

Report to staff

Attitudes of Academics to Equal Employment Opportunity:

Some Preliminary Results

Julia Della Flora, University of South Australia
Corliss Gustavson, University of South Australia
Linley Hartmann, University of South Australia
Alison Konrad, Temple University
(listed in alphabetical order)

Differences between the views of men and women on progress toward equal opportunity and misunderstandings about the scope of equal opportunity interventions have been highlighted in a variety of studies (for example Everett and Entekin (1994), Mayer and Bacchi (1996)). In addition, Burton (1997) highlighted the impact of key systemic impediments to the career progress of women. Nevertheless quantitative research to explore predictors of attitudes to EEO programs, perceptions of the extent of positive discrimination within these programs, and discrimination on the basis of ethnic diversity and disability have not been widely undertaken in Australia generally. The aim of this study was to explore the factors influencing attitudes to EEO programs in academic organizations. Interim results indicate significant differences on most items between men and women and between men in faculties and some effects for rank/level and qualification in relation to organization processes for promotion.

Introduction

In a recent study of academics in business faculties across the USA, egalitarianism, beliefs about the existence of discrimination, sexism and racism have been found to mediate the relationship between demographic category and equal employment opportunity (EEO) attitudes (Konrad, in preparation). This study extends previous work by assessing the potential for material self-interest to mediate the relationship between demographic group and EEO attitudes and by examining the impact of social identities on both the level of support for EEO programs and the effects of the various predictors of those attitudes.

Attitudes towards EEO programs have been extensively researched in the USA where the focus of these programs is not only on discrimination based on sex but also on race and national origin. However, whereas the Australian Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act (1986) requires annual reports (from organisations with more than 100 employees and higher education institutions) on actions which have been taken to break down barriers which have prevented women from having equal involvement in their organisations, it does not follow the same course as US legislation which applies to both race and sex, and indicates employment quotas of certain proportions for these. In Australia, equal employment opportunity EEO programs have focused primarily on discrimination based on sex, except in NSW and WA where race, national origin and disability have also been included within the legislative framework. Programs related to EEO have focused on establishing 'equity' through equal outcomes for employees, rather than 'equality' through the same treatment. Equity is defined as appropriately different treatment which recognises the different circumstances under which women and other identified groups have undertaken employment whereas 'equality' refers to identical treatment regardless of the disparate effect this might have (Burton, 1995). Given the changing cultural and linguistic nature of the Australian population, it is timely, not only to examine attitudes to sex discrimination but also attitudes to discrimination based on race as defined within the Racial Discrimination Act (1975), that is with reference to race, colour, national or ethnic origin. As the number of overseas born, higher degree students increases in Australia, so the pool of applicants who may be seeking jobs in Australian universities will become more culturally diverse.

Previous research in the USA has shown that the major predictors of attitudes toward affirmative action programs are political conservatism, anti-egalitarianism, racism, and beliefs about the existence of labour market discrimination (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Little, Murry and Wimbush, 1998; Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner and Drout, 1994; Feldman, 1988; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Tougas & Beaton, 1993; Kravitz & Platania, 1993). Questions regarding whether material self-interest affects EEO attitudes and why demographic groups differ in their attitudes are only beginning to be addressed.

Burton (1995) noted that women were more likely to identify (a) structural biases in the employment context and labour market, (b) organisational dynamics which reinforced division of labour, and (c) systemic issues (such as stereotypes, preferences and definitions of situations), and associated interests which reduced their opportunities.

Few men appeared to understand these perspectives. In Australia, a great deal of research has been undertaken with regard to barriers to women's progress in their academic careers. The differences between the views of men and women on progress toward equal opportunity and misunderstandings about the scope of equal opportunity interventions to include positive discrimination have been highlighted in studies by Everett and Entekin (1994) and Mayer and Bacchi (1996). In her report on Australian universities, Burton (1997) highlighted the impact of the traditional academic culture, the changing academic labour market and application of the principle of academic merit as key systemic impediments to the career progress of women. Nevertheless quantitative research to explore predictors of attitudes to EEO programs, perceptions of the extent of positive discrimination within these programs, and discrimination on the basis of ethnic diversity and racism have not been widely undertaken in Australia.

