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RACE, GENDER, AND REPRESENTATION INDEX AS PREDICTORS OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CLIMATE IN MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

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Race, Gender, and Representation Index as Predictors of Equal Opportunity Climate in Military Organizations

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Abstract

Recent analyses of the perceptions of Equal Opportunity Climate (EOC) in the military highlight differences among various demographic subgroups. Prior research (Dansby, 1994) indicates minority officer women have the least favorable views of EOC in military organizations when contrasted to comparable demographic subgroups (i.e., Caucasian officer men, etc.). Differences based on race, gender, and representation index (proportion of the total represented by a particular demographic group) are explored in a sample of 190 Army units (N = 47,823) that conducted the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey between 1990 and 1995. As predicted, minority officer women's perceptions of the favorability of the EOC improved as their representation in the organization increased ($p < .05$). Contrary to expectation, educational attainment failed to predict improved perceptions of EOC. The findings are interpreted as supporting the strategy of increasing representation as a means to improving perceived EOC.

Race, Gender, and Representation Index as
Predictors of Equal Opportunity Climate in Military Organizations

In July of 1948, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981, mandating equality in the treatment of all persons in the military regardless of race, color, religion, or national origin. One result of Mr. Truman's action has been a continuing interest by military researchers and analysts in the effects of implementing that policy, and subsequent equal opportunity policy directives, within the services. (See, for example, MacGregor, 1981; Binkin, Eitelberg, Schexnider, & Smith, 1982; Day, 1983; Nalty, 1986; Thomas, 1988; Rosenfeld, Thomas, Edwards, Thomas, & Thomas, 1991; Dansby & Landis, in press.)

In recent years, interest has been focused on Equal Opportunity Climate (EOC) as an indicator of the success of these policies. For example, researchers such as Landis, Dansby, and Faley (1993) at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) have explored the nature of Equal Opportunity Climate (EOC) in military organizations using the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Survey (MEOCS). A similar program of EOC research at the Navy Personnel Research and Development Center is described by Rosenfeld and his colleagues (Rosenfeld et al., 1991; Rosenfeld & Edwards, 1994). Based on the work of Landis, Fisher, and Dansby (1988), Dansby and Landis (1991) consider EOC to be

> The expectation by individuals that opportunities, responsibilities, and rewards will be accorded on the basis of a person's abilities, efforts, and contributions, and not on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin. It is to be emphasized that this definition involves the individual's perceptions and may or may not be based on the actual witnessing of behavior. (p. 392)

The MEOCS (see Dansby & Landis, 1991; Landis, Dansby, & Faley, 1993; Landis, Dansby, & Tallarigo, in press) is an organizational development survey assessing EOC and other aspects of organizational effectiveness (OE). It has been administered nearly 3,000 times in military units, and a database of over 400,000 individual responses has been accumulated between 1990 and 1995. The survey measures nine EOC factors and three OE factors, described elsewhere (Dansby & Landis, 1991; Landis, Dansby, & Faley, 1993).

Consistently in military EOC surveys there have been differences in perceptions between men and women, officers and enlisted members, and minority group members and majority group members. In general, men, officers, and majority group members perceive the EOC as being more favorable (Dansby & Landis, 1991; Rosenfeld et al., 1991; Landis et al., 1993). In further exploring these differences, Dansby (1994) reported a particularly large difference in perspective between minority officer women and majority officer men, with minority officer women holding a much less positive view

of EOC in the military. Contrasted to the other relevant subgroups (i.e., minority enlisted women, majority enlisted men, etc.), these two groups had the lowest and highest favorability ratings, respectively.

It is not surprising that those who have historically suffered the most discrimination (minority group members and women) should report a less favorable EOC; nor is it any less to be expected that those with more status and organizational power (officers) should have more favorable views of EOC. What is somewhat unexpected, however, is that minority officer women are less sanguine about the EOC than are minority enlisted women. One might expect that, among minority women, the more powerful group (officers) would be less subject to discriminatory actions than the less powerful group (enlisted members). (See, for example, Kitano, 1980; Feagin & Feagin, 1993.)

