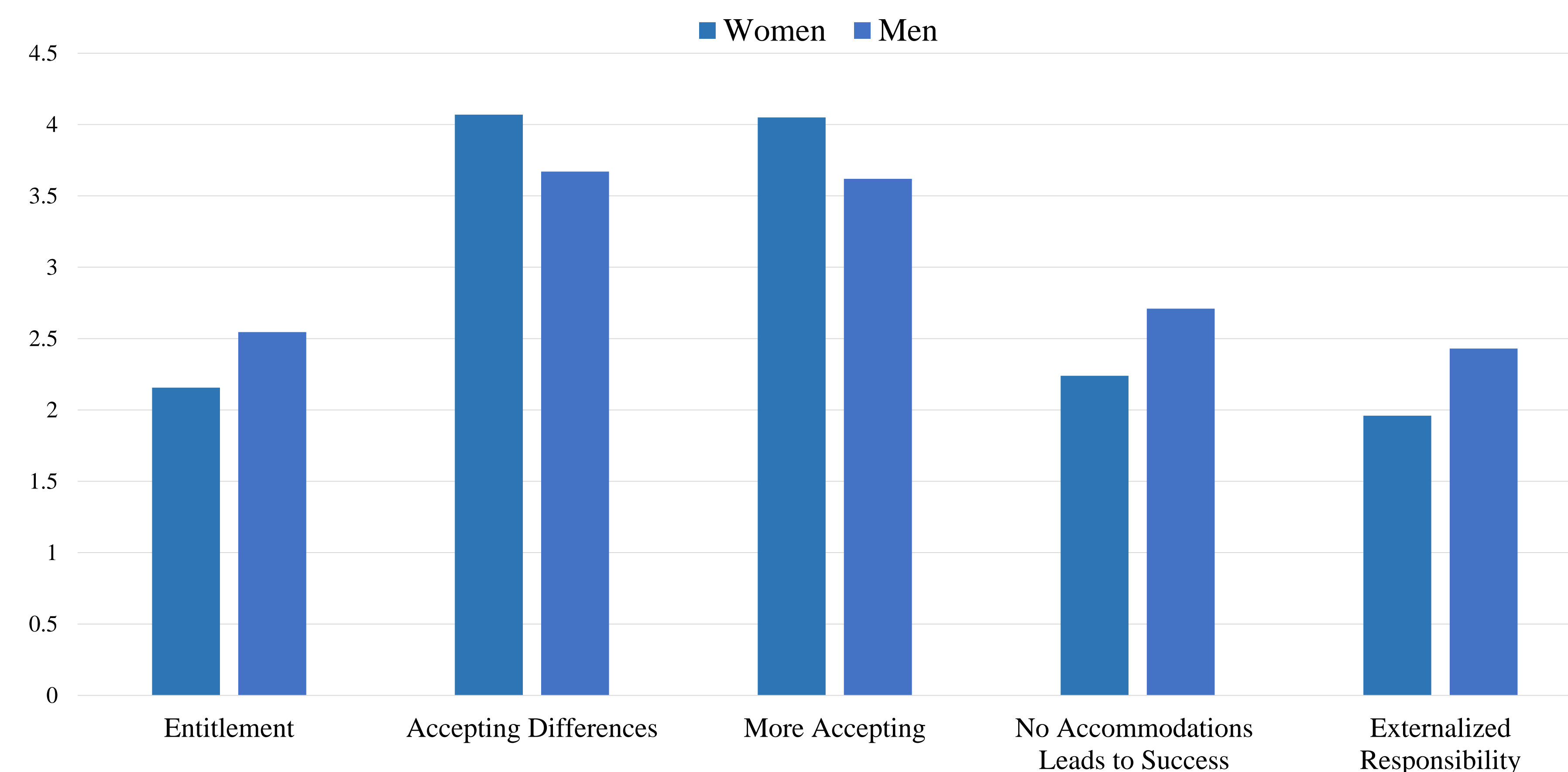
Students who had received an accommodation and those who had not perceived the campus climate regarding accommodations similarly. Compared to participants who had never received an accommodation, those who had were higher in externalized academic responsibility, $t(86) = -1.95, p = .05$.

