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“In our department there is absolutely no discrimination of women or others.” Staff

Attitudes on Gender Quotas in a Belgian University

Jolien Voorspoels

Abstract

Though gender quotas are one of the policy measures used to address persistent gender inequality in academia, empirical studies on staff attitudes towards academic gender quotas are rare. In this case study of a Belgian university, I examine how the attitude towards gender quotas in decision-making bodies can be explained by attitudes towards gender equality and diversity policies. Using a 2014 survey of 469 academic and administrative staff members, I analyze their attitudes and sociodemographic variables through ordinal logistic regression models. The findings show that resistance towards gender quotas as a policy measure can be understood through respondents' gender stereotypes and the denial of gender inequality in contemporary society. Furthermore, women and respondents who supported diversity policies were more likely to support gender quotas. Additionally, women assistants, humanities and social sciences staff and other/external staff were also more likely to be supporters. The results imply that enhanced explicit communication on gender inequality, in academia and beyond, could enhance the implementation success of gender quotas.

Keywords: gender quotas, staff attitudes, higher education, policy, decision-making

In response to gender inequality, gender quotas are implemented at different levels of academia as one of multiple gender-equality policy measures, a set ranging from voluntary self-governance to legal initiatives (e.g. European Commission, 2013; Husu, 2005). Gender quotas

and other affirmative/positive-action measures¹ have been applied to students' admissions (Rotthoff, 2008; Suk, 2013), staff recruitment (Zehnter, 2012), and, more commonly, the appointment of decision-making bodies (Peterson, 2015; Schandevyl, Woodward, Valgaeren, & De Metsenaere, 2013; Zinovyeva & Bagues, 2010). This not only applies to universities but also includes (inter)national funding agencies, advisory boards, and public committees (Husu, 2005). In this article, I examine staff attitudes towards gender quotas for decision-making bodies at universities. I question how staff thinks about gender quotas as a policy measure and how these attitudes are embedded in attitudes towards gender equality and diversity policies.

Gender quotas in academia remain controversial. This is clear from the normative debates about gender relations in academia, the core values and practices of academia, and the way gender quotas would interact with these values either in a positive or a negative manner (e.g. Andersen, 2010; Peterson, 2015; Schandevyl *et al.*, 2013; Zehnter, 2012). Opponents argue that gender quotas would undermine an academic tradition of self-governance based on principles such as meritocracy, excellence, and neutral allocation procedures. Proponents emphasize that such “universal” conceptualizations of merit, excellence, and neutrality are gendered to begin with and, therefore, that gender quotas could challenge gendered organizations and their processes to enhance justice and ethics therein (Andersen, 2010; Schandevyl *et al.*, 2013; Zehnter, 2012). In addition, empirical research contributes limited and mixed findings on the effects of gender quotas. For instance, Bagues, Zinovyeva, and Sylos-Labini (2010; 2014) found that an increase of the number of women evaluators in academic committees did not necessarily affect the success rate of women candidates positively in Spain and Italy. Regarding another potential effect of gender quotas on its beneficiaries, Zehnter

¹ Affirmative action is predominantly associated with the legal context in the US and, by extension, the Anglosphere, while positive action is the dominant terminology in the European context. They are both umbrella terms for measures targeting specific sociodemographic groups to establish greater equality. I will reference previous research accordingly; my own focus lies on gender quotas as a form of positive action.

(2012) found that while arguments about quotas did not change over time, the stigma of incompetence towards quota beneficiaries did seem to fade.

As I will discuss in the next section, the empirical knowledge on attitudes to gender quotas is extremely limited. Therefore, I contribute to a greater understanding of staff attitudes by bridging and adding to the literatures on affirmative action and gender equality policies in academia. First, I do so by extending empirical research on the implementation phase as extant research predominantly focuses on diagnosis and adoption phases. Second, I include all staff members of the case university instead of focusing on women as beneficiaries or on students. Including all staff is important, since examining only a section of the population might result in an underestimation of how individuals could feel negatively affected by the measure and could engage in (in)formal resistance practices, which can obstruct the quotas' formal implementation process. The third and perhaps most crucial contribution lies in testing insights from the mostly American affirmative action research in a West European context, where gender quotas are in use.