To explain this unexpected result, several hypotheses were proposed. Three of the most promising include the following:

1. Since minority officer women are a much smaller cohort than minority enlisted women, perhaps they experience different organizational dynamics, leading to perceptions of a less favorable EOC. Some evidence for this possibility comes from the work of those studying the dynamics of tokenism in organizations. For example, Kanter (1977), Spangler, Gordon, and Pipkin (1978), Izraeli (1983), Heikes (1991), and Tallarigo (1994) all offer support for the idea that the ratio of representation (and not necessarily the absolute numbers) between the dominant and "token" groups impacts organizational dynamics or views of the climate. In the Tallarigo (1994) study (using MEOCS factors), as the ratio of women to men in military organizations increased, the women were less likely to see themselves as victims of discrimination (though their ratings of EOC did not improve). Based on such studies, we hypothesize that minority officer women will have more favorable views of EOC as their representation (compared to other groups in the organization) increases.

2. A second possibility is that education level influences the women's perceptions of EOC in the military. Since all officer women have at least a bachelor's degree, they are generally better educated than their enlisted counterparts; therefore, they might be more aware of equal opportunity concerns and more discerning in rating the EOC. In support of this hypothesis, Terpstra and Cook (1985) found that better educated women were more likely to have filed sexual harassment complaints. In broad-scale surveys of federal employees, the United States Merit Systems Protection Board (1981, 1988) also found that better educated persons were more likely to report having been sexually harassed. Thus, we hypothesize that better educated minority women will report less favorable perceptions of EOC.

3. A third hypothesis, not addressed by the present research, is that minority officer women have higher expectations regarding EOC when they come into the

military. These expectations may be based on the training they receive prior to entry (which emphasizes the professional nature of the officer's role and may lead women officers to believe they will be treated with greater respect as officers) or on a general perception (based on comparison with civilian society) of a positive EOC in the military. If such expectations are less than fully met, the women officers may respond with what might be characterized as a "contrast" effect (Sherif & Hovland, 1961); their perceptions of EOC may become less positive in reactance to unfulfilled expectations. This line of thinking is related to the relative deprivation hypothesis (Brinton, 1938), which proposes people evaluate their status based not only on the absolute level of the conditions affecting them, but also on their expectations of what they deserve. Therefore, we propose that minority officer women have higher initial expectations of the EOC in the military, and their perceptions will be negatively influenced if they are less than fully confirmed.

The present research tests hypotheses 1 and 2, using data from the MEOCS database.

Method

Sample

Hypothesis 1. The data used to test hypothesis 1 resulted from a sample from the MEOCS database consisting of 190 units from the United States Army, surveyed between 1990 and 1995. A total of 47,823 in these units completed the MEOCS. Data included averages for MEOCS scales (by demographic group) from each unit and demographic characteristics (i.e., numbers of people assigned, not just those who completed the MEOCS) of the units. Units were selected if demographic data were available at the time they took the MEOCS. If the demographic data were incomplete or invalid, the unit was eliminated from the analysis for hypothesis 1, resulting in 131 valid units. For identifying demographic subgroups (e.g., Minority Female Officers) for analysis, at least one person fitting the appropriate combination of race (minority/Caucasian), sex (male/female), and rank (officer/enlisted) had to be present in the unit. Median unit size was 278 people, with a range from 21 to 17,649 military personnel. The missions of the units included direct combat (32%), combat support (21%), and combat service support (47%). Table 1 gives the size (N) of each demographic subsample as well as other information. The Ns in Table 1 represent numbers of units with at least one person fitting the demographic subcategory.

