

1995

Diversity awareness in management education: survey results 1995 research project

Catherine Smith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Smith, C. (1995). *Diversity awareness in management education: survey results 1995 research project*. Perth, Australia: Edith Cowan University.
This Report is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks/6880>

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement.
- A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

EDITH COWAN
UNIVERSITY

Survey Results
1995
Research Project

*Diversity
Awareness
In
Management
Education*

658
.007
SMI



EDITH COWAN
UNIVERSITY

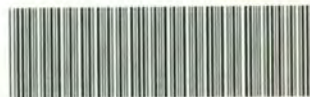
PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ISBN: 0-7298-0297-3

PD-3060 9.96 250

ABSTRACT

While much is known about female **disadvantage** in learning, less research has explored their **advantages**, or the advantages and disadvantages experienced by **male** students. It seems to be generally assumed that gender issues are exclusively female issues. This project sought to dispel this myth by gathering information about male students' perceptions and experiences, and comparing them with those of female students, to highlight perceptual differences and their implications for learning.



ASLIB48920207B

RESEARCH PROJECT:

Diversity Awareness in Management Education

Summary of findings regarding LECTURERS

- Female students perceived significantly more sex-biased attitudes in male lecturers than did male students;
- Female students perceived lecturers as significantly more receptive to discussion from male perspectives than from female perspectives;
- Half of female students experienced significant levels of discomfort when lecturers used language or examples that excluded their gender, but no male students experienced such discomfort;
- Female students were three times more likely to challenge lecturers' sex-biased attitudes than male students, but most students preferred not to challenge, for fear of academic and social penalties;
- For the majority of students, but especially women, lecturers' inclusion of both female and male perspectives in their teaching would have a 'positive' or 'very positive' effect on their learning experience;
- Students of both sex felt slightly more confident in giving their opinions in class when the lecturer was of the same sex as themselves;
- Female students rated the teaching standard of female lecturers higher than male students did.

Summary of findings regarding STUDENTS

- Three quarters of the students surveyed were unaware of ECU guidelines for bias-free communication;
- Female students were perceived to be advantaged because they listen, notice, share information and see situations from a wider perspective, but were perceived to be disadvantaged because they are dominated in various ways by male students;
- Male students were perceived to be advantaged because they are taken more seriously, and more powerful because of their more visible and vocal behaviour; however, they were perceived to be disadvantaged because they have a narrower perceptual framework;
- Students of both sex, but particularly females, felt greater levels of confidence in giving their opinions in same sex groups than in mixed sex groups;
- Female students were more likely to express their disapproval of a student's dominating or demeaning behaviour by either ignoring it or commenting cautiously, while male students were more likely to use forthright requests for the behaviour to stop.

Rationale for the research project

In 1992 the federal government appointed an Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, to review Australia's management and leadership capabilities, and advise on measures to strengthen management practices, in an effort to improve economic performance.

An international leadership expert advising the Task Force alleged that 'corporate Australia's Achilles' heel' was its all-male monoculture, whose 'rugby-scrum mentality' made it difficult for women - and men who did not fit this particular image - to break in (Mant, 1994:3). Mant emphasised that, because new ideas arise from diversity, Australian management culture needed to embrace a variety of differing perspectives.

The final report of the Task Force (known as the Karpin Report¹) highlighted the strong inter-relationship between the highly gendered nature of both management education and management practice, whose inherent contradictions represented major impediments to more equitable participation of women in management. A low level of gender diversity awareness amongst lecturers and students can cause tensions, resulting in embarrassment and discomfort for the individuals affected. Moreover, it can pejoratively influence the assessment of student competence by lecturers, and evaluation by students of lecturers' teaching performance.

The Karpin Report recommended that, with increasing numbers of women enrolled in university business programmes and working in management positions, teaching and learning experiences in management education should meet the needs and expectations of female, as well as male, students. To encourage business to capitalise on the benefits of gender diversity, as a key lever for improving national competitiveness, educational institutions were urged to review their own role in shaping management cultures and practices.

The Report also recommended direct action by tertiary institutions to ensure that gender and minority issues were placed high on the educational agenda, to avoid disadvantaging the increasing numbers of female university students.

¹Report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, *Enterprising Nation: Renewing Australia's Managers to Meet the Challenges of the Asia-Pacific Century*, AGPS, 1995



The gendered culture of management education

Organisational culture has consistently been identified as a source of attitudes and behaviours that result in barriers to women's advancement and contribution to management (Burton & Ryall, 1995; Gherardi, 1995; Hearn, 1994; Morrison, 1992; Sinclair, 1994; Smith & Hutchinson, 1995). However, management education also plays a significant role in influencing organisational attitudes and practices (Fastenau, 1995; Simpson, 1995). Educational institutions therefore have a crucial role to play in raising awareness of gender issues and integrating them into management teaching.