As gender inequality and resistance seem to persist, the underlying aim of this research was to investigate how attitudes towards gender equality and diversity policies can predict support for, or resistance to, gender quotas. I hypothesized that opposition to gender quotas expresses a broader rejection of gender-equality promoting measures, based on an underlying denial of gender inequality. Inversely, I assumed support for gender quotas would go hand in hand with support for diversity policies. By testing these hypotheses, this research hopes to contribute to the understanding of the adoption and implementation of gender quotas within academia. If gender quotas prove to be controversial because the arguments underlying their adoption were not accepted, then it may be important to focus efforts towards gender equality on the underlying factors rather than on gender quotas themselves.

This article starts by theorizing attitudes towards gender quotas, gender equality, and diversity policies, and by formulating the hypotheses. The second section presents the methodology and data. In the third and fourth section, the empirical results are presented and discussed. The last section concludes the article by discussing the limitations of current research and suggestions for future research.

Gender Quotas and Attitudes

The limited research on experiences with gender quotas has predominantly focused on its beneficiaries, in casu women. It has shown that Dutch women professors preferred career-development measures to quotas. While the latter stand for an organizational approach to promoting women, the former measures focus on coaching and training individual women to develop their professional skills (Willemsen and Sanders, 2007, as cited in Castaño *et al.*, 2010). In Sweden, women appointed to the *Tham* quota positions as research assistants reported a lack of institutional and financial support. Carl Tham, Minister of Education, had initiated 31 full professorship positions for women but this political intervention was met with institutional resistance (Mählck, 2006, as cited in Castaño *et al.*, 2010). The broader literature on gender-equality policies targeting academia also covers views and experiences of “elite” stakeholders, such as academic managers. Carvalho *et al.*'s findings suggest that top managers are more aware of their agency in establishing gender equality when formal equal opportunities and/or affirmative action policies are in place (2013). In Sweden, women managers were aware of their role as active and symbolic change agents, although they also indicated they would resist equal-representation policies if these hindered individual women's careers (Peterson, 2015). Bagilhole (2002), however, found that different responses to equal opportunities – characterised as confusion, collusion, cynicism, and contrariness – could potentially hamper the effective operation of equal-opportunities policies. In a rare study including all university employees,

Deem and Morley (2006) examined the employees' views on equality policies and their opinion on UK universities' shifting notions of equality and diversity from redistributive to recognitional forms. They found that the recognitional form highlighted a depoliticised take on diversity as management strategy, instead of addressing structural inequality in the organization.

However, we still need to understand the attitudes and factors which underlie and mediate the support for gender quotas in academia. Therefore, I turn to affirmative-action literature. Attitudes research has primarily focused on affirmative action in the United States. While gender quotas are an illegal category in the USA variety of affirmative action plans (Kravitz, 2008), the affirmative action literature offers us specific insights and therefore the opportunity to test these in a West European context where gender quotas are legal. Reviewing affirmative action literature, Kravitz (2008) summarized that, aside from the strength of the particular affirmative action plan, there were several attributes of respondents that could predict their attitudes towards affirmative action: sociodemographic (racioethnicity, sex/gender), opinion (racism and sexism, political ideology, belief that workplace discrimination exists, social dominance), and mediating variables (beliefs about fairness and the implications of affirmative action for self-interest). In this article I particularly follow up on two opinion variables as I study how attitudes towards the issue at hand (gender inequality) and the policy framework (diversity policies) predict staff attitudes towards gender quotas.