Hypothesis 2. The data for hypothesis 2 were at the individual level and consisted of responses to MEOCS by 2,528 minority enlisted women surveyed in the 190 units identified above. Only minority enlisted women were selected because (as discussed previously) all officer women have bachelor's degrees. The restricted range of the education level for officers renders their data inappropriate for testing the relevant hypothesis. Most (62.5%) of these women were African-American; 13.6%

were Hispanic; and 7% were Asian-American. Over two thirds (71.7%) were of relatively low rank (E5 and below); half (47.1%) were 25 years of age of younger, and only 4.1% were over 40. About 85% were serving in active duty units. Just over 20% were college graduates, but 55% had some college.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Measure	Statistic	Sample[b]							
		MFO	CFO	MFE	CFE	MMO	CMO	MME	CME
	N	48	52	110	109	103	118	131	131
RI[a]									
	Mean	.010	.021	.076	.063	.022	.107	.291	.456
	Median	.006	.011	.067	.052	.016	.068	.285	.466
	Maximum	.054	.144	.331	.279	.120	.850	.541	.774
	Minimum	.001	.000	.002	.001	.003	.004	.002	.017
Number									
	Mean	5.98	19.19	55.92	43.66	14.81	75.62	247.03	407.6
	Median	2	5	15.5	11	5	18	71	119
	Maximum	44	180	895	881	220	1506	4839	9116
	Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Population									
	Mean	1483.3	1477.9	845.91	829.22	997.59	890.6	830.32	830.3
	Median	467	476	249	245	358	316	278	278
	Maximum	17649	17649	17649	17622	17649	17649	17649	17649
	Minimum	37	37	27	27	27	21	27	27

[a]RI=Representation Index

[b]MFO=Minority Female Officers; CFO=Caucasian Female Officers; MFE=Minority Female Enlisted; CFE=Caucasian Female Enlisted; MMO=Minority Male Officers; CMO=Caucasian Male Officers; MME=Minority Male Enlisted; CME=Caucasian Male Enlisted

Variables

The dependent variables were the scales from the MEOCS (Dansby & Landis, 1991; Landis, Dansby & Faley, 1993; Landis, Dansby & Tallarigo, in press). The MEOCS scales have been shown to be reliable (average Cronbach's alpha of .84; range from .75 to .91) and construct valid (Landis et al., 1993) for military units. Scale scores range from 1 to 5, with a higher score indicating a more favorable climate. Five of the scales measure the perceived frequency of certain behaviors (e.g., sexist and racist behaviors), three are organizational effectiveness factors (e.g., perceived work group effectiveness), three are general racial attitudes (e.g., attitudes toward

discrimination), and the final is an overall global estimate of EOC in the unit. In the test of hypothesis 1, these measures were aggregated over individuals to create mean scores separately for any of the eight demographic categories present within units.

The scales used in this study included: Scale 1, Sexual Harassment and (sex) Discrimination; Scale 2, Differential Command Behaviors toward Minorities; Scale 3, Positive Equal Opportunity Behaviors; Scale 4, Racist/Sexist Behaviors; Scale 5, "Reverse" Discrimination I (at the unit level); Scale 6, Commitment (to the organization); Scale 7, Job Satisfaction; Scale 8, Perceived Workgroup Effectiveness; Scale 9, Discrimination Against Minorities and Women; Scale 10, (desire for) Racial Separatism; Scale 11, "Reverse" Discrimination II (attitudinal); Scale 12, Overall Equal Opportunity Climate.

For testing hypothesis 1, independent variables included the total number of persons serving in each unit (population), the number of persons in each demographic subgroup (number), and the proportion of each relevant subgroup in the total unit population (representation index; calculated by dividing the subgroup population by the total unit population). The independent variable in testing hypothesis 2 was whether the individual was a college graduate or not.

Statistics and Analyses of Data

Hypothesis 1. The three independent variable measures were computed for each demographic group in each unit. The units were then divided at the median for each measure for each demographic group, and two-tailed *t* tests were computed between the two halves.

