

Dichotomy of Perception: An Analysis of Faculty Perspectives on Affirmative Action in the University of Missouri System

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Introduction

Discrimination in admissions and faculty employment has been a problem in academia throughout this nation's history. The Civil Rights Movement led to political and legal remedies for this problem, among them anti-discrimination provisions in admissions (Title VI) and employment (Title VII), and affirmative action (Executive Order 11246), which all provided substantial gains for underrepresented groups in higher education (Travers & Rebores, 1995).

Long known as the "marketplace of ideas," universities have in recent years had the reputation of providing equity for all students and faculty. Yet, affirmative action, a primary tool by which to promote equity in higher education, is being challenged in the courts and legislatures of states such as California, Texas, Florida, and Washington. In addition, this study was conducted at a time when the Missouri General Assembly was considering legislation, similar to initiatives in other states, which would "...abolish minority preferences in the State's system of public employment, education, and contracting..." (Garnier, 1998).

This study examines faculty employment data to determine what it reveals about trends in faculty hiring based upon gender. This study also examines faculty perceptions of the impact of affirmative action on employment practices in the University of Missouri System.

Background

Research has shown that there is a correlation between race, gender, and professional rank in higher education institutions. Males, particularly white males, hold higher paying jobs at research universities, while women are relegated to the less prestigious ranks and less prestigious colleges (Wilson, 1995). According to Wilson, 66.5% of white males held the majority of high-paying faculty positions as compared to 21% of women in 1995. Conversely, at low-paying two-year colleges, 47.9% of the teachers were women (Wilson,

1995). Longitudinal studies of women faculty representation indicated that they obtained rank and tenure at a slower rate than their male counterparts. In 1992, women comprised 32.5% of full-time faculty (Wilson, 1992).

Review of Literature

Summers (1995) conducted a study which indicated that women were quite more favorable in their attitudes toward affirmative action. In addition, men felt that they were less apt to encounter affirmative action, and more importantly, that their careers would be negatively affected should they encounter it, which relates to the idea of self-interest as a variable which affects responses to affirmative action.

Self interest recurred as a variable which affects opposition to race targeted interventions in research conducted by Stack (1997). Veilleux and Tougas (1989) redefined self-interest as affecting one's group rather than one's personal situation in assessing men's attitudes toward affirmative action programs. Consequently, those men who believed that men as a group would be deprived of opportunities for hiring, promotion, and salary as a result of affirmative action were opposed to these programs.

In addition, when men perceived that women as a group were being unfairly treated and that their career opportunities were limited based upon sex differences, they were favorable to programs designed to help this group. Tougas, Beaton, and Veilleux (1991) also employed a comprehensive model of self-interest to predicting women's reactions to affirmative action. Results showed that even if women recognize that their group's situation has not improved by past efforts, they will not approve of affirmative action unless they feel that present organizational practices are discriminatory to women.

Research Questions

1. Are there differences between gender groups regarding faculty perceptions of the impact of affirmative action policies on employment practices in the University of Missouri System?
2. What do faculty data for the University of Missouri System reveal about trends in faculty hiring based upon gender for the years 1993-97?

Method

The survey used for this study was produced as part of a larger Public Research Institute (PRI) study for the Office of Human Relations at San Francisco State University (SFSU) (DeLeon, Browning, & Newton, 1996). Some questions were modified to reflect the University of Missouri's setting and population.

Population and Sample

The University of Missouri System manages four campuses in different regions of Missouri: University of Missouri-Columbia (UMC), University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), University of Missouri-Rolla (UMR), and University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL). A random sample of 616 tenured and tenure-track faculty members in the University of Missouri system received a questionnaire. Stratified random sampling was successively employed to determine the number of faculty members on each of the four campuses to be surveyed, yielding a total of 329 (53%) on the UMC campus; 113 (18%) on the UMKC campus; 83 (13%) on the UMR campus; and 91 (15%) on the UMSL campus. Two mailings were sent to faculty campus addresses.

There were a total of 291 respondent, 34 (14.3%) of whom were located on the UMSL campus; 125 (52.5%) on the UMC (the flagship) campus; 45 (18.9%) on the UMKC campus; and 34 (14.3%) on the UMR campus. There were 137 (48.2%) white respondents and 147 (51.8%) ethnic minority respondents.

There were 205 (74.3%) males and 71 (25.7%) females. There were 101 (34.9%) full professors; 128 (44.3%) associate professors; and 60 (20.8%) assistant professors. Of this total, 224 (77.2%) were tenured; 64 (22.1%) were tenure-track; and 2 (0.7%) were not tenure track.

Results of Statistical Analysis

The Chi-square (X^2) test of independence was employed to test the research questions. The statistical package SAS was used to analyze the data. [Table 1](#) indicates that nearly 100 percent of the male and female respondents agreed with the affirmative action policy on their campuses, but the responses of women faculty were slightly higher. Approximately 63 percent of the male respondents also believed that there is a scarcity of women faculty in their fields while 65% of women faculty did not believe that women faculty are scarce in their fields. Additionally, 62% of the male respondents did not believe that women faculty in their fields lack the specialties needed, but the percentage was greater (83%) for female faculty.