Gender Equality

A resistant attitude towards gender quotas as a policy measure could originate from specific beliefs about gender and gender equality. As Lombardo and Mergaert report in their study of gender trainings, resistance is “a phenomenon that emerges during processes of change—such as when gender equality policies are implemented—and that is aimed at maintaining the status

quo and opposing change” (2013, p. 299). Such resistance can be based on sexist attitudes. Previous research of faculty members’ attitudes in the USA and Australia found negative effects for sexism on support for affirmative action (Konrad & Hartmann, 2001; Konrad & Spitz, 2003).

However, these studies were based upon traditional attitudes towards women, measuring the effect of respondents believing in classical gender roles. In contrast, I argue that, in a context of more subtle and covert sexism, the Modern/Neosexism scales (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995) are more fitting to measure sexism and to predict attitudes towards policies addressing gender inequality (Dierckx, Motmans, & Meier, 2017; Swim & Cohen, 1997). Both are based upon the concept of Modern Racism, but the Modern Sexism scale focuses on the denial of continuous discrimination against women, while the Neosexism scale aims to capture the opposition to feminist demands and to progressive policies supporting women (Becker & Swim, 2011). Resistance to affirmative action may actually reflect a lack of understanding of still prevailing gender inequality, rather than reflecting any conscious resistance to gender equality. When understanding is lacking, affirmative action or other gender-equality policies can be perceived as exaggerated or even biased against the dominant social groups (Swim & Cohen, 1997). In European academia, Zehnter and Kirchler (2015) found that Austrian medical students more often thought quotas for women to be unnecessary, unfair, and discriminatory than hypothetical quotas for men. These findings uncovered implicit attitudes towards quotas for both women and men, and manifested a denial of discrimination against women in academia. With this in mind, I expect that respondents with modern sexist attitudes consider gender quotas less important, as they believe gender equality already exists or that gender inequality is mainly caused by individual, gendered choices and behavior; neither belief requiring organizational policy intervention. Hence the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The higher the staff score on modern sexism, the lower the attributed importance of gender quotas as a policy measure in academia.

Diversity policies

Gender quotas in academia tend to be implemented as part of a broader (gender) equality-policy framework (European Commission, 2013). Logically, we could then assume the attitude towards such frameworks to be an indicator of support for gender quotas as a policy measure. Positive action programs have been adopted in European academia since the 1980s, but recently diversity management has also entered policy discourses at European universities, mirroring an earlier shift in the Anglosphere (Ferree & Zippel, 2015; Klein, 2016). Diversity management presents differences in organizations as strategic, profitable assets, and takes into account a variety of differences beyond the most common identity references (gender and ethnicity), such as sexual orientation and skills (Bleijenbergh, Peters, & Poutsma, 2010; Pringle & Strachan, 2015; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). In analogy to affirmative action studies, diversity attitudes have been studied as a dependent variable through examining the predicting and mediating role of sociodemographic, organizational-unit, and opinion variables (e.g. Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Park & Denson, 2009). Researchers have also studied how individuals' diversity attitudes (van Dick, van Knippenberg, Hagele, Guillaume, & Brodbeck, 2008) and organizational policy support (Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000) affect individual and organizational outcomes, such as group identification, career satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The role of diversity attitudes in supporting gender quotas as a policy measure, however, has not yet been researched.

As the conceptual debate on the meaning of diversity and diversity management is ongoing (e.g. Pringle & Strachan, 2015; Zanoni *et al.*, 2010), there is still a great deal of ambivalence. For instance, consider the possible shift away from “historically excluded groups,

wherein minorities and women may be lost amidst the wealth of what constitutes diversity” (Flores & Rodriguez, 2006, p. 309). This uncertainty towards the meaning of diversity could also lead to different understandings and degrees of support for gender-equality policies. The embedding of gender quotas in a diversity policy context might thus appear either conflicting or logical depending on one’s understanding of the principles of diversity policies. Empirically testing the relation between diversity policies and gender quotas attitudes for the first time, I hypothesize a positive effect. If respondents oppose diversity policies² as a policy framework, I expect that they would resist more targeted measures such as gender quota. Hence the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The higher the staff value diversity policies at the university, the higher the attributed importance of gender quotas as a policy measure in academia.