Hypothesis 2. The MEOCS scale scores were subjected to a multivariate analysis of variance with education level (college graduate/not college graduate) as the independent variable and pay grade as a covariate (to control for age and experience as extraneous variables).

Results

Hypothesis 1

The number of any demographic group was highly correlated with the population of the unit (ranging from a low of .86 for Minority Female Officers to a high of .99 for both samples of male enlisted). On the other hand, the representation index (RI) was essentially uncorrelated with the other two measures (ranging from a low of .00 for the correlation with the number for the group of Minority Male Officers to a high of .296 for the equivalent correlation for the Caucasian Female Officers).

Only the RI proved to be consistently and significantly correlated with the EOC scales. Due to this finding, the remainder of this section will focus on the effects of the RI on climate.

Table 2 presents means and standard deviations for the 12 climate scales, based on a median split of the RI, and Table 3 shows results of significance tests for the median split by scale. It is quite clear that as the RI increases for three of the

Table 2

Means (Standard Deviations) for each Demographic Group by Median Split on the RI

		Scale Means and Standard Deviations											
Group[a]	RI Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MFO	>Mdn	3.83(.76)	3.93(.82)	3.82(.76)	3.93(.79)	3.90(.69)	3.18(.58)	4.06(.68)	3.96(.48)	3.02(.65)	3.73(.70)	4.30(.74)	3.05(.78)
	<Mdn	3.38(.68)	3.58(.58)	3.36(.49)	3.56(.62)	3.55(.45)	3.10(.46)	3.45(.97)	3.29(.82)	3.06(.67)	3.12(.78)	3.67(.72)	2.46(.75)
CFO	>Mdn	4.04(.50)	4.63(.35)	4.24(.41)	4.32(.38)	4.26(.27)	3.49(.46)	4.30(.32)	4.02(.34)	3.89(.43)	3.69(.48)	4.67(.23)	3.78(.58)
	<Mdn	3.98(.71)	4.54(.42)	4.19(.44)	4.30(.43)	4.13(.62)	3.44(.62)	4.03(.85)	3.92(.74)	3.75(.55)	3.45(.59)	4.64(.38)	3.71(.53)
MFE	>Mdn	3.66(.47)	3.78(41)	3.30(.32)	3.82(.43)	3.94(.32)	2.74(.40)	3.81(.42)	3.63(.41)	3.02(.44)	3.82(.37)	4.30(.29)	2.80(.39)
	<Mdn	3.71(.63)	3.81(.61)	3.32(.55)	3.77(.61)	3.92(.51)	2.88(.50)	3.74(.52)	3.54(.54)	3.02(.49)	3.71(.47)	4.13(.46)	2.86(.52)
CFE	>Mdn	3.66(.48)	4.19(.37)	3.83(.38)	3.87(.49)	3.83(.41)	2.88(.56)	3.84(.45)	3.54(.56)	3.62(.39)	3.34(.50)	4.47(.25)	3.13(.56)
	<Mdn	3.74(.67)	4.20(.53)	3.72(.49)	3.93(.63)	3.93(.53)	3.02(.61)	3.89(.65)	3.60(.59)	3.59(.67)	3.46(.76)	4.28(.61)	3.13(.61)
MMO	>Mdn	4.11(.62)	4.23(.49)	3.91(.51)	4.16(.60)	4.11(.42)	3.44(.48)	4.26(.47)	3.90(.43)	3.42(.62)	3.90(.61)	4.44(.54)	3.46(.76)
	<Mdn	3.79(.64)	3.75(.76)	3.54(.64)	3.76(.63)	3.77(.59)	3.18(.48)	3.82(.76)	3.71(.59)	3.33(.77)	3.46(.67)	3.88(.72)	3.11(.93)
CMO	>Mdn	4.45(.28)	4.73(.15)	4.33(.35)	4.43(.28)	4.17(.30)	3.65(.32)	4.30(.28)	3.99(.29)	4.43(.23)	3.55(.41)	4.63(.24)	4.11(.33)
	<Mdn	4.31(.56)	4.54(.50)	4.16(.46)	4.16(.44)	4.06(.39)	3.47(.45)	4.08(.56)	3.94(.39)	4.35(.44)	3.49(.45)	4.49(.40)	3.85(.43)
MME	>Mdn	3.89(.30)	3.86(.30)	3.30(.23)	3.77(.34)	3.81(.30)	2.89(.30)	3.71(.29)	3.53(.28)	3.23(.26)	3.60(.20)	4.04(.28)	2.97(.34)
	<Mdn	4.00(.34)	4.01(.33)	4.49(.38)	3.90(.40)	3.96(.32)	3.08(.48)	3.83(.38)	3.69(.36)	3.32(.42)	3.68(.40)	4.24(.30)	3.18(.40)
CME	>Mdn	4.04(.27)	4.30(.25)	3.68(.31)	3.88(.30)	3.79(.25)	2.86(.34)	3.77(.30)	3.49(.35)	4.04(.23)	3.12(.27)	4.11(.27)	3.33(.36)
	<Mdn	4.12(.37)	4.43(.27)	3.81(.29)	4.03(.43)	3.78(.40)	2.99(.49)	3.94(.32)	3.66(.38)	4.15(.24)	3.12(.40)	4.28(.26)	3.37(.51)

