

DEFENSE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN COMMENTS REGARDING THE MILITARY EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CLIMATE SURVEY (MEOCS)

by

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Abstract

A content analysis was conducted of 658 open-ended comments (about .3% of all respondents) that had been written by respondents filling out the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (MEOCS). The content analysis focused on the style (or format) of the MEOCS, the content of the MEOCS, and miscellaneous factors that may have affected completion of the MEOCS. Consistent with previous research, results indicated that the most frequent perception was that the MEOCS was “biased,” or slanted toward finding evidence of discrimination in the military. Additional concerns included the issue of “reverse discrimination,” types of discrimination not covered in the MEOCS, and the ability of some MEOCS items to accurately measure race or sex discrimination.

In response to these concerns, several possible changes in the MEOCS are presented and discussed. These changes include developing separate items for measuring race and sex discrimination, reducing redundancy in the MEOCS, modifying the tone of some items, and increasing the number of response options. In addition, the issues of response bias (only .3% of all respondents provided written comments) and survey redesign are discussed.

A Content Analysis of Written Comments Regarding the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (MEOCS)

Since 1990, the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (MEOCS) has been used to assess the human relations climate within military units. To date, approximately 220,000 military personnel have completed the MEOCS and a normative database has been developed to assist commanders with interpreting MEOCS results for their units. Factor analysis has shown that the MEOCS consists of eleven factors that can be grouped according to three broad categories: equal opportunity (EO) behaviors, organizational effectiveness, and racial attitudes and perceptions (Dansby & Landis, 1991; Landis, Dansby, & Faley, 1993). In addition, responses on the first 50 items of the MEOCS, which form the basis for the EO behavior dimension, vary with the gender and ethnicity of the respondent and are significantly correlated with subsequent MEOCS measures of job commitment, perceived work group effectiveness, and job satisfaction (Landis, Dansby, & Faley, 1993). Since its initial development, the MEOCS has undergone slight changes in wording and content. The most recent version (version 2.3) has a mechanism in place to test out experimental items that might be used in future versions of the survey (Dansby, 1994).

One type of feedback that has been useful in making changes in the MEOCS are the open-ended written comments that are voluntarily and anonymously provided by respondents. These comments are requested of each respondent on the last page of the MEOCS by the following statement: "Please provide any written comments on a separate sheet of paper addressed to Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, Director of Research. THEN, SEAL YOUR ANSWER SHEET, QUESTIONNAIRE, AND ANY WRITTEN COMMENTS IN AN ENVELOPE AND RETURN THE ENVELOPE TO YOUR SURVEY ADMINISTRATOR." These directions require that respondents expend a certain degree of effort in providing comments since there is no place on the MEOCS questionnaire itself where comments can be written.

As of July 1994, a total of 658 written comments had been received by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI), indicating that relatively few respondents (approximately .3% of the total sample) took time to write about their reactions to the MEOCS. Despite this low response rate, the written comments provide a potentially valuable source of feedback concerning perceptions of the MEOCS and may suggest possible changes or improvements in the survey.

Previous Research on the Written Comments

To date, two studies have been conducted on the written comments for the MEOCS. Ritchie (1993) analyzed 101 written comments and found that respondents objected to the language used in the MEOCS (42%), wanted separate questions for sex and race discrimination (42%), felt offended by the survey (37%), and asked for a "does not apply" option in the survey (16%). Ritchie recommended several changes in the MEOCS and emphasized the need to involve respondents more by rewriting the instructions, asking for open-ended comments, and improving the wording of some MEOCS items. Tallarigo (1994) analyzed 193 comments and reported that respondents felt the MEOCS was biased (43%), had poor instructions (9%), needed to measure other areas of discrimination (26%), and should have greater relevance (6%). A revised (or experimental) version of the MEOCS was created addressing these concerns and tested with a group of military units. In addition, new scales on discrimination were developed that might eventually be incorporated into the MEOCS.

Focus of Present Study

The goal of this project was to conduct a content analysis of all written comments received as of July 1994 and examine the generality of the findings reported by Ritchie (1993) and Tallarigo (1994). It should be noted that written comments are returned to DEOMI without accompanying demographic information concerning the respondent (e.g., race, sex, years of experience, employment level, etc.), so it is unclear to what degree respondents who write comments are representative of those respondents who do not. As a result, it is not possible to compare various demographic groups in terms of their reactions to the MEOCS.

Written comments that are received by DEOMI vary widely in terms of specificity and the care with which they are written. Some comments consist of a few words or a single hand-written sentence, while other comments are typed, cover several pages, and refer to specific items in the survey. In developing a coding scheme, it was therefore necessary to make it flexible enough so that a variety of response formats could be coded. The coding scheme used in this study was developed by consulting previous research on the MEOCS and incorporated many of the categories described by Tallarigo (1994). Three general coding categories focusing on survey style, survey content, and miscellaneous factors affecting survey completion were used and items for each category were constructed. Through use of this coding scheme, an analysis of the written comments was conducted with the goal of identifying and better understanding respondents' reactions to the MEOCS.

Method

Materials

Coding scheme. A total of 658 written comments that had been received by DEOMI prior to June 1994 were subjected to a content analysis. A complete list of the coding items used in the content analysis can be found in the Appendix along with accompanying definitions for each item. These items were developed after a preliminary reading of several of the written comments and cover three broad categories: style, content, and miscellaneous factors affecting completion of the MEOCS. All coding occurred on a nominal (or "yes-no") level and indicated whether a particular type of statement had been made by the respondent.