There are social implications arising from an improved understanding of the extent to which EEO programs are accepted by University staff. The factors influencing the level of acceptance provide an indication of the extent to which compliance with the employing organisation's policies can be expected from staff, how difficult it is going to be to implement related policies and hence future directions for programs within these organisations. Although it is not the focus of this research, the results may also have implications for the teaching of a diverse population of students.

The purpose of this research was to explore the factors influencing attitudes to EEO programs in academic organizations and this paper reports on the research process and provides preliminary analysis of the data.

Method

This was a quantitative study using a survey research method. The primary constructs to be measured included attitudes toward EEO programs, material self-interest in those programs, perceptions of demographic group interests in those programs, beliefs regarding the existence of discrimination, beliefs about the academic merit system, sexism, individualism, egalitarianism, political conservatism, social identities. Information was collected from participants regarding their sex, age, qualifications, service, position classification, division, minority membership, and their classification within 'feminist' and political ranges.

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was distributed to the study population by mail with a reply addressed envelope enclosed. The sample population for the study included approximately 800 continuing academics at classifications of Level A, B, C, D & E (combined), among whom it was expected that approximately 12% would be absent on study leave or other travel at the time of the survey. It was anticipated that the sample could be skewed to the extent that people with strong opinions were mostly likely to reply. Respondents were not identified in any way.

Analysis

The analysis reported here is preliminary and provides information about the sample and analysis of all questions for significant differences between men and women, faculties, age groups, promotion levels and qualification.

Two hundred and thirty nine responses were received, which is about a 30% response rate. Females comprised 48% of respondents. Some questionnaires were incomplete and the lowest response rate for any question was q.53 concerning the appropriateness of women doing 'men's work' (205). This question unfortunately included a double negative. Fifteen people chose not to identify their work place, four their sex and six their age. Sixty per cent were aged over 40 years of age; 50% had less than 10 years academic employment experience and 80% less than 20 years. Sixteen per cent were classified as level A, 44% as level B, 26% as level C and 12% as level D or E. PhD qualifications were held by 33% and a Masters level qualification by 52%. Twenty-two per cent considered themselves a member of a minority group. From the total sample, minority group status was based on language differences for 10%, on appearance for 5%, culture/religion for 5%, and family background for 14%, with some double counting. Four per cent identified themselves as people with a disability.

Fifty one per cent (slightly more men than women) considered they worked with a few or no women colleagues, 90% with no indigenous colleagues, 98% with a few or no disabled colleagues, 77% with few or less culturally and linguistically diverse colleagues. With regard to the presence of indigenous or disabled colleagues, the perceptions of men and women were similar, however, 30% of men compared with 11% of women considered they work with many people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Twelve per cent identified their Division as Business and Enterprise, 33% as Education, Arts and Social Sciences, 25% as Health Sciences, 24% as Information Technology, Engineering and the Environment, 4% as other areas.

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses for sex by age by qualification; Table 2 the distribution for sex by faculty by qualification and Table 3 the distribution for sex by Level by qualification. Each percentage shown in these tables is a percentage of the total sample. Table 1 indicates that the largest groups of respondents are aged 36-55 years, of whom about one third have PhD qualifications. Each age group is similar in sex distribution except that there are fewer women over 56 years of age. In all except this age group, men are at least twice as likely to have PhD qualifications as women, with the majority of women holding a Masters degree. Table 2 indicates that the Faculties of Technology and of Health Sciences provided the largest percentage of responses from men (18.7%) and also includes the highest percentage of men with PhD qualifications (12.3%). Social Sciences provided the highest percentage of female responses and also includes the higher percentage of women with PhD qualifications (3.7%). Men respondents with PhD qualifications outnumber women in all Faculties. Table 3 indicates that the majority of responses (45%) came from Level B staff, with 26% from Level C. At each level, male respondents are more frequently qualified at PhD level. In summary, about 25% of the sample are men with PhD qualifications and 8% are women, whereas one third of women have Masters Degrees. Of the sample who are classified as Level A or B, a higher percentage are women rather than men.

