

Summary Report – Gender Bias Project 2018

<p>Name of project/applicant: Gendered Attitudes at Aarhus University (AU) Post.doc in Gender Studies Lea Skewes & Professor in Social- and Organizational Psychology Michelle Ryan from Exeter University - Associate Professor Joshua Charles Skewes was included in the analysis</p>
<p>1. Please describe the main activities</p> <p>It was a questionnaire sent out to all AU employees via YouGov. The questionnaire consisted of: demographic questions (gender, age, position, faculty), followed by two separate standardised questionnaires. The first was Swim et al's (1995) <i>Modern Sexism Scale</i>. This measures denial of discrimination, resentment, and antagonism towards gender equality demands. This was chosen to uncover the degree of resistance any gender interventions at AU may encounter. The second was Morton et al's (2009) <i>Support for Discriminatory Practices Scale</i>. This measures peoples' stereotypical assessment of what defines a good and promotable employee. This was chosen to uncover any explicit hiring biases against women at AU. Finally, we offered two open questions about gender interventions.</p>
<p>2. Are the activities in accordance with the project description that was granted? If no: What has been changed?</p> <p>No changes were made in the original research design. The two open questions were narrowed in to be: 1) What do you think of Aarhus University's current policies on gender equity? 2) What do you think of the #MeToo movement? One of these questions were explicitly discussed and positively evaluated at the second meeting with the vice deans.</p>
<p>3. Please describe the main results</p> <p>The questionnaire was sent out to 15,493 AU employees. With one prompt 2,183 answered at least one question. In total, 1,805 completed the entire questionnaire.</p> <p>We found that the university employees had an average Modern Sexism score of 4.18 (on a 7-point Likert scale). Ideally one would want all employees to score below 3.50 and thereby express disagreement with the sexist statements. To compare this result with other samples, Swim et al. (1995)'s original study on US psychology students found a mean score ranging between 1.93-2.268 (on a 5-point Likert scale) suggesting disagreement with the majority of the statements. In Ekehammer, Akrami, & Araya's (2000) more comparable Swedish study, they found a score on the MS ranging from 1.87-3.34 on the individual items on a 5-point Likert scale, and a mean of 2.28 ($SD = 0.75$). In contrast to these results, the average score for AU employees was slightly above scores for men in the South African Navy. We showed that significantly higher MS scores were positively correlated with beliefs that enough or even too much was already being done to achieve gender equity in the organization, while significantly lower MS scores were correlated with the beliefs that not enough was currently being done to achieve gender equity. Our findings show that modern sexist attitudes are prevalent at AU, and these attitudes affect employees attitudes to gender equity interventions.</p> <p>In response to the open question: What do you think of Aarhus University's current policies on gender equity? 43.84% (or 957 participants) reported not knowing the organization's gender equity policy. 13.00% (284) reported not having an opinion on the policy. 6.14% (134) preferred not to answer. 16.90% (369) did not provide a response. This indicates that many of AU employees in our sample are not aware of the AU gender equity policy.</p> <p>20.11% (439) of the respondents provided an open answer to the question about their attitudes about AU's gender equity policy. These responses were analyzed qualitatively and categorized as expressing one of the following three attitudes:</p>

- 1) That the current policy contributed nothing or too little to gender equity in the organization (54.36% or 212 people)
- 2) That the policy contributes the right amount to gender equity (34.62% or 135 people)
- 3) That the policy did too much for women at the expense of men (11.03% or 43 people)

There was wide variation of words used in the *nothing or too little* category were. The most frequent words were ineffective (6), insufficient (5), unambitious (3), and a catastrophe (2). Many related terms were only used once. These include: unprofessional, underdeveloped, inadequate, superficial, vague, weak, short-sighted, statement-like, dreadful, empty air, invisible, absent, slack, unfocused, embarrassing, shameful, lousy, and purely symbolic. The words used most frequently for the *right amount* category were okay (32), fine (25), good (17), sensible (11), well-balanced (5), and appropriate (3). The words used most frequently in the *too much* category were favoritism (of women), preferential treatment (of women), and reverse discrimination (against men).