Attitudes towards gender quotas

The two aforementioned hypotheses are not isolated from each other. When modern sexist attitudes and attitudes towards diversity policies combine in different ways, this could lead to different degrees of support for gender quotas. For instance, one might not support diversity policies at work, but might be very supportive of gender equality as a policy goal. In this case, gender quotas could still be important to the respondent as a policy measure. Following from the first two hypotheses, I expect that respondents are most supportive when they value diversity policies and exhibit no or low modern sexist attitudes. Hence the third hypothesis:

² I will use the concept of diversity “policies” instead of diversity “management,” since this aligns more with the institutional discourse of the case study.

Hypothesis 3: When university staff score low on modern sexism and value diversity policies (highly), gender quotas as a policy measure in academia is best supported (compared to other constellations of the two attitudes).

In sum, I hypothesize that attitudes towards gender quotas as a policy measure depend on how respondents think about the issue of gender inequality and the diversity policy framework.

Methods and Data

Given its political context, the University of Antwerp as one of the public universities in Belgium provides an interesting case to investigate the research question and hypotheses. Belgium is a front-runner in terms of gender quotas, since it was the first European state to adopt electoral gender quotas for all political levels back in 1994. Furthermore, gender quotas apply to advisory committees as well as to the boards of listed and state-owned companies (Meier, 2014). The most recent gender quotas of 2012 were decreed by the Flemish Ministers for Education and Science Policy, which are sub-state competencies in Belgium, and targeted the decision-making boards of Flanders' public universities (Ghent University, Hasselt University, and University of Antwerp).³ Since October 2013, academic decision-making bodies, on both centralised (e.g. Board of Governors and Research Board) and decentralised levels (such as faculty or department boards and selection committees) are required to implement gender quotas of maximum two-thirds members of the same gender (Meier, 2014). Within this specific Flemish and Belgian context, I investigated the University of Antwerp, a midrange,⁴ and internationally an average-sized, university in Flanders.

³ Decree of 13 July 2012, *Belgisch Staatsblad*, 17 September 2012. Decree of 13 July 2012, *Belgisch Staatsblad*, 8 August 2012. Decree of 13 July 2012, *Belgisch Staatsblad*, 8 August 2012.

⁴ The University of Antwerp employs almost 5,400 staff and teaches circa 20,400 students, while Ghent University and Hasselt University respectively employ circa 9,000 and 1,300 staff and teach circa 41,000 and 6,400 students (2016).

I conducted an online survey of all University of Antwerp staff.⁵ Through an email from the Human Resources department, 5,212 staff members were invited to participate in the bilingual survey (Dutch/English), of whom 808 responded (cf. sample discussion below). Data was collected between 18 November and 15 December 2014, with one reminder halfway through.

Measures

Importance of gender quotas as a policy measure.

This dependent variable was measured through the item “an obligation to have at least one third of the boards and commissions of the university made up of members of another gender.” Respondents were asked to indicate how important they considered gender quotas on a 5-point Likert scale (very unimportant - very important). The item was part of a series of initiatives regarding diversity and equal opportunities, including both implemented and suggested policy measures.

Modern sexism.

This scale originates from Dierckx *et al.* (2014, 2017) and tests hypothesis 1. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (totally disagree – totally agree). Following the outcome of a factor analysis, the subscales *Gender stereotypes (MS_GS)* (items 1 to 3, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .653$) and *Denial (MS_D)* (items 4 to 6, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .811$) were

⁵ This was part of the European FP7 project EGERA. For more technical information about the survey design I refer to the EGERA report: http://www.egera.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Report_on_the_Pilot_study_on_gender_culture_in_academia.pdf

constructed as summated scales, scaled back to zero as the lowest value (see Appendix Table 1). The higher the scores, the more sexist attitudes the respective respondent held.