Significant differences were found for sex by qualification and rank; for faculty by age, academic experience, qualification, and minority membership; and for age by academic experience, and rank.

Results and discussion

The details of the questionnaire are attached in Table 4. Rather than aggregating items within the different scales, in this paper we will discuss the results for questions within each of the scales. The level of significance using Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests for each question is reported in this table. Italics are used when referring to a specific question. For many questions a large number of responses were scored 3 and 4 on a six point likert scale, scores which can indicate undecidedness or indifference to the issue.

Attitudes to EEO programmes

These items dealt with whether EEO programmes were a good idea for women and a range of minority groups. Significant differences were found for sex and faculties, particularly for men across faculties. More men tended to agree that *there is no discrimination against women today* and that *women academics enjoy favouritism over men*. Females were more likely to consider they were *at a lower rank than men of equal qualification*. The social sciences faculty was more likely to agree that EEO is a good idea, and that there is discrimination. The Business and Technology faculties showed more agreement that *women academics enjoy favouritism*, and *advance less qualified women*. There were no significant differences based on rank and few on qualification, however generally Levels A and B tended to be more in favour of EOP for all and recognised more discrimination. Professors and those with PhD qualifications tended to disagree *that women academics experienced discrimination*.

The need for EOP to reduce discrimination based on sex, colour etc

Significant sex differences were found as were differences between men across faculties. The need for EOP programmes was supported by women more than men and more by Social Sciences Faculty. There were no significant differences based on rank and qualification but professors and those with PhD qualifications generally scored lower on the need for EOP to reduce discrimination.

The effect of EOPs in my section...

Significant differences were identified on the basis of sex and faculty for all aspects. There were no differences with regard to the question of whether EOP *enhance women's careers* but women tended to consider that EOPs had a *positive effect on their careers*. More men tended to agree that EOP *advance less qualified women*, *mean that women displace men*, *damage their careers* and *hurt their chances of promotion*. The Business and Technology faculties showed more agreement as to the negative effects of EOP in their section than other faculties. Level A respondents considered EOP could help their career more than did other levels.

Attitude toward inequality in Australia today

Significant ($p < .05$).sex differences were evident for all items except *inequality is due to unequal access to education*, *more equality equals fewer problems* and *it is best to*

minimize inequality. Faculty differences followed a similar pattern. For two items there were significant differences across faculties for women and for men. These items concern the idea that *inequality is due to lack of effort*, and *differential rewards relate to effort*. Once again Business and Technology faculties were closer in agreement that *inequality is a market asset*, *differential rewards are due to more effort*, *inequality motivates*, and *inequality is due to performance*. More differences between levels were evident for these items, with level A and professors more in agreement that *inequality motivates*, *inequality is due to performance*, *inequality is due to lack of effort*.

Feelings about organizational processes including who gets promoted

Scores for these questions were well spread but once again with a substantial percentage of middle range scores. Significant sex differences were found for all items except the view that *insiders control resources* and that *promotion is linked to accomplishment*. Similar significant faculty differences were evident, particularly for men. Respondents from the Health and Technology faculties were more positive about processes. It is in this section of the survey that differences in view by level within the organisation becomes most apparent. For level/rank, significant differences were found for most items and it is mainly levels C and D & E who are more similar than other levels in their responses regarding the link between rank and promotion and accomplishment.

Factors to be considered in promotion decisions/ the bias toward men or women

Significant sex and faculty differences were evident for all items at $p < .01$ and for age ($p < .02$). Technology faculty were less favourable toward any special considerations. For Level, significant differences are found for most items and it is mainly level C and D & E which disagree that promotion decisions should take family matters into consideration. Significant differences for age indicate that younger people agree that promotion links to ability.

Ideas about appropriate jobs and roles for men and women

Results show significant sex and faculty differences ($p < .001$) with significant differences between men in faculties on items about *suitability of some jobs to men*, *housekeeping to women* and that *women with children should not work if there is no financial need*. Once again there were many similarities between Technology and Business faculty. There was only one item of significant difference for rank/levels and that concerned whether *women are more suited to housekeeping and childcare than men*. Professors were more likely to agree.