Pairing the quantitative measure of the *Modern Sexism Scale* and the qualitatively defined categories we found that the mean MS scores were 3.04 ($SD = 1.20$) for the participants expressing the attitude that the policy contributed too little to equity, while the mean MS scores were 4.74 ($SD = 1.15$) for those expressing the attitude that the policy contributed to equity in the right amount, and 5.82 ($SD = 1.09$) for those expressing the attitude that the current policy did too much for women. This suggests an interconnection between people's assessment of the current gender equity policy and their degree of modern sexism.

The other prominent themes which arose out of the qualitative answers were;

- 1) A perceived disconnect between AU policies and the implementation of these policies (49 out of 390). A sub-category of this group (14) express explicit distrust in whether the leadership at AU intended the gender equity policy to be more than window dressing
- 2) Expressed assumptions of gender blindness (41/390)
- 3) Expressed assumptions of reverse discrimination (29 out of 390) which in other studies have been positively correlated to *Hostile Sexism*

Finally, employees critiqued three specific AU policies as hindering gender equity goals;

- A) The requirement to stay abroad (23/390)
- B) The lack of female leaders (particularly at the very top of the organizational hierarchy) (20/390)
- C) The lack of a "Maternity Fund" or a distribution of costs due to parental leave (14/390)

We also posed the open question: What do you think of the #MeToo movement? This was a relevant question to pose because former research in DK has documented that anonymous reporting of sexual harassment is key to reducing this problem in the workplace. Borchorst & Rolandsen Agustin (2017) advise that; "Consistently, the message is that it is important for an organization to have a clear and visible policy; that the leaders clearly signal that there is a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and bullying; that it has been made clear where one can direct any complaints under the protection of anonymity; and that there is a procedure for how cases are tackled if they are taken to court" (163). Presupposing that AU like all organizations might have behavior of this nature employees response to this type of initiative is relevant for any gender equity plan which wishes to encourage women to enter and stay in research.

1085 people offered meaningful open answers to this question. The majority; 44% (477 people) were purely positive about the #MeToo. The most common words to sum up this groups opinion of the movement was: Good (92), Important (88), Necessary (55), Fine (39), Timely/Long overdue (25), and Relevant (23). The second largest group consisted of people who were ambivalent about the #MeToo movement. This group expressed both positive and negative opinions about the movement and consisted of 38,4% of the sample (417). Finally, a group of 17,6% (191) expressed purely negative attitudes about the #MeToo. Their most common word choices were: Out of control (22), Too much (21), Exaggerated (16), Witch hunt (14), Spun too far (13), Too much focus (9), Court of the public/mob justice (8), Hysterical (6), Men-bashing/hating on men (5), Gone off track (5), Ridiculous (5), Out of proportions (4), Over the top (4), Attention Seeking (4), Pillory (4), and Public Lynching (3).

We also uncovered two prominent themes in the open answers about the #MeToo movement. The most prominent theme were different ways in which employees cast doubts on the necessity or usefulness of this particular type of intervention against sexual harassment. Two-hundred and six AU employees expressed at least one type of delegitimizing strategy with which to write off the movement and/or its users. Seven sub-strategies emerged:

- 1) The assumption that fluidity between criminal, severe, and smaller cases delegitimizes all of the movement (62),
- 2) A niche specific assumption (it only occurs elsewhere) (39),
- 3) An explicit questioning of the reality of sexism and/or sexual harassment (26),
- 4) Victim blaming, (22),
- 5) An assumed irrelevance in DK (21),
- 6) An assumed overexaggerated attention to movement and/or victims (20),
- 7) Assumed problem of the past (16).

The second most common theme in the comments on the #MeToo was a focus on human rights. One might have expected a heavy bias in favour of a women's rights focus since the #MeToo primarily has been successful at drawing attention to women's rights. However there was a large difference between how many people focused on men's rights (150 people), and how many people focused on women's rights (5 people), revealing an over-exaggerated degree of concern for men's rights (to not be wrongly accused) over women's rights not to be sexually assaulted in the workplace.

4. Have the project results been disseminated (research publications, lectures, conference abstracts etc.)? If yes: Please explain. If no: Do you plan to disseminate the results?

Yes. One article is currently in review in an open access journal. A second article is nearly done. We are considering the possibility of a third article. We have already disseminated a few of the result during the #MeToo seminar at AU, held a Gendering in Research talk at AU, and given a talk on the 8th of March at Taking Turns with Unconscious Bias Workshop at Copenhagen University . And we plan to disseminate the results in talks during 2019 and 2020.