Attitude towards diversity policies (DP).

To test hypothesis 2, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree) regarding statements about working in a diverse environment and about the university's policy-making role. The items in this question and in the broader survey clearly suggested that equal opportunities and diversity were not only about gender, but also about ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and so on. From a factor analysis of 12 items I extracted one scale, consisting of 7 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .875$, see Appendix Table 2), which I constructed by summing the items and rescaling to zero. The higher the score, the more the respective respondent valued diversity policies.

Modern sexist denial and attitude towards diversity policies (MS_D & DP).

I have constructed this nominal variable by recoding and combining the previous two scales to test hypothesis 3. To limit the percentage of empty cells while running an ordinal logistic regression, I first recoded both scales in a binary way: modern sexist denial (low: 0 to 6; high: 7 to 12) and attitude towards diversity policies (low: 0 to 14; high: 15 to 28). The new variable sorted respondents along four combinations, in which combination 4 was the base case of scoring high on attitude towards diversity policies and low on modern sexist denial. The other combinations then scored low on both (1), scored high on both (2), and scored low on attitude towards diversity policies and high on modern sexist denial (3). I consider the base case the most progressive and combination 3 the most conservative.

	DP low	DP high
MS_D low	Combination 1	Combination 4 – base case
MS_D high	Combination 3	Combination 2

Finally, the analysis included four sociodemographic variables (*base case*): gender, self-identified (*Dummy Woman*), age (*18-30*), staff category (*Administrative-technical personnel*), and work unit (*Sciences*).

Analytical techniques

To decide on the construction of the scales, the scores were factor analyzed using principal-axis factoring and varimax-rotation techniques with Kaiser normalization (Van Wesemael & De Metsenaere, 2009). No indication of multicollinearity between independent variables was flagged by the condition index and tolerance values (Janssens, Wijnen, De Pelsmacker, & Van Kenhove, 2008). I used ordinal logistic-regression analyses to predict the outcome of the ordinal dependent variable. I tested the hypotheses in separate models, as entering all independent variables into one model led to too many empty cells in the calculation, thereby limiting the ability to calculate a fitting model (Lammers, Pelzer, Hendrickx, & Eisinga, 2007; Strand, Cadwallader, & Firth, 2011). To convert the log odds into odds ratios, I took the exponent of $-\beta$ based on the cumulative logit model (see Appendix Table 3 & 4):

$$\log \frac{p(Y_i \leq j)}{p(Y_i > j)} = \alpha_j - \beta X_i$$

Sample

After data cleaning, I conducted the analyses based on 469 observations (response rate of 9%, before cleaning 15.5%). More than two thirds of the respondents identified as women (Table 2). As men are slightly in the majority at the university (51.18%), women were thus overrepresented in the sample. One third of the sample was between 18 and 40 years old (62.9%, table 3), which revealed an overrepresentation of younger staff – between 18 and 30 years old – of 35.2% to the 28.97% in the total university population. This was mostly accounted for by an underrepresentation of staff between 51 and 60 years old (13.6% to 18%). Age groups were recoded to 18-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60+ for analysis. Respondents encompassed both academic and administrative staff in all working units of the university. In comparison to the population, administrative-technical and assistant academic staff were overrepresented (41.4% to 24.3% and 13% to 5.7%, table 4), while non-statutory academic staff – still one third of the sample – were underrepresented in the sample. Mirroring the sample of administrative-technical staff, respondents from administrative units are also overrepresented, together with respondents from the four humanities and social sciences faculties. Staff from the two health sciences faculties and from other university institutes or external affiliations are underrepresented (Table 5). The survey seemed to appeal more to women, younger, administrative-technical, assistant academic, and humanities and social sciences staff, which possibly indicates another level of involvement regarding the topics of equal opportunities and diversity. As ordinal logistic regression is based on probabilities and odds, it was not necessary to add weighing coefficients to the models. Since no significant effect was found for age, or subsequently for the intersection with gender, I will not discuss this further. Concerning staff category and work unit, the interaction models with the independent attitude scales did not result in reliable model fits or in significant interaction effects. For this reason, this will not be further discussed either.