Women and men appear to have grown up in different cultures (Tannen, 1995:139). Consequently, female and male students entering management programmes are likely to have been socialised differently, resulting in different personal affinities with management study units. The Karpin Report found that men are more likely to feel comfortable with 'hard' management units (e.g. accounting) while women are more attuned to 'soft' units (e.g. human resource management). Also, because female and male managers define leadership somewhat differently (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995), there may be variation in units they consider important for managerial study.

University management courses have traditionally exhibited a strong masculine ethos (Sinclair 1995). Yet, due to their unequal power base and associated fear of academic and social penalties, students may be unlikely to challenge paradigms which reflect sexist attitudes on the part of lecturers. Moreover, if male students have greater difficulty in accepting a female lecturer's authority and credibility (Gallos, 1995), there may be gender differences in the evaluation of female and male lecturers' teaching abilities.

Despite arguments that theoretical management perspectives should incorporate diversity issues (Kanter, 1975, 1977; Marshall 1989; Wilson, 1995), few management models embrace the issue of gender. Most management texts are written by men, using examples of men, which may have a detrimental educational effect on women by rendering them of marginal importance or invisible (Spender & Sarah, 1980).

Because women tend to employ less assertive behavioural patterns, they may be perceived as generally less powerful in mixed-sex group settings. Language also influences social power (Spender, 1980). Women and men use language in different ways, so it may be more difficult for women - and men with less dominating linguistic styles - to be heard in mixed-sex groups, in turn inhibiting their confidence and contributions (Gilligan, 1982; Tannen, 1995).

The Karpin Report found that gendered management curricula had serious potential to deter women students from contributing and to ignore or marginalise their interests (Ashenden, Milligan & Quin, 1995). It therefore recommended a major overhaul of university-level management education.

Research project focus and methodology

Following the recommendations of the Karpin Report, this research project evaluated the preparation for management of postgraduate students in the Faculty of Business at Edith Cowan University. The study explored ways in which gender issues might affect learning experiences, and investigated whether female and male students had differing perceptions about what they are taught and how they learn.

Very little, if any research has explored how gender issues in the management curriculum affect male students. While much is known about female disadvantage in learning, less research has explored their advantages, or the advantages and disadvantages experienced by male students. It seems to be generally assumed that gender issues are exclusively female issues. This project sought to dispel this myth by gathering information about male students' perceptions and experiences, and comparing them with those of female students, to highlight perceptual differences and their implications for learning.

The sequence and wording of questions were significantly influenced by the sensitivity of the subject, and suspected levels of subconsciousness surrounding many gender-related learning issues. To break down conventions of order, the questionnaire format reversed the common practice of putting the masculine first, and posed questions about female students and lecturers before those referring to males.

The research was conducted between July 1995 and May 1996, through a questionnaire predominantly requiring Likert-scale responses and open-ended comments. The questionnaire was mailed to 472 students of management units on full- and part-time postgraduate business courses. A separate form was enclosed for completion by respondents willing to be interviewed in connection with the production of a video. The completed questionnaires were analysed independently by a computerised statistical package, which allowed identification of differences in gender responses, as well as proportional comparisons.

A response rate of 18% was achieved ($n = 85$). Fifty women and thirty-five men replied, whose ages ranged from the early twenties to the middle fifties. The relatively low return rate may have been due to students' preoccupation with examination preparation, and to the controversial nature of the survey topic. Nevertheless, the returns were largely proportional to the overall student populations on each course surveyed, to full- and part-time students, and to the female and male student populations within the faculty. Returns from international students, particularly men, were under-represented compared with those from local students. This could be attributable to more traditional gender attitudes in non-Australian cultures, which might limit the perceived relevance of such a questionnaire to students from overseas.

Survey analysis

The survey results suggest that some management units tend to exhibit a masculine bias that can disadvantage female and male students in different ways. This may deter future managers from capitalising on gender diversity in the workforce. What often causes some concern to male students, causes much greater concern to females. Perceived disadvantages in learning experience appear to be mirror opposites of the advantages attributed to the other sex (e.g. female students may be better listeners because male students are more vocal; male students may have narrower perspectives because their listening skills are less well developed). Both female and male respondents feel disadvantaged by an imbalance in the skills they possess and exercise.

A significant number of women frequently experience sexist attitudes in male lecturers (e.g. ignoring women's knowledge and experience; comments about women's bodies). This disadvantages women's learning, and indirectly that of men, who are denied the benefit of hearing and learning about women's views. While students can play a useful role in making lecturers aware of sex-biased attitudes, they tend to be deterred from doing so, for fear of academic and social penalties. Moreover, because few are aware of the university guidelines on gender-inclusive language, most students are unaware of their rights and responsibilities. This particularly disadvantages women who are more likely to be rendered invisible through sexist language.