Items in the style category were intended to measure perceptions of the MEOCS primarily in terms of "tone" or how the questions in the MEOCS were written. Items in this category included general reactions to the survey (respondent reported the survey was either biased, offensive, and/or disruptive), readability (respondent reported that the survey was ambiguous, hard to understand, contained inappropriate wording, or made a statement indicating the respondent did not understand the instructions), and format (respondent made a comment concerning the scaling of response items, the length of the survey, or the need to provide more elaborate, open-ended responses for some of the survey questions).

Coding items in the content category were designed to measure perceptions of the substance of the survey and the actual topics that were covered. Items in this category included areas of discrimination needing more coverage in the survey (other types of discrimination, "reverse discrimination"), perceived problems in the content of the MEOCS (respondent reported that items were not military enough, lacked relevance or credibility, confused the terms majority and minority, and/or involved a situation in which a majority group respondent felt that he/she was a minority group member).

Items in the miscellaneous category focused on external variables that might have affected how the respondent completed the MEOCS. These included statements indicating that the respondent did not take the survey seriously, respondent felt coerced to complete survey, respondent felt that his/her anonymity was threatened, and/or respondent suggested factors other than race or sex differences to explain responses.

Finally, in addition to these three coding categories, written comments were also scored as to whether they contained statements expressing an opinion or idea not directly relevant to the survey (e.g., social commentary or personal experience not involving EO) or whether the written comment referred to a specific item in the survey by number. In the latter instance, a notation was made of survey item numbers that were mentioned by the respondent.

Procedure

Written comments were coded primarily by the author of this report. There was no limitation on the number of coding categories that could be scored positively for a given written comment. Interrater reliability was determined by having a second researcher (with an extensive background in race relations and the military) code 30 cases according to the scheme outlined above and then comparing coding forms. Immediately prior to this reliability coding, the second rater went through a brief training session and five sample cases were reviewed with regard to how they should be coded. Because the data were on a nominal level, percentage agreement was used to assess interrater reliability. For the sample of 30 cases, average interrater reliability was found to be 78%. This value, while acceptable, does indicate some disagreement in how certain statements should be coded.

As coding of the cases took place, each case was assigned an identification number. This number was placed on both the written comment and the coding form and provided a means of referencing specific written statements made by respondents. Throughout this paper, whenever an identification number is listed, the actual written comment can be found by going back to the original collection of 658 written comments that are kept at DEOMI and looking up the appropriate number.

Results

Because of the nominal level of the data and the lack of demographic information concerning individual respondents, simple frequencies were calculated for the various coding items. As much as possible, actual examples of written comments were obtained to illustrate the type of comment that might occur for a particular item.

Style of Questionnaire

Table 1 presents frequency data for the coding items in the general reactions category. The frequencies are presented in terms of the number and percentage of written comments that were scored positively for each of the coding items.

The coding item that was scored positively for the greatest number of comments dealt with perceived bias in the MEOCS. Twenty-five percent of the respondents felt that the MEOCS was in some way biased or slanted toward finding a particular result. In most cases, this meant that the MEOCS was seen by respondents as being biased toward finding evidence of discrimination, against either women or minority group members, in the military. Approximately five respondents felt the MEOCS was biased toward not finding discrimination.

Table 1		
Number and Percentage of Respondents Who Made Written Comments Concerning the Style of the MEOCS		
	<u>Number of Respondents</u>	<u>Percentage of All Respondents</u>
<u>General Reactions</u>		
Biased toward finding a particular outcome	165	25.0
Offensive to respondent	90	13.7
Disruptive to unit or military in general	27	4.1
<u>Readability</u>		
Ambiguous or too general	28	4.3
Hard to understand words	2	0.3
Respondent did not understand instructions	18	2.7
Wording of survey items not appropriate	96	14.6
<u>General Format</u>		
Scaling of response options a problem	22	3.3
Too long	15	2.3
Need for more elaborate comments	12	1.8

In the remainder of this report the author will cite comments as examples. The comments are quoted verbatim, including grammatical and spelling errors. Sample comments for this coding item include the following statements: "This sounds like a witch hunt: looking for trouble. There are enough avenues open for people who feel they have been discriminated against to report it" (#370), "A more appropriate title for the survey would have been 'How do you feel about affirmative action/and just how prejudice are you?'" (#337), "I cannot answer this questionair due to the racist opinions the questions are asking" (#102), and "These surveys are a good tool to use. But questions should not be worded in such a way as to get a response i.e., what you or the survey wants" (#576). Most of the statements for this coding item were made on an individual level; however, in approximately 15 cases, the statement was made by a commander and applied to a group of respondents.

A second coding item that occurred relatively frequently (or for 13.7% of the respondents) indicated that respondents were offended by the type of questions in the MEOCS. Sample statements include: "A very common complaint from personnel who were asked to fill them in was that the survey was very insensitive and insulting" (#463), "I have been a Marine for over thirteen years, and I have seen some garbage in that time. Nothing comes close to this. It was simply a waste of the time it took to complete and the paper on which it was written. This survey insulted my integrity as a Marine and my intelligence as a human being" (#443), and "Once again this command has found a way to waste more money not to mention my time. I feel you could find a better more affordable way to do this. Here is my blank form maybe you can get a refund" (#599). These statements indicate that some respondents had a strong emotional reaction to the MEOCS and that equal opportunity is a sensitive issue. In approximately five cases, profanity was used by respondents in describing their reactions to the MEOCS.