TABLE 2
Respondents and Population by Gender

	<i>N</i> (469)	<i>N</i> %	<i>P</i> (5212)	<i>P</i> %
Man	141	30.1	2668	51.19
Woman	327	69.7	2544	48.81
I feel otherwise	1	0.2		

TABLE 3
Respondents and Population by Age

	<i>N</i> (469)	<i>N</i> %	<i>P</i> (5250)	<i>P</i> %
18-24 years	40	8.5	294	5.6
25-30 years	125	26.7	1227	23.37
31-40 years	130	27.7	1492	28.42
41-50 years	86	18.3	1000	19.05
51-60 years	64	13.6	945	18
Older than 60 years	24	5.1	292	5.56

TABLE 4
Respondents and Population by Staff Category

	<i>N</i> (469)	<i>N</i> %	<i>P</i> (5224)	<i>P</i> %
ATP – Administrative Technical Personnel	194	41.4	1271	24.3
AAP – Assistant Academic Personnel	61	13	297	5.7
BAP – Non-statutory Academic Personnel	150	32	2844	54.4
ZAP 1 – Assistant/Associate Professors	34	7.2	812*	15.5*
ZAP 2 – (Full) Professors	30	6.4		

* Total ZAP population

TABLE 5
Respondents and Population by Work Unit

	<i>N</i> (469)	<i>N</i> %	<i>P</i> (5250)	<i>P</i> %
Administration	98	20.9	646	12.3
Other/External	42	9	693	13.2
Health Sciences	77	16.4	1524	29
Humanities and Social Sciences	137	29.2	1028	19.6
Sciences	115	24.5	1359	25.9

Results

Gender quotas were thought (very) important by a small majority of the university respondents (54.7%). Table 6 shows that nearly a quarter (22.6%) considered them (very) unimportant, while just as many respondents (22.8%) remained undecided.⁶ The latter group might have been even larger, as respondents could have left this question open and therefore have not been included in the data analysis. I analyzed staff attitudes towards diversity policies and gender equality to help us comprehend this variation.

TABLE 6
Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent Variable Importance of Gender Quotas as Policy Measure

	<i>N</i> (469)	<i>N</i> %
Very unimportant	37	7.9
Unimportant	69	14.7
Neither unimportant/nor important	107	22.8
Important	194	41.4
Very important	62	13.3

The findings in Table 7 indicate that the respondents were on average (20.76) supportive of diversity policies and held no strong sexist attitudes (3.85 and 2.98), although on average women were more supportive and less sexist than men (21.29 to 19.54 (DP), 3.36 to 4.98 (MS_D) and 2.73 to 3.56 (MS_GS)). However, even within this rather positive sample of respondents I could analyze the effects of the respective attitudes on the attributed importance of gender quotas.

⁶ These results resemble the attitudes of staff questioned through a similar survey in 2009 (Stuurgroep Gelijke Kansen, 2010).

TABLE 7
Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Used in the Analysis

	Mean	SD	Women Mean (SD)	Men Mean (SD)	Range
Importance of gender quotas (1-5)	3.37	1.126	3.56	2.94*** ^a	(1,5)
Attitude towards diversity policies (0-28)	20.76	4.980	21.29 (4.332)	19.54 (6.067)* ^a	(0,28)
Modern sexism denial (0-6)	3.85	2.405	3.36 (2.141)	4.98 (2.602) *** ^a	(0,6)
Modern sexism gender stereotypes (0-6)	2.98	2.037	2.73 (1.965)	3.56 (2.088)**	(0,6)

Notes. Means compared by sex:

*, ** significant (2-tailed) at 0.005 and 0.001 level.

