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SEX DISCRIMINATION: DOES THE WOMAN GET THE JOB OR DOES THE BEST 'MAN' WIN?

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ABSTRACT

This exercise requires students Co make hiring decisions for traditional 'male jobs" (police officer) and traditional "female jobs" (nurses). In both cases male and female applicants are seeking the one open position. Both hiring organizations have an affirmative action plan. The police force is ninety- percent (90%) male and the hospital's nursing staff is ninety percent (90%) female. Different conditions are created whereby the gender of the best-qualified applicant is changed. The results for two conditioning, involving one hundred and eighteen (118) students, are provided; and alternative issues for class discussion are identified.

EXERCISE AND RESULTS

This exercise addresses the question of discrimination by requiring students to decide which of three different applicants for two different jobs they would hire. An indirect approach is taken to make the intent of the exercise less obvious to students and to encourage 'honest" responses. In the first situation, three applicants for a nurse's job are considered. Two are female arid one is mare; arid they are told that ninety percent (90%) of the nurses are female, that the hospital has an affirmative action plan and it wants to have a more equally represented workforce. The information provided is designed so that the one male applicant is the second best qualified applicant.

A second situation is provided, which is similar, except that it is a police force and ninety percent (90%) are male and the one female applicant is the second best applicant.

The students' decisions are then summarized on the blackboard. In recording their answers, the responses of the male and female students may be shown separately.

The exercise, which may be completed within fifteen (15) minutes, provides an excellent basis for discussing the issues of "righting past wrongs', adhering to espoused organizational policies and reverse discrimination as well as problems associated with the contradictory demands facing managers. That is, should he or she hire the best qualified applicant, which will most help that manager achieve his or her own and the organization's performance goals, or should the organization's stated policies and society's goals of fairness be followed?

An analysis of the results of the exercise indicates that although males (3 of 33) are no more likely than females (3 of 32) to choose a male nurse (x^2 0.00, $p>.95$), males (8 of 33) are more likely than females (3 of 32), to select a female police officer, even though the male is most qualified (x^2 = 11.03 $p<.001$).

Modifications to this exercise may be used as well. One modification would be to switch male and female names. That is, have a male name accompany the information that is provided for the best qualified nurse, and a female name accompany the information that is provided for the best qualified police officer. The results of the exercise could be used to discuss the idea of sex-role stereotyping. That is, how many (and of which sex) will hire (or refuse to hire) a nurse who is a males given he is the most qualified and will this percentage be different than for the hiring of a female police officer?

When this modification was used, nine of fifty-three (9 of 53) people still said they would hire the female for the nurse's job. However, only two of fifty-three (2 of 53) indicated that they would hire the male for the police job. (Both of these people also selected a female for the nurse's job.) These results suggest that there may be a greater sex-role stereotyping for traditionally 'female jobs" than for traditional "male jobs", particularly on the part of males. That is, males may be more accepting of women entering "male jobs" (e.g. police work), than they are for men to enter 'female jobs" (e.g. nurse's job).

Further analysis, based upon the data collected from both exercises, indicates a tendency for females to ignore affirmative action directives and to choose the best-qualified candidate, regardless of gender, more often than do males (x^2 3.50, $p<.075$). These results may be because the focus of the educational systems and the media have been on discrimination against women per se rather than gender-based discrimination in general, and thus the messages may have had a more pronounced effect on males. That is, males may feel targeted' by these messages to a greater degree than do women, possibly because they see themselves as the "offending" party and perceive the burden of redressing past wrongs as most appropriately their own (i.e., male "guile"). Females, however, may not share this burden and thus may be less likely to heed the messages and participate in gender-directed affirmative action programs. This hypothesis remains to be tested in future research. If it is supported, it may mean that educators will need to seek out more effective ways of involving women (as yell as men) in affirmative action pro grains.

This exercise may be further modified by having the second best qualified applicant described as a very lose second best. This person could be from either Group, i.e. from the under represented group (male nurse or female police officer), or the reverse. Another modification could delete the stated affirmative action plans of the organization. This could be lone to examine whether students will address the issue of disproportionate representation in the work force when they are not given the "clue' to do so.

Regardless of which modification(s) of this exercise is used, the resulting discussions should provide an interesting basis, and considerable involvement, for examining the issues of affirmative action, discrimination, stereotyping and/or sex-roles in the workplace.