Feminism

Significant differences were found between sexes and between men in faculties. Women more frequently identified themselves with feminism. Faculty differences were significant for men, not women.

Politically left or right?

There were no significant sex differences but faculty differences were significant for men and women. Significant age differences indicated that younger people considered themselves more to the political right than other age groups.

A number of themes emerge from these results. First, that women favour EOP not just for themselves but for minorities. Second, that women's views across faculties are more

consistent than are those of men. Third, there are more significant differences related to rank within the organization (ie level) than to qualification. Four, age differences are more pronounced in items related to organizational processes and promotion. Although young people feel more marginalised they are also more in favour of promotion based on talent plus recognition of discrimination against minorities.

One of the clear impressions from this data is of the effect of self interest. Those who have been promoted think the system is better than those who are struggling to do so. Those who are more highly qualified tend to think the criteria for promotion are fair. Men more than women favour the status quo. Further examination of these results is continuing.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the results of a study of academic attitudes toward Equal Opportunity Programmes in terms of sex, faculty, age, qualification and rank. The results reported in this paper are preliminary, however, there are extensive differences between men and women in attitudes and experiences measured in this survey. Not surprisingly some bigger differences emerge between men across faculties than between women. Differences are also evident on the basis of rank and qualification within the organisation, particularly with regard to promotion processes. It is also important to note that the results are from a convenience sample who may be motivated to participate in the research in order to express a strongly held view.

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Table 1: Gender x age x qualification as a percentage of the total sample.

		Gender		Group Total
		Female	Male	Table %
<35years	PhD	1.8%	4.8%	6.6%
	Master	4.8%	1.8%	6.6%
	Bachelor	2.6%	3.5%	6.1%
	other	.4%	.4%	.9%
Group Total		9.6%	10.5%	20.2%
36-45 years	PhD	2.6%	7.9%	10.5%
	Master	12.7%	6.6%	19.3%
	Bachelor	1.8%	.9%	2.6%
	Group Total	17.1%	15.4%	32.5%
46 – 55 years	PhD	2.2%	8.3%	10.5%
	Master	13.2%	.0%	20.2%
	Bachelor	1.8%	.8%	3.5%
	other	.4%	.4%	.9%
Group Total		17.5%	17.5%	35.1%
56+ years	PhD	1.3%	4.4%	5.7%
	Master	1.8%	4.4%	6.1%
	Bachelor		.4%	.4%
	Group Total	3.1%	9.2%	12.3%

Table 2: Gender x faculty x qualification as a percentage of the total sample.

		Gender		Group Total
		female	male	Table %
Business	PhD		1.8%	1.8%
	Master	3.7%	5.0%	8.7%
	Bachelor	.5%	.9%	1.4%
	other		.5%	.5%
Group Total		4.1%	8.2%	12.3%
Social Sciences	PhD	3.7%	5.9%	9.6%
	Master	12.3%	5.5%	17.8%
	Bachelor	3.2%	2.3%	5.5%
	other	.5%		.5%
Group Total		19.6%	13.7%	33.3%
Health Sciences	PhD	2.7%	5.5%	8.2%
	Master	11.9%	2.7%	14.6%
	Bachelor	.9%	.5%	1.4%
	other		.5%	.5%
Group Total		15.5%	9.1%	24.7%
Technology	PhD	.9%	11.4%	12.3%
	Master	3.7%	5.5%	9.1%
	Bachelor	1.4%	1.8%	3.2%
	other	.5%		.5%
Group Total		6.4%	18.7%	25.1%
Other	PhD	.9%		.9%
	Master	1.4%	.9%	2.3%
	Bachelor	.5%	.9%	1.4%
	Group Total	2.7%	1.8%	4.6%

Table 3 :Gender x Level x qualification as a percentage of the total sample.