5. Has the project revealed barriers and/or solutions for achieving a more balanced gender representation in research?

The project revealed clear barriers to gender equity at AU. Our findings suggest an overall high degree of explicit modern sexism, which predicted resistance to gender equity interventions. Our findings also suggested that AU's gender policy is neither well known or nor well received. We also uncovered attitudes towards #MeToo that may suggest resistance to new interventions designed to reduce sexual harassment in the organization.

6. How can the results serve as inspiration for the next university wide action plan for a more balanced gender representation in research at Aarhus University?

Interventions on Gender Discrimination

Our data showed that only employees who were very high on explicit sexism thought that current gender equity initiatives were adequate (or even too much in women's favor). This reveals that explicit sexist attitudes are currently holding AU back from implementing their intended gender equity policies. What kind of interventions might be necessary to create a constructive and progressive work environment where gender equity and equal gender representation can be achieved? The first task AU faces is to establish clear and unequivocal communication about what the agenda is for the organization. The leaders of the organization need to be explicit in their recognition that there *are* problems with gender equity and what their intended solutions to these problems are. Furthermore, employees with lower modern sexism scores express a clear need to ensure implementation of the progressive intentions. In order to achieve this several steps are needed, the first one being visibility: employees who are not aware of the problem needs to be made aware of it, and be facilitated in seeing the sexism in the organization. This step involves making explicit to all AU employees that modern sexist attitudes are in conflict with the organizations perspectives and goals. Explicit initiatives need to be put in place to increase awareness of the problem for all employees – not just the ones that are already gender aware - but particularly the leaders in the organization who are responsible for carrying out the organizations policies. The second step in the necessary intervention is that policies need to be implemented by *all* leaders in the organization, gender equity policies should not be a voluntary options, but rather a concrete action plan with concrete goals that need to be met within a set time frame. Compliance with this could be ensured by holding all leaders accountable to how successful they are at increasing the number of female researchers (particularly at the higher levels), and putting sanctions in place for violations to comply with the organizations set goals. Accountability would ensure that the university could reestablish employees belief in the organizations intention to implement their gender equity policies. In other words, the key words for the future gender equity agenda should be; *increased visibility* of the gender equity problem, holding leaders *accountable* to gender equity goals, and *sanctions* for leaders who do not conform with the organizations goals.

Interventions on Sexual Harassment

What can an organization do to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace? Borchorst & Rolandsen Agustín (2017) show that the best practice in any organization that wishes to reduce sexual harassment is a clear and visible zero-tolerance policy combined with an anonymous reporting channel. Borchorst & Rolandsen Agustín's recommendation is corroborated by international research. Rudman & Glick (2008/2010) show that it is fundamental to an organization's work environment that leaders make explicit that they have a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment; that if leaders tolerate sexual harassment, people who are exposed to it will not report it (Pryor, LaVite, & Stolle, 1993), and the sexual harassment will continue. Borchorst & Rolandsen Agustín (2017) describe how important it is that the organization takes responsibility for the work environment as follows: "It is crucial that sexual harassment is *not* made into a problem between the violator and the victim but rather is considered a shared responsibility amongst leaders, co-workers, and the working environment of the organization" (163). Therefore, assuming that AU, like any other organization, has occurrences of sexual harassment, the AU work environment could be greatly improved for women if these recommendations were followed.

7. How do you evaluate this type of small-scale project as a tool to generate knowledge and provide inputs to a new action plan in the field of gender bias?

It is a great step in the right direction to explore gender equity challenges within the university prior to writing the action plan. However, it would have been ideal if you had maintained the original plan of disseminating the findings to all AU employees in order to start a scientifically founded dialogue about

the gender equity challenges at AU – particularly since one of the challenges we uncovered were a lack of clear communication and commitment to gender equity.

8. Any other remarks

Our findings of a high degree of resistance to gender equity initiatives was further backed up by the fact that Lea Skewes due to the study received 29-pages worth of paternalistic attempts at regulating the research design and methods along with flat out hate mails. She was also verbally critiqued by co-workers for carrying out the study – indicating an environment where this discriminatory behavior is considered acceptable.