The final item under "General Reactions" indicated that the respondent viewed the MEOCS as being potentially disruptive and this comment occurred 4.1% of the time. Sample statements include: "I think this question/survey is a bunch of B.S. It causes more problems and should be banned from the Navy" (#556) and "It is my personal opinion that this survey has the potential to create far more problems than it could possibly solve. Furthermore, I don't care who my boss has lunch with" (#48).

Under the heading "Readability," respondents were most likely to indicate concern over the appropriateness of how survey items were worded. Several respondents indicated concern over how ethnic groups were referred to. For example, one complaint was that the word "white" was capitalized throughout the questionnaire, however, this was not done for the word "minority" that was used to represent other ethnic groups (this problem has since been corrected in the most recent version of the MEOCS). A related complaint was that additional ethnic groups (e.g., Hispanics) should be specifically mentioned in the survey. Other respondents felt that survey items focused too much on differences between groups and should be worded more positively (e.g., "The wording of the question could have been something like the following: a. Organization parties, picnics, award ceremonies and other special events were attended by personnel of all races., b. The spouses of personnel mixed and mingled during special events regardless or race," #286). Another comment from respondents was that some survey items (such as items 13, 15, 19, & 27) referred to both women and minority group members (e.g., "There were more than 10 questions that addressed issues concerning 'minorities and women.' These questions were nearly impossible to answer because racial discrimination and sex discrimination are separate issues," #533).

Approximately 4.3% of the respondents felt that the survey was worded too generally (e.g., ".....this survey is vague on many questions," #249) and a slightly smaller percentage made comments indicating that they did not completely understand the directions (e.g., "What is a majority? What is a minority?," #551). Very few respondents indicated that survey items were too difficult or could not be understood.

In terms of "General Format," the scaling of response items had the highest percentage, with several respondents expressing a need for a response format that included a "does not apply" choice (e.g., "Many questions pose situations that cannot exist in all units. For example, one question mentions a 'newly arrived minority officer' and a 'newly arrived majority officer' and did or did not the C.O. take them out to lunch? What if no officers or only one type of officer arrived, or maybe NOBODY went out to lunch? But without an N/A block you must write that there is 'no chance' that the situation occurred, possibly indicating a response to the scenario posed. This survey is rife with such possibilities," #159). A smaller percentage of respondents indicated that the MEOCS was too long or needed open-ended or essay-type questions (e.g., "I wish the questions could have been condensed to about 10 to 20? As it looks right now people will just fill in the blanks as fast as they could which could be erroneous!!," #166; "Place a comment section on your survey," #27).

Content of Questionnaire

Table 2 (next page) presents the number and percentage of respondents who made statements falling under any of the three content headings. With regard to types of discrimination needing additional coverage in the MEOCS, a total of 116 statements were made by respondents that fell under this heading. Most common was discrimination due to status/rank (2.9%), sexual harassment (1.7%), civilian-related (1.7%), age (1.4%), religion (1.2%), and minority-minority issues (1.4%). The "Other" category produced a relatively high count, with discrimination due to marital status, weight/physical appearance, and "old boy" network being the most common. These results suggest that respondents have concerns about discrimination in the military that go well beyond the variables of race and gender that are the focus of the MEOCS.

In terms of statements by respondents expressing concern over "reverse discrimination," race as a factor in "reverse discrimination" was mentioned more frequently than gender (13.4% vs. 6.2%). Sample statements again reflect a sensitivity to the topic of equal opportunity: "Why weren't there more questions directed toward dealing with minority's statements toward the majority?" (#569), "...this study seems to depict the 'white' male as being the enemy! Actually we, 'the majority,' have become the oppressed and angry minority. Through condoned discrimination such as: non-verbal & non-written 'quotas,' the white male doesn't stand a chance or have any rights" (#396), "It is readily apparent that women are given preferential treatment by the commander. He has remarked on several occasions that 'If we don't give them (women) what they want, we'll have social actions down our throat!'" (#349), and "This is another attempt at debasing white men. That is discrimination, & you should be ashamed of yourselves. I am sure the results will be an insult to those of us who work hard everyday to be honorable Air Force officers. When will 'white-bashing' stop?" (#288).

Table 2		
Number and Percentage of Respondents Who Made Written Comments Concerning the Content of the MEOCS		
	<u>Number of Respondents</u>	<u>Percentage of All Respondents</u>
Additional Types of Discrimination Mentioned by Respondents		
Religion	8	1.2
Age	9	1.4
Disability	3	0.5
Homosexuality	7	1.1
Nepotism	2	0.3
Civilian-related	11	1.7
Status/rank	19	2.9
Sexual harassment	11	1.7
Political/bureaucratic	1	0.2
Minority-minority	9	1.4
Other (e.g., weight, marital status, "old-boy" network, etc.)	47	7.1
Concern Over Reverse Discrimination		
Gender-based	41	6.2
Race-based	88	13.4
Problems in Content of MEOCS		
Not military enough	7	1.1
Lack of relevant survey items	53	8.1
Lack of credibility/validity of survey items	62	9.4
Terms minority vs. majority	33	5.0
Respondent is majority but feels like minority	5	0.8