Comparison of Survey Conditions



Participants agreed that excused class absences were most appropriate for the student with muscular dystrophy and least appropriate for the student with ADHD. ADHD differed significantly from muscular dystrophy and moderate hearing impairment, while GAD differed from ADHD, $F(3, 96) = 4.88, p = .003$. Participants most agreed that excused absences were unfair to other students in the classroom for the student with mild hearing impairment. The mild hearing impairment condition significantly differed from the ADHD and muscular dystrophy conditions, $F(3, 96) = 3.42, p = .02$. Participants agreed most that receiving outlines of the lecture was unfair to the teacher when the student had GAD and agreed least when the student had mild hearing impairment. The GAD condition was significantly different from the ADHD and mild hearing impairment conditions, $F(3, 96) = 2.77, p = .04$.

Perceptions of Opposite Gender



Compared to women, men had higher entitlement scores, $t(95) = -2.52, p = .01$, and felt more externalized academic responsibility, $t(95) = -3.36, p = .001$. Men disagreed more that having students with disabilities teaches other students that "being different is okay," $t(95) = 1.97, p = .05$, and to be more accepting, $t(95) = 2.21, p = .03$. Men agreed more that students who do not receive accommodations are more likely to succeed after college, $t(95) = -2.66, p = .009$.

Student Observations

There must be a balance between accommodations and letting disabled students learn to work with their disabilities.

My teachers were accommodating but the school wasn't.

People are not aware of all the accommodations. They need to be promoted more!

I am dyslexic and I have been treated differently by my classmates. People say it is unfair for me to have extra time on tests especially when I receive a better grade than them. They see my grade and say that it is because I had more time. But really it takes me much longer to read and process the questions.

Perception Indicators

The further along in college participants were, the more they agreed:

- accommodations are unfair to teachers, $r(100) = .26, p = .008$
- non-disabled students are distracted by having students with disabilities in the class, $r(100) = .24, p = .02$
- students with disabilities have a hard time concentrating in the college classroom, $r(100) = .23, p = .02$

Participants high in overall entitlement felt that, the more they agreed:

- the overall climate of the university was unfavorable for students with disabilities, $r(100) = .34, p = .001$
- students with disabilities were distracting their non-disabled peers in the classroom, $r(100) = .23, p = .02$
- students who don't get accommodations are more likely to succeed after college, $r(100) = .21, p = .04$

The higher students' externalized academic responsibility, the more they agreed:

- current accommodations do not meet the needs of students with disabilities, $r(100) = -.26, p = .009$
- teachers focused more on students with disabilities, $r(100) = .29, p = .004$
- students with disabilities were distracting their peers in the classroom, $r(100) = .38, p < .001$
- having students with disabilities in the classroom does not lead to greater acceptance, $r(100) = -.33, p = .001$
- students who do not get accommodations are more likely to succeed in the future, $r(100) = .51, p < .001$

Closing Thoughts

Our hypotheses were not supported. Instead, we found that students saw the appropriateness of accommodations being very specific to the disability. Men and students higher in entitlement or externalized academic responsibility revealed the most negative attitudes towards students with accommodations and towards the accommodations themselves. These students may have been reflecting a concern, seen in previous research, that students with accommodations may be getting an unfair advantage. Students further along in college expressed concern for teachers, students with accommodations, and non-accommodated peers. Perhaps classroom experiences and maturity allowed them to see and empathize with multiple perspectives. These findings add to our growing understanding of accommodations on the college campus, demonstrating that perceptions are multi-faceted and some students harbor perceptions that may be stigmatizing to their peers needing accommodations.