The majority (69%) of male respondents did not believe that minority faculty is less qualified than white male faculty, but the percentage was even higher for female respondents (84.51). Moreover, 68% of male faculty did not believe that there is low motivation to hire minority faculty in their department while women faculty was divided in their opinion on the issue.

Approximately 68% of women faculty did not believe that finding qualified women faculty takes more time and effort than finding qualified white male faculty, but male

faculty were divided in their opinion on the issue. In addition, approximately 77 percent of male faculty believed that their departments had been thorough in their efforts to recruit minority faculty, but the percentage was lower (60%) for female respondents.

Lastly, 63% of the male respondents indicated that they would not support legislation to abolish minority preferences, but an overwhelming majority of the women (87%) indicated that they would not support legislation to abolish minority preferences.

[Table 2](#) indicates that there were more newly hired White male faculty in a given year than any minority faculty group. The data for minority faculty new hires were very scant, with some fluctuation of 1-4 hires for individual years. Similarly, [table 3](#) indicates that more White female faculty were employed than any other racial group. African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and American Indian female faculty followed, respectively. As with male faculty, the hiring data for all female minority faculty were extremely scant, with some fluctuation of 1-2 hires for individual years.

Discussion

This study provides strong evidence that gender group membership is important in understanding employees' perceptions of affirmative action programs (Parker, Baltes, & Christiansen, 1997). Faculty perceptions in this study may have been a function of their political ideologies or their belief that affirmative action serves as a vehicle by which to create a more equitable workplace for women (Parker, et al., 1997).

Ambivalence and concordance rather than opposition more accurately characterized the difference in perceptions between gender groups in this study. The only item on which the groups had a difference of opinion was the scarcity of women. Both groups agreed with the system affirmative action policy and supported minority preferences for the State's system of public employment and education, except the percentage was higher for women on both items. Female faculty responses may be reflective of their belief that affirmative action policies work more in their favor in selection decisions (Graves & Powell, 1994). Stack (1997) indicated that women are more supportive of help-oriented programs to nurture the opportunities of the disadvantaged than men.

These differences in perceptions among gender groups may have also been attributed to the historically conditioned perceptions that are embedded in American society (Bax, 1996). The American workplace is structured upon the white male system, or the "old boy" network, which thrives on power relations (Schaeff, 1992). White males compete to acquire and hold on to key positions in order to secure their place in a system which perpetuates the employment of those who have similar values and beliefs. Women, therefore, are at a disadvantage and may understand that they must promote strategies which will improve their situation such as affirmative action.

Conclusion

Researchers who have studied faculty representation in academe have consistently indicated that the number of women faculty has increased, but not enough to impact the disparity that currently exists in the academic workplace. The gender groups only differed in opinion substantially regarding the scarcity of women. Both groups agreed with the system affirmative action policy and supported minority preferences, except the percentages were higher for women. Female faculty responses may be reflective of their belief that affirmative action policies work more in their favor in selection decisions (Graves & Powell, 1994).

The conceptualization of faculty perceptions in this study may be twofold. Faculty perceptions may imply that there has been a convergence of ideological values underlying the political framework of the American workplace. That is to say, faculty who agreed to participate in the study were either more liberal or felt an obligation to conform to social standards by providing socially desirable responses in order to dispel the implication of racial bias. Faculty reactions to various items on the questionnaire and their divergence from the theoretical framework of contemporary research suggests the latter explanation.

Because affirmative action targets historically disadvantaged groups, white males tend to be the only group that does not benefit from affirmative action. Male responses in this study consistently contradicted the theoretical and empirical frameworks which suggest that they generally resist affirmative action policies. Although a substantial percentage indicated that they would support legislation to abolish minority preferences in Missouri, the majority indicated that they would not.

An overwhelming percentage of women faculty strongly agreed with their campus affirmative action policies and indicated that they would not support legislation to abolish minority preferences. This group has been historically excluded from participation in academia as professional personnel and may not have recognized any improvements in their social condition until affirmative action was implemented. This could explain their overwhelming acceptance of affirmative action.

The implications of this study challenge us to consider whether the hegemonic ideals that once permeated the knowledge hierarchy of academia have diverged to include the intellectual perspectives of academic professionals from every cultural, social, and economic origin. The ideological infrastructure that guides educational policy and constitutes the ethos of academic institutions must incorporate diversity. Consequently, higher education can live up to the reputation of being a “marketplace of ideas.”