In terms of other problems respondents perceived with the content of the MEOCS, concern over the credibility of survey items was mentioned by 9.4% of the sample. Statements in this area focused on the problem of estimating the likelihood of events, particularly in the first 50 items of the MEOCS (e.g., "The biggest problem I have with the survey are the instructions concerning the first fifty questions which try to gauge the potential for an action to occur.... Instead of trying to measure the potential for something to happen, I believe a more valid and meaningful measurement can be gained from actions that have occurred within the last thirty days," #441; "On page 2 this says 'Remember: You need not have personally seen or experienced the actions.' Well, I think we might

have a major earthquake and maybe there will be looting and probably people will die. A survey of a persons assumptions has no place in an organization based on strict principles, policies, and rules," #581). In addition, statements addressed the timeliness of some of the survey items (e.g., "Surveys such as this was needed in the 50s and 60s for awareness, but we are in the 90s now and all are treated fairly based on their own individual abilities...", #375), the time-frame used in the survey (e.g., "If the time frame were more reasonable [say one year], then the answers would more accurately reflect the truth," #169), and the general ability of the survey to measure discrimination (e.g., "Although I'm sure there are evident racial tensions in the Navy, I do not believe these questions will point them out any more clearly than they are," #525).

A relatively high percentage of respondents (8.1%) indicated that the survey was not relevant to them, often because of a lack of minority group members or women in their units. In a few cases, respondents had retired or had left their units and did not feel comfortable completing the survey. This suggests a problem in how the MEOCS was administered in some units and the identification of eligible respondents. A number of respondents (5.0%) indicated concern over the terms minority and majority. For example, "I will not fill out a survey that considers white females a majority" (#157), "The men meaning majority or minority treat women like s - - t!...Who is the minority?" (#476), and "First of all, the minority and majority groups listed is wrong, according to my own eyesight. Since I've been in the Army, I feel the Caucasian is the minority, therefore most of the questions are backwards" (#297).

Miscellaneous Factors and General Statements

Table 3 (next page) presents frequency data for miscellaneous factors and general statements. In the case of miscellaneous factors, none of the items occurred for more than 3% of the respondents. The most frequently mentioned item dealt with the concern that outside factors having nothing to do with discrimination may play a role in some of the situations described in the MEOCS (e.g., "Questions are basically irrelevant since they don't take into consideration any outside influences that may have influenced any decisions regarding choice of workplace," #361). Statements concerning anonymity, coercion, and lack of seriousness on the part of the respondent were relatively rare.

In terms of general statements, 30.4% of respondents provided a comment or opinion that did not deal directly with measuring race and sex discrimination in the military. For example, "This survey is a poor substitute for geeting out of your office and meeting the 'crew.' No commanding officer of TTF in recent memory has attempted this, you can be the first. Good luck." (#583), "I'm majority male. It isn't really important how I think or feel, except as it affects performance of my job. Part of my job is to a) make all others feel welcome b) share the wealth equitably. I'm doing my personal best. You do the same." (#460), "Due to the fact that extremely little or no action is ever taken as a result of these (and other military) surveys, I respectfully abstain from completing this one with significant effort!" (#237). Although these general statements do not provide

much useful feedback concerning the MEOCS they do reflect the strong and often differing opinions respondents had on the topic of EO in the military.

Table 3		
Number and Percentage of Respondents Who Made Written Comments Concerning Miscellaneous Factors and General Statements		
	<u>Number of Respondents</u>	<u>Percentage of All Respondents</u>
Miscellaneous Factors Affecting Survey Response		
Survey not taken seriously	4	0.6
Coerced to take survey	3	0.5
Anonymity of respondent threatened	6	1.0
Difficulty of knowing that discrimination has actually taken place	13	2.1
General Statements Not Directly Related to Survey	190	30.4

Finally, approximately 13% of the sample mentioned specific item numbers in the survey that they objected to. The majority of the comments were directed toward the two parts of the MEOCS (Parts I and V) dealing with EO, with 65% mentioning an item number from Part I (or items 1-50) and 41% mentioning an item number from Part V (or items 74-100). Specific items that were mentioned most by respondents include: Item 3 (“A majority person told several jokes about minorities”), Item 24 (“The term ‘dyke’ [meaning lesbian], referring to a particular woman, was overheard in a conversation between unit personnel”), Item 93 (“Minorities and women frequently cry ‘prejudice’ rather than accept responsibility for personal faults.”), and Item 97 (“There should be more close friendships between minorities and majority members in this organization.”). Objections to Items 3 and 97 dealt primarily with how responses might be interpreted in terms of discrimination. Item 24 was objected to because of the word “dyke” and the perceived lack of relevance of this term to either sex or race discrimination. Item 93 was objected to largely because the statement includes reference to both minorities and women.

Discussion

The results of the frequency analysis indicate that respondents had a number of concerns about the MEOCS. These concerns focus on (1) perceived bias in the “tone” of the survey, (2) wording of particular items, (3) “reverse discrimination,” (4) additional areas of discrimination not covered in the MEOCS, and (5) credibility or validity of survey

items used to measure EO. Many of the written comments expressed strong opinions of the MEOCS and the more general topic of EO in the military. These findings are consistent with the Ritchie (1993) and Tallarigo (1994) findings. The generally smaller percentages found in the present study may simply reflect the number of coding categories used (the present study had many more categories) and/or the specific coding criteria developed for the different studies.