^a Equal variances not assumed

The respective estimate parameters and model assumptions' test results can be found in Appendix Table 3. I will now discuss the results per hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1 - modern sexism

I hypothesized that the higher the staff's score on modern sexism, the lower the attributed importance to gender quotas as a policy measure would be, which the data confirmed. First, respondents who thought more in terms of gender stereotypes (MS_GS), even if of a benevolent⁷ nature, were 1.19 more likely to consider gender quotas less important. However, this effect could only explain the variation for 3.8%. Second, the effect of modern sexist denial (MS_D) was on average moderated by the respondent being a man or a woman, the effect being stronger for men than women. The odds of considering gender quotas less important for respondents who increasingly did not recognize gender inequality as a prevalent problem in

⁷ Benevolent sexism entails – subjectively – positive gender stereotypes which reproduce gender order in society. For example, see appendix table 1, items on cherishing and protecting women.

society were 1.60, if a man, and 1.19, if a woman. This interaction effect model could predict 19% of the variation in attributed importance to gender quotas. So while both gender stereotypes and a denial of gender inequality are confirmed as negative predictors, I find that the latter has a stronger power in explaining attributed importance to gender quotas.

Hypothesis 2 – attitude towards diversity policies

I hypothesized that the higher the staff values diversity policies, the higher the attributed importance of gender quotas as policy measure would be. As proportional odds could not be assumed in this model, I controlled for the odds ratios for each threshold of the dependent variable through separate binary logistic regressions (see Appendix Table 4) (Strand *et al.*, 2011). The results show that the odds for considering gender quotas less important were 0.83 for respondents who valued diversity policies more. This indicated actual higher odds for considering gender quotas important. Recounting the highest threshold in the binary logistic regression (0.75), this effect was even stronger when predicting the difference between considering gender quotas very important and the lower categories. I hereby confirm the hypothesis that respondents who were more supportive of diversity policies were more likely to support gender quotas as a policy measure and this effect accounts for 20.4% of the variation.

Hypothesis 3 – modern sexist denial and attitude towards diversity policies

According to the third hypothesis, I expected that combining a low modern sexist denial attitude with a positive attitude towards diversity policies would imply the best chance for supporting gender quotas as a policy measure, which the data confirmed. Reflecting the previous results, the model also included an interaction effect with gender and could predict 15.1% of the variation. It is important to note that, following the construction of this nominal variable, 390 respondents (79%) were sorted in the base-case group as “most progressive” and only 19 in the

third or “most conservative” group (4%). Overall, I note that the sample was supportive of diversity policies and showed low tendencies towards modern sexist denial. The gender variable had a main effect in the model. Men were 2.08 times more likely than women to consider gender quotas less important. Also a significant main effect was that respondents who scored low on both attitude scales were 4.65 times more likely to consider gender quotas less important than respondents from the base-case group. Reflecting the significant interaction effect of gender with the modern sexist denial subscale, I found that men scoring low on attitude towards diversity policies and high on modern sexist denial were 13.79 times more likely to consider gender quotas less important compared to respondents in the base category. No similar interaction effect was found for women. There was no significant difference between respondents who combined a positive attitude towards diversity policies with either a low or a high score on the modern sexist denial subscale. The results suggest that diverse combinations of attitudes towards diversity policies and gender inequality have various effects on the attributed importance to gender quotas.

Lastly, being consistent with previous research and as reflected in the discussed models, it was more likely that women considered gender quotas an important policy measure than men. The odds of considering gender quotas less important were 2.65 higher for men than women. The gender of respondents as independent variable can predict 5.9% of the variation in attributed importance to gender quotas. Furthermore, staff category can predict 2.6% and in an interaction with gender 8.5% of the variation in attributed importance to gender quotas. In the first model, the odds of considering gender quotas less important were 2.67 higher for (full) professors than for administrative-technical staff. The interaction model indicates that the effect of staff category is also dependent on gender. The predictive effect of being an academic assistant on the attributed importance to gender quotas is positive for women (0.47), yet

negative for men (1.61). The effect of the work unit does not interact with gender. This variable can explain 4.4% of the variation. In comparison to respondents with a background in science, it was more likely that respondents from the humanities and social sciences and from other/external units considered gender quotas more important as can be read in the respective odds (0.58 and 0.24).

