Disparities in Prison Punishment

Holiness Kerandi, Carceral Algorithms Research Group,
Department of Computer Science, Bucknell University, Lewisburg,PA

Introduction

-The project started as a comparison of data analysis with the New York Times.
-They investigate racial disparities in punishment and parole in the NY Department of Corrections.
-For punishment, they considered placement rates in solitary confinement and the rates of issuance of tickets, according to the incarcerated peoples age and race.
-They also interviewed inmates on their experience while incarcerated, specifically the black inmates. Where inmates discussed being written up as misconducts for a slight mistake that could be involuntary especially inmates who were mentally ill.
-In this project we have a team of students and professors who work on different parts of the project, however my interest in examining misconducts came about seeking to find out whether the data and the stories match.

Method

-Gathered info from the New York Times and tried to reproduce the analysis they had found in order to gain basic data analysis skills which I used to make my analysis.
-The professors working on the project requested data from Pennsylvania department of corrections.
- I focused on a file that had information on misconduct charges, considering data from April 2000 to February 2019 which consists of three categories of misconducts: A, B and C ranging from the most severe to the least severe.
-The process of "resolution" of these charges and disciplinary ramifications depend on the severity of the charge. This process is also, however, impacted by the discretion that the correctional staff have in this matter..[cite the Inmate discipline document]
- I investigated disparities in prison punishment by looking through misconducts
-I used Jupyter notebooks and pandas (a data analysis library in Python) as my main data analysis tools.

Results

Time frame: April 17th 2000 to February 27th 2019
- The percentage of Black and white incarcerated people are almost equal which in itself is a disparity given that the population of Black or African American people in Pennsylvania is 12% of the its population and in the entire country 13.6%.
-This shows a disparity in not only the intake of incarcerated people as well as a
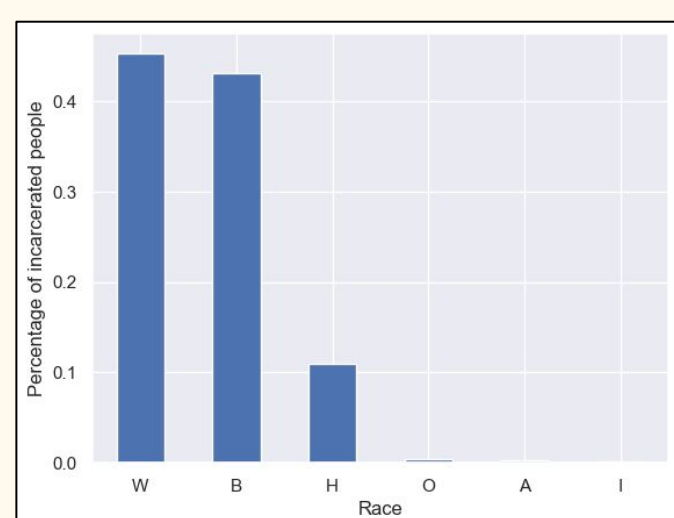disproportionate number of misconduct within the incarcerated population..

The Scourge of Racial Bias in New York State's Prisons

Figure 2,
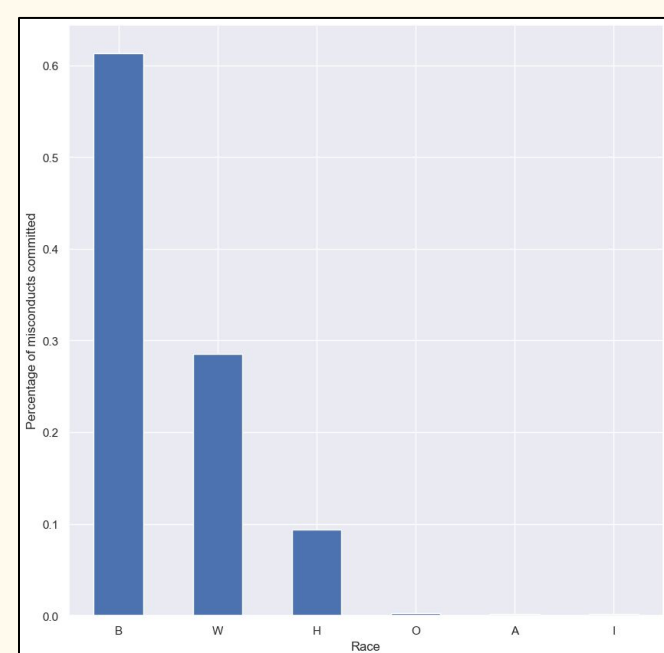The graph shows the distribution of incarcerated people by race.%