Evaluating Respondent Opinion

Although the written comments provided by respondents are inherently subjective, it is possible to collect corroborating data to evaluate some of the comments made about the MEOCS. For example, a common criticism of the MEOCS was that it had a negative "tone" and was biased toward finding evidence of racial discrimination. To investigate this perspective, an analysis of Part I (or items 1-50, which measure behavioral perceptions of the EO climate) and Part V (or items 74-100, which represent a version of the Racial Awareness and Perceptions Scale, or RAPS, Hiett et al., 1978) was conducted. These two parts of the MEOCS were analyzed in terms of whether individual items suggest that discrimination or equal treatment was occurring (e.g., discrimination: Item 6-A majority first-level supervisor made demeaning comments about minority subordinates; equal treatment: Item 95-This organization provides a good career chance for advancement for minorities and women).

Results of this analysis are presented in the upper half of Table 4. In Part I of the MEOCS, there were 39 items suggesting discrimination and 11 items (Items 1, 2, 5, 7, 14, 19, 29, 31, 35, 37, 50) suggesting equal treatment. Of the 39 items indicating discrimination, 9 (Items 4, 11, 17, 21, 22, 27, 33, 45, 47) were in the direction of "reverse discrimination" and 30 were in the direction of discrimination of the majority (and men) toward the minority (and women). For items in Part V, there were 22 items suggesting discrimination and 5 (Items 78, 79, 83, 95, 97) suggesting equal treatment. Of the 22 items, three (Items 91, 96, 100) were in the direction of "reverse discrimination" and the remainder suggested discrimination of majority toward minority. Thus, over both sections, approximately 79% of the items suggested some sort of discrimination and, of those items suggesting discrimination, 20% were in the direction of "reverse discrimination." This finding provides support for the perception that the MEOCS contains items that predominantly focus on finding evidence of discrimination (as opposed to equal treatment) in the military. Furthermore, discrimination of majority toward minority received more attention than issues related to "reverse discrimination."

A second analysis was conducted to compare the number of items that focused on race discrimination vs. sex discrimination. As can be seen in the lower half of Table 4, across both sections, there was a total of 49 items that focused exclusively on racial discrimination, 15 that focused exclusively on sexual discrimination, and 13 that focused on both. This pattern supports the perception of some respondents that the MEOCS is geared primarily toward examining racial issues in the military and, only to a lesser extent, discrimination based on sex.

Table 4		
Number of Items in Part I and Part V of the MEOCS (Version 2.3) According to Type of Statement		
	Part I (Items 1-50)	Part V (Items 74-100)
Items Suggesting Either Race or Sex Discrimination (includes both "regular" and "reverse" discrimination)	39	22
Items Suggesting Equal Treatment	11	5
Items Suggesting Reverse Discrimination	9	3
Items Suggesting Discrimination Based on Race	32	17
Items Suggesting Discrimination Based on Sex	14	1
Items Suggesting Discrimination Based on Both Race and Sex	4	9

Pros and Cons of Changing the MEOCS

Given the above observations and comments concerning the MEOCS, a number of changes and possible improvements can be proposed. However, in changing the MEOCS, certain risks must be acknowledged. First, a major change in the MEOCS may affect the current factor structure of the survey and alter the items which comprise the various MEOCS scales. Second, the norms that have been carefully established since 1990 will not be as useful in interpreting a MEOCS that is different in content. Finally, the 658 written comments that were analyzed for this study come from respondents that may or may not be representative of other military personnel. Given the low response rate, it is difficult, if not impossible, to know for certain how accurately the written comments reflect the opinions of other individuals who completed the MEOCS.

On the other hand, certain benefits may come from revising the MEOCS. Respondents had to exert a certain degree of effort and in many cases expressed very strong negative opinions about either the style or content of the MEOCS. In at least 20 cases, respondents indicated that they were expressing an opinion that was shared by many

other military personnel in the unit. Many of the comments reveal a hostility and suspicion toward the MEOCS (and perhaps toward DEOMI) which may carry over to create negative perceptions of EO in general. This hostility may result in less than honest answers or simply no answers at all in those cases where the respondent refused to complete the MEOCS. Currently, the response rate for the MEOCS is 57%, a value that might be improved if some potential respondents had a more positive reaction to the survey. Finally, even if the current version of the MEOCS has a valid factor structure, its usefulness and accuracy may well be improved by changing items so that the survey has greater face validity and produces less reactance and resentment on the part of respondents.

Possible Changes in the MEOCS

Based on the above analysis of the written comments, a number of possible changes in the MEOCS can be identified.

Separating race and sex discrimination items. One issue mentioned by respondents that would be fairly easy to address involves separating the topic of race discrimination from sex discrimination. Twelve MEOCS items in Parts I and V combine both sex and gender discrimination (e.g., Item 13--"Graffiti written on the organization's rest room or latrine walls 'put down' minorities or women.") and it should be possible to word these items so that they focus on one type of discrimination, but not both.