		Gender		Group Total
		female	male	Table %
Level A	PhD	.5%	1.4%	1.8%
	Master	4.5%	2.7%	7.2%
	Bachelor	3.2%	3.2%	6.3%
	other	.5%		.5%
	Group Total	8.6%	7.2%	15.8%
Level B	PhD	4.1%	10.4%	14.4%
	Master	17.1%	7.2%	24.3%
	Bachelor	2.7%	2.3%	5.0%
	other	.5%	.9%	1.4%
	Group Total	24.3%	20.7%	45.0%
Level C	PhD	1.8%	6.3%	8.1%
	Master	9.9%	8.1%	18.0%
	Bachelor		.5%	.5%
	Group Total	11.7%	14.9%	26.6%
Level D or E	PhD	1.8%	7.2%	9.0%
	Master	.5%	2.3%	2.7%
	Bachelor	.5%	.5%	.9%
	Group Total	2.7%	9.9%	12.6%

Table 4: Summary data and significance levels for Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests of differences based on sex,

Item	N	Mean	SD.	% 1-2 score disagree	% 5-6 score agree	Sex	Faculty	Faculty Fem
EEO area good idea for— Women	235	4.69	1.29	8	64	.000	.000	.176
Indigenous Australians	235	4.84	1.15	5	66	.000	.000	.034
People of colour	231	4.48	1.41	10	55	.000	.000	.397
Variety of C & L backgrounds	235	4.85	1.14	4	68	.000	.002	.174
People with disability	233	4.81	1.11	4	65	.000	.002	.593
W/academics experience discrim ⁿ in hiring & promotion	232	3.52	1.47	27	28	.000	.002	.150
Today there is no discrimination against women	231	3.35	1.49	32	24	.000	.019	.507
W/academics enjoy favouritism over men	233	2.88	1.62	44	19	.000	.000	.832
Employment discrimination is experienced by... Indigenous/Aust/Academics	218	3.87	1.23	13	30	.009	.013	.702
...academics with a disability	213	3.77	1.19	15	24	.000	.095	.888
...academics with different C & L	221	3.62	1.32	21	24	.000	.027	.738
...academic people of colour	218	3.56	1.30	20	20	.000	.023	.281
I am at lower rank than equally qualified staff of opposite sex	223	3.18	1.68	42	24	.010	.260	.803

Item	N	Mean	SD.	% 1-2 score disagree	% 5-6 score agree	Sex	Faculty	Faculty Fem
In my section of the university...EOP are needed to reduce discrim ⁿ based on...								
Sex	228	3.51	1.58	33	30	.000	.014	.057
Colour	229	3.63	1.53	26	31	.000	.001	.211
Culture & linguistic differences	229	3.75	1.49	24	32	.000	.000	.611
disability	226	3.81	1.43	29	34	.000	.003	.373
In my section of the university...EOPs... ...advance less qualified women over men	223	2.80	1.49	45	13	.000	.000	.302
...have +ve effects on my career	223	3.49	1.46	24	26	.000	.018	.562
...displacement	230	2.46	1.34	54	7	.000	.011	.390
...enhance women's...careers	231	4.51	1.08	7	53	.833	.799	.942
...damage my career	229	2.32	1.26	57	6	.000	.001	.916
...help my promotion	228	3.17	1.44	33	19	.000	.002	.169
...hurt my promotion	229	2.56	1.35	49	9	.000	.002	.364

Item	N	Mean	SD.	% 1-2 score disagree	% 5-6 score agree	Sex	Faculty	Faculty Fem
In Australia today—								
Everyone has fair chance	235	2.38	1.19	60	5	.003	.34	.179
Unequal outcomes are due to differences inability, talent, etc	232	2.96	1.39	39	15	.000	.012	.223
In equality is due to unequal access to education	232	3.87	1.31	15	33	.440	.323	.287
In equality is due to performance	226	3.21	1.28	30	12	.000	.003	.045
In equality is due to lack of effort	225	2.67	1.25	44	5	.000	.000	.013
Inequality motivates	226	2.13	1.13	65	3	.073	.016	.140
More equality = fewer problems	229	4.24	1.36	11	45	.871	.652	.620
Differential rewards = harder work	220	3.43	1.42	25	20	.000	.000	.013
Generally, inequality a good idea	229	1.78	1.13	80	4	.031	.006	.251
Inequality from market competit ⁿ is an asset for society	228	2.44	1.37	53	7	.016	.000	.088
It is best to minimize inequality	229	4.74	1.24	5	60	.122	.024	.113
Problem is there is not an equal chance for all	229	4.53	1.20	6	55	.018	.057	.453