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Table 1. Perceptions by Gender

Variable	GENDER		X^2
	Male f(%)	Female f(%)	
Agree	93(45.81)	22(31.88)	
Strongly Agree	97(47.78)	46(66.67)	
Affirmative Action Policy			
Uninformed	7(3.41)	3(4.23)	5.036
Not Very Informed	32(15.61)	19(26.76)	
Moderately Informed	110(53.66)	35(49.30)	
Very Informed	56(27.32)	14(19.72)	
Affirmative Action Goals			
Strongly Negative	4(2.00)	1(1.52)	1.807
Moderately Negative	24(12.00)	6(9.09)	
Moderately Positive	102(51.00)	30(45.45)	
Very Positive	70(35.00)	29(43.94)	
Affirmative Action Implementation			
Strongly Negative	11(5.47)	2(2.99)	4.987
Moderately Negative	45(22.39)	13(19.40)	
Moderately Positive	117(58.21)	48(71.64)	
Very Positive	28(13.93)	4(5.97)	
Affirmative Action Results			
Strongly Negative	15(7.65)	6(9.23)	1.079
Moderately Negative	58(29.59)	15(23.08)	
Moderately Positive	112(57.14)	40(61.54)	
Very Positive	11(5.61)	4(6.15)	
Scarcity-Minorities			
Not At All	24(11.71)	12(16.90)	1.444
Moderately	64(31.22)	19(26.76)	
Greatly	117(57.07)	40(56.34)	
Scarcity-Women			
Not At All	73(36.14)	45(65.22)	18.311***
Moderately	84(41.58)	18(26.09)	
Greatly	45(22.28)	6(8.70)	
Lack Specialties-Minorities			
Not At All	90(45.23)	36(52.17)	3.779
	54(27.14)	22(31.88)	

Moderately Greatly	55(27.64)	11(15.94)	
Lack Specialties-Women Not At All Moderately Greatly	124(62.31) 56(28.14) 19(9.55)	57(83.82) 11(16.18) 0(0.00)	12.843***
Less Qualified-Minorities Not At All Moderately Greatly	138(69.35) 46(23.12) 15(7.54)	60(84.51) 10(14.08) 1(1.41)	7.015*
Less Qualified Women Not At All Moderately Greatly	171(86.80) 24(12.18) 2(1.02)	64(91.43) 6(8.57) 0(0.00)	1.436
Low Motivation to Hire-Minorities Not At All Moderately Greatly	137(68.16) 33(16.42) 31(15.42)	35(49.30) 19(26.76) 17(23.94)	8.047**
Low Motivation to Hire-Women Not At All Moderately Greatly	153(76.88) 34(17.09) 12(6.03)	49(70.00) 15(21.43) 6(8.57)	1.363
Takes More Effort to Recruit-Minorities Not At All Moderately Greatly	58(28.71) 72(35.64) 72(35.64)	22(31.43) 25(35.71) 23(32.86)	0.246
Takes More Effort to Recruit-Women Not At All Moderately Greatly	98(49.25) 71(35.68) 30(15.08)	46(67.65) 19(27.94) 3(4.41)	8.745**
Lack Resources to Recruit-Minorities Not At All Moderately Greatly	132(65.35) 47(23.27) 23(11.39)	42(60.87) 15(21.74) 12(17.39)	1.649
Lack Resources to Recruit-Women Not At All Moderately Greatly	140(70.71) 44(22.22) 14(7.07)	50(75.76) 11(16.67) 5(7.58)	0.926
Recruiting Efforts-Minorities Not At All Thorough Not Very Thorough Moderately Thorough Very Thorough	18(8.96) 28(13.93) 61(30.35) 94(46.77)	11(16.18) 16(23.53) 22(32.35) 19(27.94)	9.673**
Recruiting Efforts-Women Not At All Thorough Not Very Thorough Moderately Thorough	8(4.02) 20(10.05) 69(34.67) 102(51.26)	4(5.80) 9(13.04) 21(30.43) 35(50.72)	1.062

Very Thorough			
Vote-Missouri Senate Bill 681	70(37.23)	9(13.24)	13.480***
Yes	118(62.77)	59(86.76)	
No			

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 2. Total Tenured/Tenure-Track Newly Hired Males by Campus and Race, 1993-1997

	UMSL	UMKC	UMR	UMC
White	23	29	25	103
African American	7	1	0	6
Hispanic	0	1	1	3
Asian American	2	7	6	12
American Indian	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	32	38	32	124

Note: UMSL = University of Missouri-St. Louis; UMKC = University of Missouri-Kansas City; UMR = University of Missouri-Rolla; UMC = University of Missouri-Columbia

Table 3. Total Tenured/Tenure-Track Newly Hired Females by Campus and Race, 1993-1997

	UMSL	UMKC	UMR	UMC
White	21	28	11	63
African American	3	1	0	5
Hispanic	0	0	0	2
Asian American	0	2	1	1
American Indian	0	1	0	2
TOTAL	24	32	12	73

Note: UMSL = University of Missouri-St. Louis; UMKC = University of Missouri-Kansas City; UMR = University of Missouri-Rolla; UMC = University of Missouri-Columbia