Reasons for separating the two types of discrimination include stated confusion by respondents as to what type of discrimination the item was measuring, as well as research suggesting that race and sex discrimination represent historically different types of barriers for employees that need to be understood and studied separately (Blankenship, 1993; Clayton, 1992). On a practical level, it is also the case that military units can vary greatly in terms of the proportion of women and minorities they contain. These differences in representation may well produce different perceptions of the EO climate that can only be measured if race and sex discrimination items are separated. If separate scales were created for racism and sexism, this would also permit more specific feedback to military units and allow commanders to more accurately diagnose any EO related problems their units may be experiencing. In addition, the two scales could be added together for an overall measure of the EO environment.

Increasing response options. Another change in the wording of the MEOCS would be to include a "does not apply" option for survey items. This would allow respondents to respond more accurately to items that may not apply to their particular military unit and avoid the problem of forcing respondents to choose a response they may not completely agree with. A "does not apply" option might also reduce the number of respondents who leave part of the MEOCS blank or fail to complete the survey because they feel it cannot be answered accurately.

Greater balancing of MEOCS items. One method of dealing with the perceived bias in the MEOCS is to create a greater balance in Parts I and V between items suggesting discrimination and those suggesting equal treatment. Currently, approximately 79% of the items in Parts I and V are worded so that they suggest discrimination. To change this percentage, some MEOCS items could be reworded so that their meaning stays essentially the same even though they describe a situation involving no discrimination. For example, "A majority supervisor did not select a qualified minority subordinate for promotion" (Item 18) could be changed to "A majority supervisor selected a qualified minority subordinate for promotion." The statement "I dislike the idea of having a supervisor of a race different from mine" (Item 88) could be changed to "I don't mind the idea of having a supervisor of a race different from mine." These types of minor wording changes should leave the factor structure of the MEOCS unchanged and result in fewer criticisms from respondents that the MEOCS is somehow biased or slanted toward finding a particular result. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know what the optimum balance is between items suggesting discrimination and those suggesting equal treatment. If 10 items were reworded to suggest equal treatment, this would change the overall percentage of equal treatment items to approximately 34%. A rewording of 20 items would change the overall percentage to just under 50%.

A related issue arises concerning the topic of "reverse discrimination." Several respondents indicated a resentment that the MEOCS was focusing only on discrimination directed toward women and members of minority groups. In fact, approximately 20% of the items in Parts I and V of the MEOCS focus on the issue of "reverse discrimination" based on either race or sex. Should this percentage be increased? Arguing against an increase are the two "reverse discrimination" scales that are already produced by the MEOCS. Arguing for an increase is that a larger number of items would allow the MEOCS to provide separate scales for race and sex and probably reduce objections to the overall "tone" of the MEOCS (at least by white males). Additional "reverse discrimination" items could be created by minor wording changes in currently existing MEOCS items.

One specific item in the MEOCS that some respondents viewed as not relevant to either race or gender discrimination was Item 24 (see previous description of this item). Unless this item loads significantly on a particular factor or there is a desire to measure discrimination based on sexual preference, it is recommended that Item 24 be eliminated from the survey.

Modifying instructions. A more substantive change to the MEOCS involves modifying the instructions given to respondents. A criticism of the current instructions for Part I was that respondents felt uncomfortable estimating the likelihood of a certain event, particularly when they had never previously experienced or observed that event. In some cases, respondents seemed either unwilling or unable to estimate the likelihood that a given event could occur. An alternative approach would be to ask subjects to report on events they had either heard about, seen, or experienced over a slightly longer period of time (e.g., six months instead of 30 days). This would remove a certain degree of

subjectivity from the MEOCS that some respondents found troubling. However, it is also possible that such a change would affect either the factor structure or the norms that have been recently developed for the MEOCS.

A less dramatic modification would be to provide a detailed example in the instructions for Part I that would describe more completely the type of judgment that is being sought (currently, only a brief example is given). This example could discuss the various response options and illustrate how respondents might approach and think about the estimating of likelihoods. A detailed example might also serve to dispel the suspicion about EO that some respondents expressed after filling out the MEOCS.

A second minor modification involves instructions that require the respondent to provide some type of information about himself or herself (or unit) while the instructions are being read. This would encourage the respondent to pay closer attention to the instructions and would discourage the practice of a unit not copying the instructions for respondents since they are not perceived as being important to the process of completing the questionnaire.

Reducing redundancy. Although redundancy was not a major complaint concerning the MEOCS, some respondents mentioned specific items they felt were repetitive. If the need arises to reduce the length of the MEOCS or create room for additional questions, then some of these items could probably be eliminated with little loss of reliability (this, of course, is a statistical issue that could be examined with a large database of MEOCS responses). Some of the MEOCS items that were mentioned as being repetitive include: Items 3 and 42 that both deal with ethnic jokes; Items 5, 7, 11, 26, and 35 that deal with eating lunch or meeting in a cafeteria; Items 16 and 20 that deal with interracial dating; Items 12 and 40 that deal with the use of insulting ethnic names. In each case, a statistical question arises as to what, if any, additional information is gained by having multiple items for the same type of event.

Measuring additional areas of discrimination. Many respondents stated that the MEOCS should measure types of discrimination other than those based on race or sex. If the MEOCS is to be expanded in this regard, it is recommended that the focus be limited to those categories or groups that have been identified for civil rights protection by the federal government. This would include discrimination based on religion, age, and disability. In addition, the topic of sexual harassment is one that could be more thoroughly assessed by the MEOCS.