Many women report significant discomfort through lecturers' language or examples that exclude the female sex. Language plays a vital role in shaping our assumptions and perceptions: while on the surface it may look objective and unbiased, closer examination reveals that this is not necessarily the case. Much of our written and spoken language refers only to the masculine gender, on the assumption that single-sex pronouns incorporate female experience. However, research shows that this is not the case, and that female readers and listeners cannot envisage themselves when language excludes female pronouns and examples. A large majority of all students, but particularly female students, feel that if lecturers include both female and male perspectives in their teaching, this will have a positive effect on their learning experience.

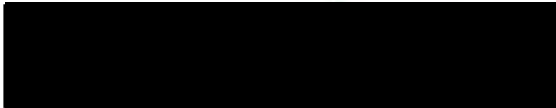
Most students feel more confident giving opinions in same-sex groups. This suggests the use of same-sex groups when learning requires a free exchange of opinions (e.g. at the problem formulation stage of group work or brainstorming sessions), to allow a wider range of viewpoints. Subsequent mixed-group discussion can allow exploration of all ideas generated. Women are more likely to react to students' dominating or demeaning behaviour by ignoring it or commenting cautiously, while men are more likely to confront such behaviour. Increased awareness of communication styles is thus essential for understanding and interpreting cultural cues.

Follow-up

A detailed report of this research has been passed to the Faculty of Business Teaching and Learning Committee, together with recommendations. A more detailed analysis of this survey, which includes student comments, is also available in a journal article.

Drawing on the results of the survey and subsequent interviews with respondents, a 40-minute video¹ has been produced to provide a practical guide on diversity awareness, for improving management teaching and learning, and for induction and management development purposes. It aims to heighten lecturers' and students' awareness of the different classroom experiences of women and men in management education, and to open up intellectual debate on gender issues.

While of direct relevance for teachers and students on management programmes, the video also has wider faculty and university application, and will be available for purchase by interested parties outside ECU. It also constitutes a valuable support to the *Gender Issues in Management* unit² commissioned by the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, which was distributed nationally in 1996 for tertiary education and in-house management development programmes.



Associate Professor Catherine Smith

September 1996

¹*Gender Issues in Management: Capitalising on Awareness of Diversity*, produced and distributed by Edith Cowan University, October 1996.

²*Effective Organisations: Gender Issues in Management*, produced by Edith Cowan University, published and distributed by AGPS, 1996.

References

- Alimo-Metcalfe, B. (1995). Female and male constructs of leadership and empowerment. *Women in Management Review*, 10 (2), 3-8.
- Ashenden, D., Milligan, S. & Quin, R. (1995). *Objective profiles of business schools*. Research project for the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills. In *Enterprising nation: renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century*. Research Report Volume 1. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 393-468.
- Burton, C. & Ryall, C. (1995). Managing for diversity. In *Enterprising nation: Renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century*. Research Report Volume 2. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 765-814.
- Fastenau, M. (1995). Business schools ignore need to 'imagine' being a woman manager. *HR Monthly*. December. 22-23.
- Gallos, J.V. (1995). When authority = she: A male student meets a female instructor. *Journal of Management Development*. 14 (2), 65-76.
- Gherardi, S. (1995). *Gender, symbolism and organizational cultures*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice*. London, Cambridge University Press.
- Hearn, J. (1994). Changing men and changing managements: Social change, social research and social action. In M.J. Davidson & R.J. Burke (Eds.), *Women in management: Current research issues*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 192-209.
- Kanter, R.M. (1975). Women and the structure of organizations: Explorations in theory and behaviour. In M. Millman & R. M. Kanter (Eds.), *Another voice: Feminist perspectives on social life and social science*. New York: Anchor Books, 35-74.
- Kanter, R.M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Mant, A. (1994). Scrum mentality sidelines women. *The Australian*, 3 June, 3.
- Marshall, J. (1989). Revisioning career concepts: a feminist invitation. In M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall & B.S. Lawrence (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 275-292.
- Morrison, A.M. (1992). New solutions to the same old glass ceiling. *Women in Management Review*. 7 (4), 15-19.
- Simpson, R. (1995). Is management education on the right track for women? *Women in Management Review*. 10 (6), 3-8.
- Sinclair, A. (1994). *Trials at the top*. Melbourne: The Australian Centre, The University of Melbourne.
- Sinclair, A. (1995). Sex and the MBA. *Organization*. 2 (2), 295-317.
- Smith, C.R. & Hutchinson, J. (1995a). *Gender: A strategic management issue*. Sydney: Business & Professional Publishing.
- Spender, D. (1980). *Man made language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Spender, D. & Sarah, S.E. (1980). (Eds.). *Learning to lose: Sexism and education*. London: The Women's Press.
- Tannen, D. (1995). The power of talk: Who gets heard and why. *Harvard Business Review*. September-October, 138-148.
- Wilson, F.M. (1995). *Organizational Behaviour and Gender*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

658.007 SMI

ASLJB48920207B

Smith, Catherine

(Catherine Ruth)

Diversity awareness in
management education :

survey results, 1995

research project.

8 p. ; 21 cm.