[a]MFO=Minority Female Officers; CFO=Caucasian Female Officers; MFE=Minority Female Enlisted; CFE=Caucasian Female Enlisted; MMO=Minority Male Officers; CMO=Caucasian Male Officers; MME=Minority Male Enlisted; CME=Caucasian Male Enlisted

groups, their perception of the state of EOC improves. The finding is true for three of the four officer groups (Minority Female Officers, Minority Male Officers, and Caucasian Male Officers). It does not hold for the Caucasian Female Officers nor for the two female enlisted groups. For the male enlisted groups, there is a negative relationship

between RI and climate. This negative relationship will be addressed in the discussion section of this paper.

Table 3

t Values and Significance Tests for Median Splits on the Representation Index (RI) for Climate Scales

			Scales											
Group[a]	df	Statistic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MFO	47	t	2.15	NS	2.45	NS	2.09	NS	2.52	3.43	NS	2.85	3.01	2.69
		p	.037		.018		.041		.015	.001		.007	.004	.010
CFO	51	t	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
		p												
MFE	109	t	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	2.33	NS
		p											.020	
CFE	108	t	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	2.11	NS
		p											0.04	
MMO	102	t	2.54	3.75	3.18	3.34	3.39	2.77	3.50	NS	NS	3.45	4.51	2.07
		p	.013	<.001	.002	.001	.001	.007	.001			.001	<.001	.041
CMO	117	t	NS	2.83	2.31	3.92	NS	2.50	2.76	NS	NS	NS	2.42	3.78
		p		.006	.022	<.001		.014	.007				.017	<.001
MME	130	t	NS	-2.74	-3.44	-2.09	-2.8	-2.72	-2.07	-2.82	NS	NS	-3.84	-3.19
		p		.007	.001	.040	.006	.008	.040	.006			<.001	.002
CME	130	t	NS	-2.93	-2.61	-2.26	NS	NS	-3.05	-2.99	-2.58	NS	-3.7	NS
		p		.004	.010	.025			.003	.003	.011		<.001	

Note: Negative t indicates higher RI is negatively related to climate.

[a]MFO=Minority Female Officers; CFO=Caucasian Female Officers; MFE=Minority Female Enlisted; CFE=Caucasian Female Enlisted; MMO=Minority Male Officers; CMO=Caucasian Male Officers; MME=Minority Male Enlisted; CME=Caucasian Male Enlisted

Hypothesis 2

The multivariate analysis of variance failed to support hypothesis 2. There was no significant effect for education level on the 12 MEOCS scales [Wilks' Lambda = .9939; $F(12, 2451) = 1.25$; NS)].