Obviously, increasing the scope of the MEOCS in this manner could lengthen the survey considerably. It would also extend the MEOCS beyond its original scope by adopting a more expansive definition of EO. Whether this is an appropriate or desirable goal depends on DEOMI's view as to how the MEOCS should be used in the future. An alternative to adding additional sections that measure specific types of discrimination would be to include a broader measure of organizational justice (c.f. Schaubroeck, May, & Brown, 1994). Such a measure would serve to address respondents' perceptions of

fairness and the overall manner in which they are treated in their military unit. As such, it should apply to all respondents and not be limited to a single form of discrimination.

Summary and Conclusion

Clearly, measuring the EO environment of any organization is a sensitive task. A content analysis of 658 written comments concerning the MEOCS has suggested several ways in which the MEOCS can be changed and improved. Although these suggestions are based on a relatively small sample of respondents that may or may not be representative of the military as a whole, they do reflect the strong emotional reaction that many respondents had in filling out the MEOCS.

To date, the three studies conducting a content analysis of the MEOCS all yield basically the same conclusion: individuals who provide written comments tend to perceive the MEOCS as biased and have many suggestions for items that should be changed, added to, or omitted from the MEOCS. As with any survey, suggestions for change need to be evaluated in the context of the survey's overall objectives and psychometric properties. Fortunately, there are a number of ways that items in the MEOCS can be further evaluated and improved. These include (1) the use of focus groups to obtain more detailed reactions to specific survey items or sections, (2) the development of test items as described by Dansby (1994) and Tallarigo (1994) and monitoring subsequent reactions by respondents, and (3) additional statistical analysis to determine whether certain items (e.g., Item 24) make a significant contribution to specific scales to warrant their inclusion in the MEOCS. Given the strong emotional reactions of respondents to the MEOCS, it is imperative that DEOMI continue to monitor respondent comments and attempt to address them whenever possible.

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Appendix: Coding Categories and Descriptions

Style or Tone of MEOCS

1. Race or Sex Tone

a. Biased/one-sided toward finding a particular outcome: R states that questionnaire seems slanted, biased, or designed to find a particular outcome (e.g., discrimination in the military). The bias may be in finding either pro or anti-discrimination. Statement should also be scored if R questions the intentions or motivation of those who devised the survey. However, simply stating that the survey will produce inaccurate results is not sufficient for scoring. Bias must be suggested or directly stated in the comment.

Sample Statements

“This survey is biased toward finding discrimination against whites.”

“The people who devised this survey are prejudiced themselves and are attempting to find something that doesn’t exist.”

b. Offensive to respondent: R expresses some degree of being uncomfortable with filling out the survey. Statements suggesting anger, disgust, hostility or suspicion would qualify for scoring. In addition, if R indicates that completing the survey is a waste of time or money, this would be scored since it suggests an adverse reaction on the part of the R. The use of profanity should also be scored in this category.

Sample Statements

“I resent having to fill out this survey and feel it is a waste of time and money.”

“This questionnaire is bullshit and I refuse to complete it.”

c. Disruptive to unit: R states that filling out survey may lead to greater tension or friction within unit or military in general. If R states that the survey does more harm than good, this would qualify for scoring.

Sample Statements

“This questionnaire will only serve to make relations worse in this unit between whites and blacks.”

“The military would be better off without silly questionnaires like these.”

2. Readability

a. Too general/Lack of focus: R indicates that the survey was too general or needs to have more of a specific focus. This should be a statement about the questionnaire overall, and not a disagreement about the wording for a specific item.

Sample Statements

“I found many of the statements in the survey overly general and subject to interpretation.”

“This survey is trying to measure everything, so it measures nothing.”

b. Hard to understand words: R indicates that he/she did not understand items or words used in the survey.

Sample Statements

“I did not understand question #34 and left it blank.”

“Does White mean Caucasian?”

c. Respondent did not understand instructions: R writes a comment that indicates that he/she did not understand or fully comprehend something stated in the instructions for the survey.

Sample Statements

“The survey should not be limited to only those events that I have personally experienced.”

“A time period of 1 year is too long for me to remember whether or not a certain event occurred.”

d. Wording of survey items not appropriate: R states that the wording of an item (or items) was inappropriate or ambiguous and made completion of the survey difficult. This could involve objections to specific words being used (e.g., whites, blacks, etc.) or a more general observation by the R concerning the survey in general. Statement should not be scored if R indicates that the survey is too general or lacks focus.

Sample Statements

“Question #9 implies that only whites make racial slurs. This is not the case and the survey should have an item to reflect this.”

“Items 100-115 were confusing and need to be reworded.”

3. General Format

a. Scaling of responses or general response format: R makes a comment concerning the response format or scaling options for the survey. This would occur if the R expressed the need for a “Does Not Apply” category or any other change in the response format used by the survey.

Sample Statements

"I would like the survey better if there were a 'not applicable' response choice"

"I found it difficult to choose between whether an event was 'highly likely' or 'reasonably likely.' Clearer response categories should be used."

b. Length: R states that the survey was excessive in length, took too long to complete, or was repetitive and became boring.