Figure 3
The graph shows the percentage of recorded misconducts committed and it's distribution by race. Black incarcerated people have the highest recorded misconducts.
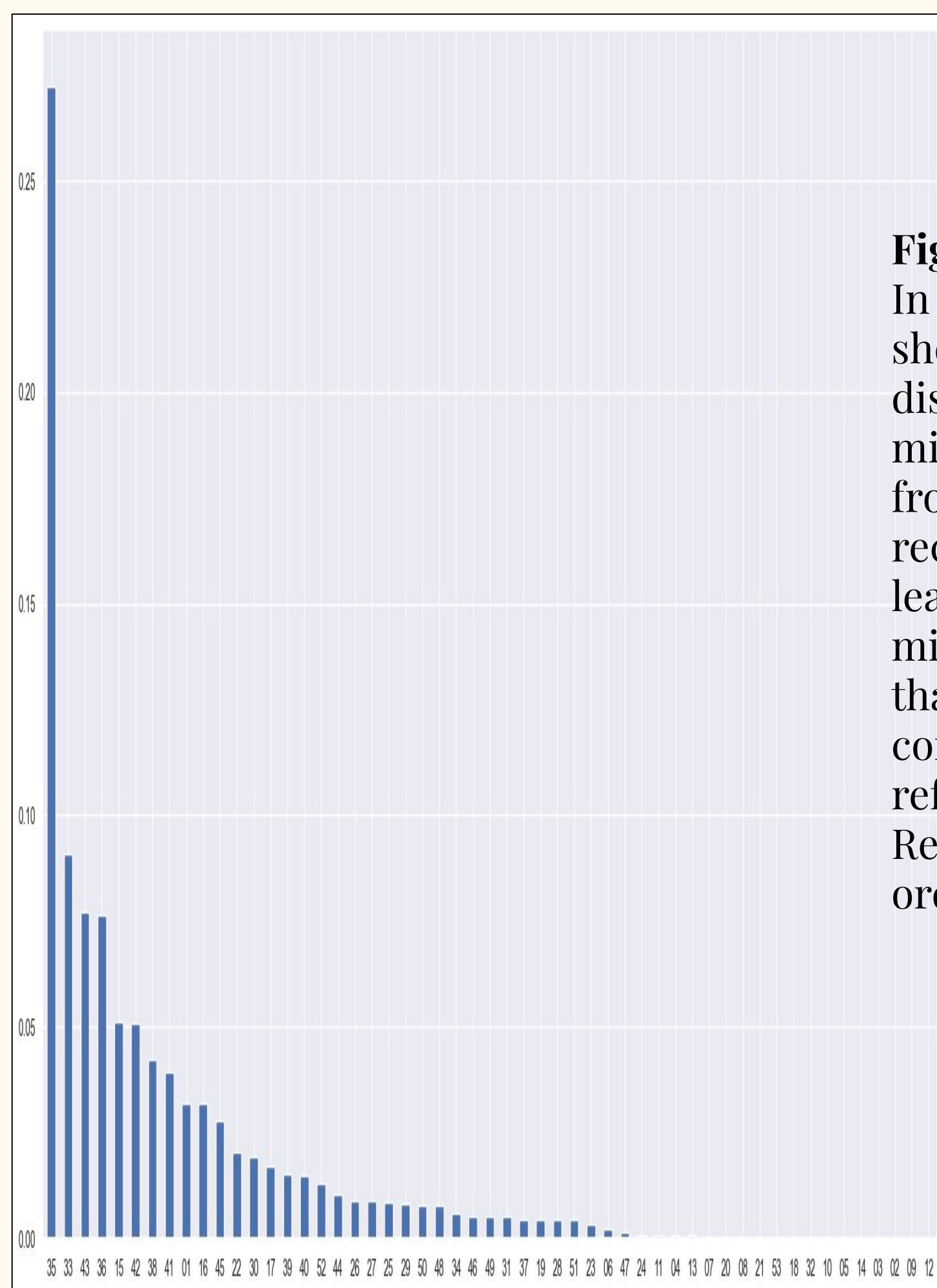

Figure 4,
In this figure, it shows the distribution of misconduct charges from the most recorded to the least recorded misconduct. Notice that the most committed is under reference code 35: Refusal to obey order.