Discussion

While the results lend support to hypothesis 1 (higher representation of minority officer women improves their perception of EOC), there is clearly no support for hypothesis 2 (higher education level improves perceptions of EOC). Hypothesis 1 suggested that minority female officers bear a double, perhaps even triple, burden: they are high ranking women of color in a largely low rank, male, and white world. Hence, they should be more aware of increasing numbers of people with demographic characteristics similar to their own and perhaps find support in those groups. The same hypothesis also suggested that for this group it is not the raw number of their peers that is critical in determining their view of climate, but the contrast between that number and the population of the unit. The failure to find a significant relationship between the numbers of minority female officers and the EOC and the finding of such a relationship between the RI and EOC supports the hypothesis. Put another way, the minority female officer scans over her unit, and it is not the numbers of her peers that is important but the proportion of the unit that is made up of peers. As that proportion increases, the perception of a positive climate also increases for 8 of 12 scales.

It also seems reasonable to apply the same hypothesis to the case of the minority male officer. But, can it be used for Caucasian Male Officers? Probably not, we would argue. Such officers are generally highly represented in the units and predominate in the power positions. Previous studies (e.g., Dansby & Landis, 1991) have shown that, perhaps because they are usually in charge, Caucasian officers in general have a rosy picture of the state of EOC as compared to other groups. Hence, we would argue that as the proportion of white male officers increases, a consensual validation of a positive climate develops and is reinforced. In future years, as more minority officers attain power positions, this phenomenon may begin to reverse.

The two enlisted male groups provide a paradox. For these groups, as their proportion increases, climate becomes progressively more negative. A reasonable explanation is that the larger units with high numbers of enlisted personnel are likely to be ones with a combat mission. We know from previous probes (Landis, Dansby, & Tallarigo, in press) that such units have a less favorable perception of climate than ones with a support mission. So, the results for these two groups may be due to a confounding of unit size with unit mission.

The findings in the present study may help clarify the findings in Tallarigo's (1994) study. Tallarigo reported no relationship between women's representation and perceptions of EOC, even though higher ratios of women to men meant relatively fewer women saw themselves as victims of discrimination. The present results indicate that there is a relationship between representation and EOC, but it holds for minority officer women only.

The failure to find a relationship between military women's education level and perceptions of EOC (hypothesis 2), in contrast to a prediction based on findings by Terpstra and Cook (1985) and the United States Merit Systems Protection Board (1981, 1988), may be due to differences in the dependent variables. In the present study, we measured perceptions of climate; the previous researchers studied frequency of complaints filed. It is possible educated women are more likely to file complaints (perhaps due to greater sophistication regarding laws and complaint procedures), yet no more likely than less educated women to recognize (and report in surveys) an unfavorable EOC. Popovich (1988) notes a similar problem when trying to establish characteristics of sexual harassment using two types of studies: archival (e.g., complaint reports) and self-report (e.g., surveys).

Yet to be explored is the third hypothesis discussed in this study (i.e., that higher initial expectations of EOC may lead to less positive ratings of EOC if the initial expectations are unfulfilled). Unfortunately, the MEOCS database contains no measures of initial expectations. A separate study will be required to test this hypothesis. It may also be interesting in future research to explore the dynamics of the representation effect. What, in particular, mediates the effect? Is it related to leadership support, type of job the person performs, prior experience as a race/gender pioneer in nontraditional jobs, or organizational characteristics (e.g., mission or geographic location).

From an action viewpoint, the present results indicate that efforts to improve representation of minority officer women will improve the perceived EOC. This can have positive benefits for the organization, such as enhanced motivation and morale, perhaps resulting in enhanced satisfaction and greater contributions by minority officer women to the organization's mission.

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