Item	N	Mean	SD.	% 1-2 score disagree	% 5-6 score agree	Sex	Faculty	Faculty Fem
In my employment...								
I feel marginalised	230	3.64	1.55	7	32	.016	.053	.978
Insiders control resources	233	3.95	1.41	22	37	.287	.329	.829
Organizational processes are fair, transparent	235	3.17	1.34	31	17	.026	.005	.508
No promotion = less talent etc	233	3.39	1.32	24	20	.004	.020	.387
Ability etc determines job offers	233	3.64	1.26	18	25	.001	.020	.987
There are few qualified applicants for jobs	223	3.68	1.35	27	30	.025	.050	.232
Professor rank = accomplishment	232	3.25	1.54	34	25	.102	.011	.482
Promotion = accomplishment	235	3.80	1.34	19	35	.530	.004	.121
Promotion decisions should consider... ...family responsibilities	231	3.82	1.51	21	33	.000	.801	.372
...past discrimination	228	3.83	1.42	17	31	.000	.121	.820
...effect of disability	227	3.96	1.29	12	32	.000	.291	.964
...effect of Indigenous background	231	3.92	1.36	16	34	.000	.022	.802
...effect of migrant experiences	230	3.78	1.36	17	31	.000	.060	.979
Promotions fairly reflect accomplishment	234	3.33	1.27	23	16	.146	.000	.415
Promotions are biased toward men	228	2.92	1.33	36	11	.000	.005	.882
Promotions are biased toward women	228	2.78	1.23	39	8	.000	.092	.704

Item	N	Mean	SD.	% 1-2 score disagree	% 5-6 score agree	Sex	Faculty	Faculty Fem
Not sure inappropriate for women to try men's work	205	2.85	1.71	34	21	.070	.002	.186
Not good for women to compete fully in job market	227	1.56	.97	88	2.6	.001	.124	.987
some jobs better suited to men	233	2.70	1.63	35	19	.000	.001	.495
women with children should not work if no financial need	236	1.66	1.08	83	3	.000	.012	.775
women more suited to housekeeping	232	2.01	1.41	71	7	.000	.000	.278
Appropriate for men to have most top executive positions	231	1.52	.91	86	2	.000	.074	.860
Appropriate for men to hold most political leadership positions	232	1.52	.98	86	2	.000	.021	.743

Item	N	Mean	SD.	% 1-2 score disagree	% 5-6 score agree	Sex	Faculty	Faculty Fem
Feminist Yes....No	234	1.75	.82	n=24	y=49	.000	.000	.927
Politically Left...Right	224	2.85	1.20	l=38	r=9	.093	.000	.006
Gender	234	1.51	.50			— —		
Age	226	43.4	9.00			.731	.000	.009
Academic experience (years)	225	11.84	8.74			.114	.007	.453
Qualification	228	1.82	.70			.000	.052	.421
Member minority	231	1.76	.42			.031	.001	.066
Minority–language	23	1.00	.00					
Minority-race/ethnic appearance	12	1.00	.00					
Minority-religion/culture	10	1.00	.00					
Minority birth country/descent	33	1.00	.00					
Has disability? Yes=1	232	1.96	.24			.871	.745	.811
Rank/level LevelA=1	227	2.33	.89			.005	.760	.396
Presence of women	229	2.64	.84			.004	.000	
Indigenous people	228	1.11	.37			.858	.000	
People with disability	219	1.29	.52			.316	.000	.143
People differing in culture/linguistics	232	2.09	.76			.000	.000	.700
Division	223	2.76	1.13			.131	—	—