A deeper dive into the misconduct charge:
-Each misconduct has a reference code tied to it, which has a matching description.
-The reference codeshare tied to a categories that determine the severity of the misconduct during the hearing.
-The categories are A,B and C,where A is the most severe.
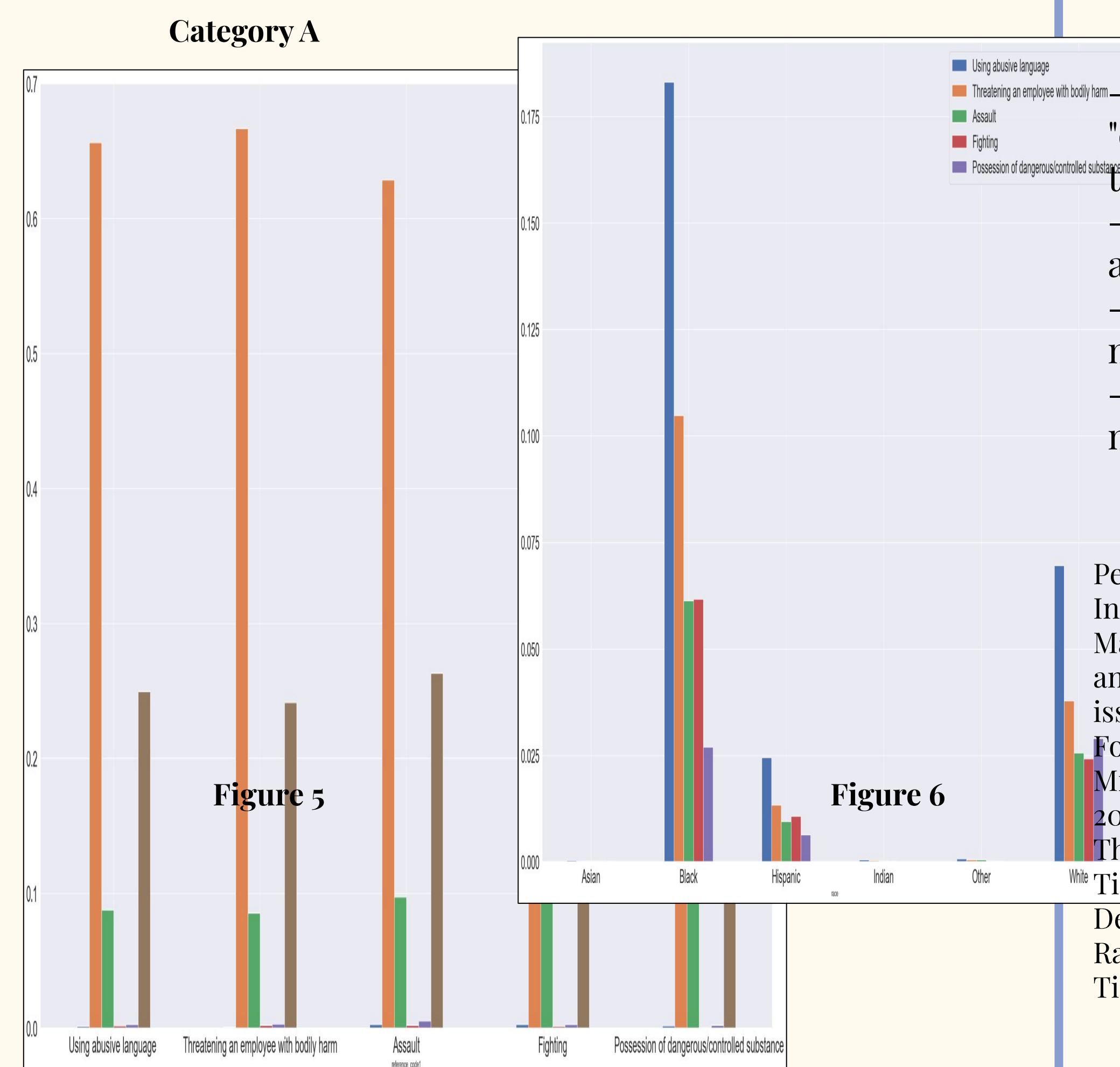-I took a closer look at each category and examined the type of misconduct and its relation to race.
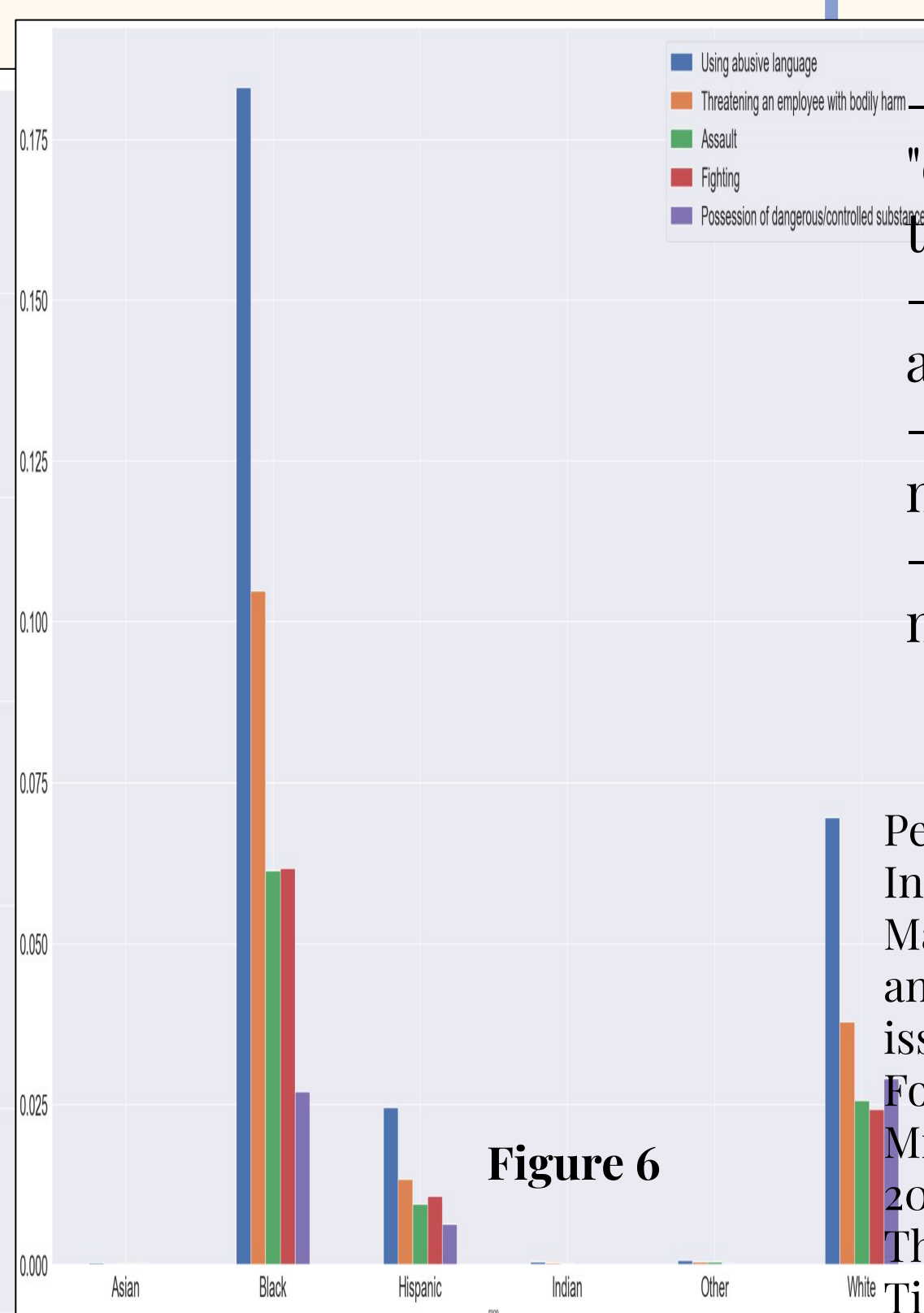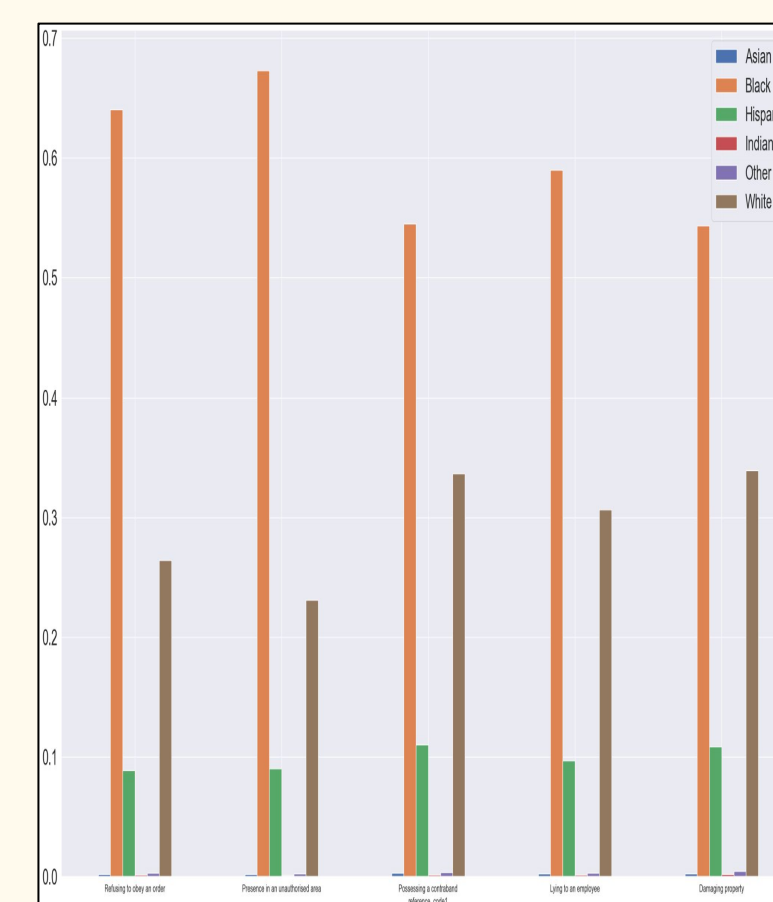