Sample Statements

"This survey took so long to complete that it lost my interest"

"The survey was repetitive and boring"

c. Need for more elaborate comments: R observes that there is a need to have something other than a multiple choice format for the questions (e.g., open-ended questions, interviews, etc.). This also includes statements on variations of the survey format, such as including more categories or changing those that currently exist.

Sample Statements

"I did not like the multiple choice format. Why don't you ask questions that we can respond to more fully?"

"To understand race and gender problems you need to visit this unit and interview us and observe how we work together."

Content of MEOCS

4. Areas involving discrimination not covered on questionnaire: R mentions a type of discrimination not covered on the survey. R may either suggest that this type of discrimination should be measured in a future survey or may simply recount an experience with a type of discrimination not covered on the survey.

a. Other types of discrimination--the categories below represent some of the possible areas----the category "other" should be used for any topic not covered in the first 10 categories.

i. religion:

ii. age:

iii. disability:

iv. homosexuality:

v. nepotism:

vi. civilian:

vii. status/rank:

viii. sexual harassment:

ix. politicians/bureaucracy:

x. minority-->minority:

xi. other:

Sample Statements

"The survey ignores discrimination due to age, which is the real problem in this unit."

"I have been treated unfairly because of my civilian status."

b. Types of “reverse discrimination”: R makes a comment that indicates a concern about “reverse discrimination.” R can either suggest that this topic be covered on future surveys or simply describe an experience that reflects a concern for this type of “reverse discrimination.”

- i. gender-based:** discrimination by women directed towards men
- ii. race-based:** discrimination by a minority-group individual directed toward a majority group person

Sample Statements

“The survey should go both ways----if an item looks at discrimination against minority groups there should be a similar item that looks at discrimination against whites.”

“In my own experience, it is males who are treated differently when it comes to promotions, not women.”

5. Problems in current content of MEOCS

a. Not military enough: R indicates that survey doesn’t seem completely appropriate for a military setting. This may be a statement indicating that the survey is “too civilian” or a comment that the survey needs to be written so that it more completely portrays the military work environment.

Sample Statements

“This survey was constructed by someone who doesn’t know much about the military.”

“There is too much emphasis on general EO and not enough on issues particular to the military.”

b. Lack of relevance of survey items: R states that he/she has difficulty completing the survey because there are few, if any, women or minority group members in the workforce, R is no longer working at the location addressed by the survey and doesn’t feel comfortable responding, R has not been working at the site long enough to provide informed answers, or situations described in survey are ones that cannot occur in R’s unit. Also, the statement should be scored if R suggests that survey items are out of date.

Sample Statements

“In my unit, we have no women, so why the hell am I filling out this survey!”

“I found it difficult to relate to many of the questions since they don’t apply to my current work situation.”

c. Lack of credibility or validity of survey items: R expresses concern that survey may not be measuring what it was designed to measure (i.e., race and gender discrimination). This can be done either by reference to specific survey questions or by a more general comment about the survey overall.

Sample Statements

“There is no way that this survey accurately measures gender/race discrimination in this unit.”

“The situations in this questionnaire are so trivial that I don’t see what they tell us about discrimination.”

d. Terms minority/majority: R expresses concern or confusion over the terms “majority” and “minority”

Sample Statements

“I think the terms ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ create artificial groups that only get in the way of understanding each other.”

“I don’t understand what you mean by majority/minority, or why that distinction is necessary.”

e. Respondent is majority but feels like minority: R states that he/she is a majority group member but, because of work conditions, sees himself/herself as being part of a minority group.

Sample Statements

“As a white female, I’m considered a member of the ‘majority,’ yet I’m also treated like I’m a minority.”

“White males definitely are no longer a majority in the military-----they’re a definite minority.”

Miscellaneous Factors

6a. Not taken seriously: R was unable to take the survey seriously and indicated that he/she responded in a cavalier manner

Sample Statements

“Many people in this unit thought this survey was a joke and filled it out appropriately.”

“I was so upset with some of the items that I decided to respond in a random fashion.”

6b. Forced to take survey: R states that he/she felt that completing the survey was not a completely voluntary act.

Sample Statements

“Voluntary, my ass! I was coerced into filling out this survey by my CO.”

“I completed this survey only because I had to.”

6c. Anonymity of respondent threatened: R expresses concern that identity might be deduced from information provided in survey.

Sample Statements

“Why is it necessary to collect so much information about each person if you’re not going to track us down based on our answers?”

“I don’t trust the people giving out this survey and am concerned they will use this information to screw us.”

6d. Difficulty of knowing that discrimination has occurred because of race/gender:

R expresses a concern that a response to a particular survey item doesn’t necessarily mean that discrimination occurred---rather there may be other factors involved besides discrimination (e.g., training, upbringing, experience. etc.)

Sample Statements

“All because a man gets promoted over a woman doesn’t indicate discrimination. There may be other factors such as education, experience, and interpersonal skills.”

“I resent the fact that some responses indicate a discriminatory climate when there may be other things going on having nothing to do with race/gender bias.”

6e. General statements not directly relevant to purpose of questionnaire:

R expresses an opinion (e.g., social commentary) or provides information (e.g., detailed personal experience) that doesn’t fall into any of the above categories and which does not seem relevant to the purpose of the survey.

Sample Statements

“The real problem in the military is that people just don’t care anymore about the quality of their work.”

“There is too much emphasis on being ‘politically correct’ in today’s world.”

7. Specific item numbers mentioned