Figure 5
Category A

Figure 6
Category B

Category charge B

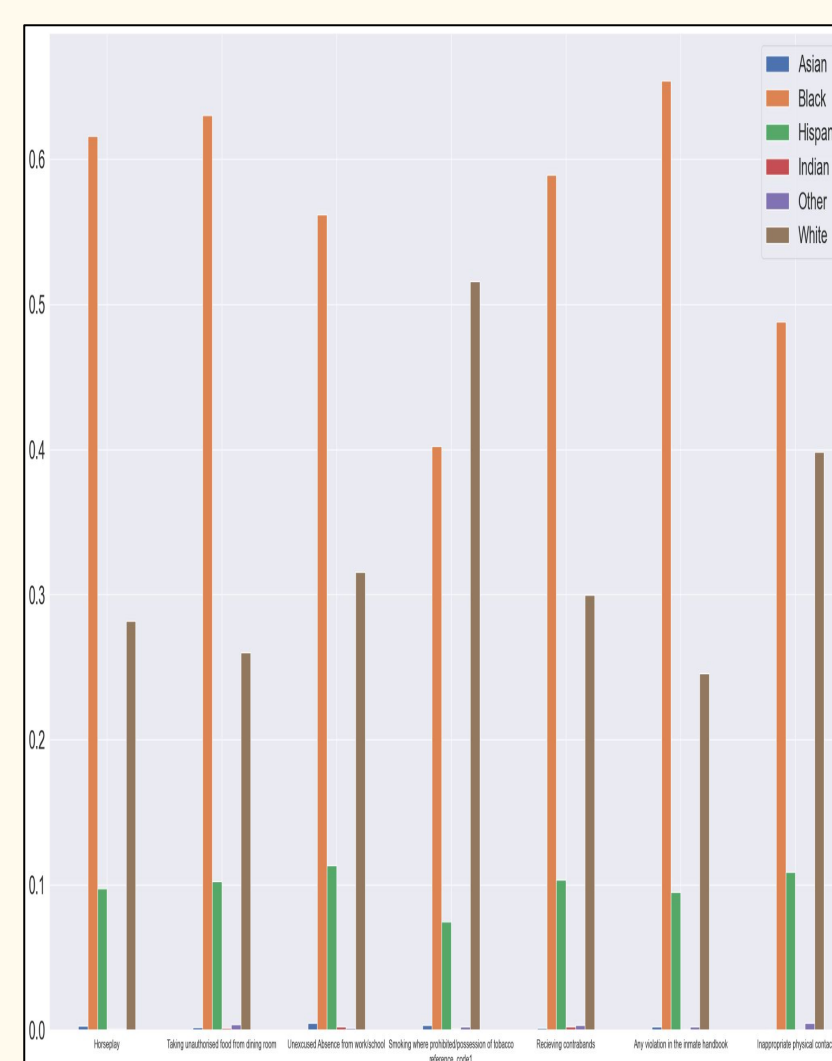**Figure 7**
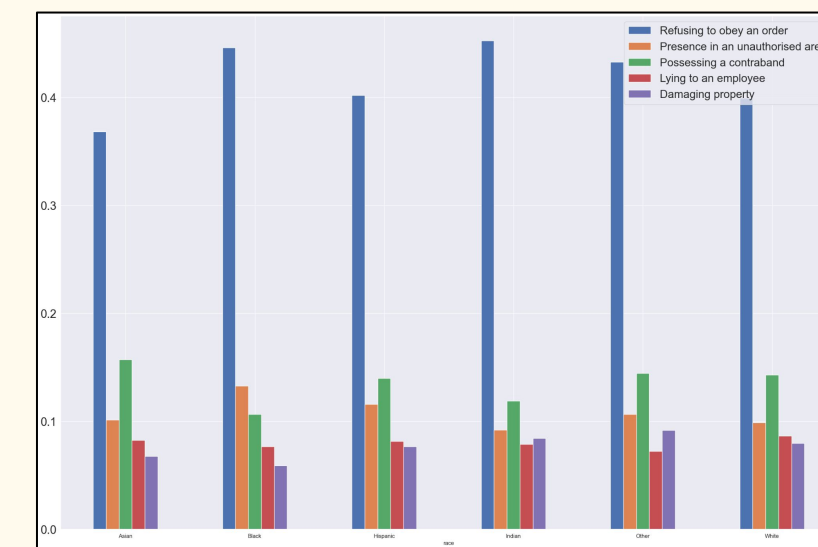

Figure 8

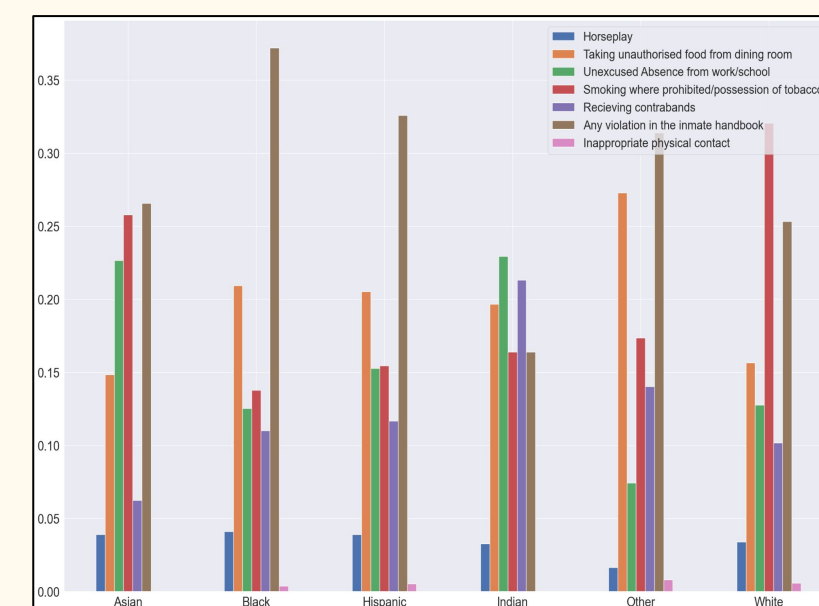### Category charge C

Figure 9

Figure 10

Discussion

-In Fig 7, B35 it is the most recorded misconduct: Refusal to obey an order,and notice that if 0.65 of the misconduct is by black incarcerated people. A33: Using abusive, obscene or inappropriate language to and about an employee. C52: Any violation of a rule or regulation in the inmate handbook not specified as a class 1 misconduct charge.
-However in C50, which is smoking where prohibited or possession of any tobacco products, there has to be tangible evidence for it to be recorded as a misconduct. This is where the status quo is flipped.
-This analysis shows that the most reported misconducts are on Black incarcerated people, and there is indication that for more "subjective" misconducts, Black incarcerated people have higher rates of being charged. This is consistent with the experiences that Black incarcerated people have reported coming in or out of prison by research currently in-progress by other members of our research group as well as the literature[Michael Winerip et al, 2016]

What next?

-Classify all misconduct categories as "subjective" vs "objective" as per the inmate handbook and investigate if there are disparities in the two categories.
- Investigate the outcomes of the misconduct hearings and especially the misconduct appeals.
- Investigate the statistical relationship between misconducts and custody levels (security levels).
-Investigate the statistical relationship between misconducts and parole outcomes.

References

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