Discussion

The likelihood of considering gender quotas an important policy measure is thus influenced by the respondents' adherence to benevolent gender stereotypes, recognition of gender inequality, attitude towards diversity policies, gender, staff category, and work unit. First, the negative effects of modern sexism complement the existing literature on affirmative action at American (Konrad & Spitz, 2003) and Australian universities (Konrad & Hartmann, 2001). Konrad, Hartman, and Spitz (2001; 2003) found that, among other predictors, traditional attitudes towards women and a belief in the existence of gender discrimination mediated the effect of gender on affirmative-action attitudes. My case study shows that the subtler benevolent gender stereotypes are also predictors of gender-quotas support. Whereas men are on average more sexist than women, gender does not interact with this effect. The denial of gender inequality in society is a stronger predictor, however, playing out stronger for men than women. These results imply that support for gender quotas is lower when gender inequality is not (or no longer) perceived as a problem. Following Swim and Cohen (1997) and Zehnter and Kirchler (2015), we can explain such a denial of or lack of insight in gender inequality as resulting in a perception of gender quotas as redundant. Second, the finding that diversity policy attitudes were a positive outcome predictor contributes to the existing literature, as there is no comparable empirical material available yet. Third, the different attitudes of women and men are also consistent with previous research. Women in Belgian and international universities are more favorable towards

gender quotas or affirmative action than men (Flores & Rodriguez, 2006; Meulders, O’Dorchai, & Simeu, 2012; Van Wesemael & De Metsenaere, 2009). Affirmative action researchers point out explanatory factors for this difference, such as self-interest and experiences of discrimination, as well as, as discussed above, traditional attitudes towards women and a belief in the existence of discrimination (e.g. Konrad & Hartmann, 2001; Konrad & Spitz, 2003). These factors could also explain the interaction effect of gender and staff category in the case of assistant academic staff. Women currently constitute the majority within this group which could lead men assistants to consider gender quotas unnecessary, while women assistants might also take other aspects of gender inequality into account leading them to support gender quotas more. Fourth, I found that (full) professors were less likely to support gender quotas as a policy measure. They are professors of the two highest academic ranks and therefore often involved in academic decision-making and governance. I would suggest that the opposing gender quotas arguments concerning meritocracy, excellence and neutrality resonate with their organizational experiences. As I will discuss in the next section, knowledge on structural gender inequality is still ambiguously met by academic managers. Fifth, staff from the humanities and social sciences and from other/external units attributed more importance to gender quotas. It would be interesting to further research how effects of staff category and work units can be explained. I expect that different experiences and perceptions of work (through individual work status and organizational culture) and of gender inequality (including vertical and horizontal segregation) in the university play a role in explaining support variations between and within certain sociodemographic groups. In this light, personal views on work and gender inequality probably influenced which respondents participated in the survey. As the sample is biased towards those respondent groups who were more likely to support gender quotas, I assume the overall university population to be less likely to support gender quotas.

What do these results tell us regarding gender equality and the implementation of gender equality policies? Given the finding that support for gender quotas is lower when respondents presume there is no inequality, I suggest that clear communication about existing structural inequalities could increase staff support for gender quotas. As long as there is no (clear) problem in the minds of staff, policy measures such as gender quotas will appear unnecessary or even conflicting with organizational values such as meritocracy, excellence, and neutrality (Andersen, 2010; Schandevyl *et al.*, 2013; Zehnter, 2012). Thus, communication on why gender quotas are implemented should be explicitly linked to insights into the structural gender inequality it aims to counter.

However, increasing knowledge on gender inequality can be an ambivalent process in academia. Research on gender inequality is still met with resistance and bias, even in academia. For instance, Handley *et al.* (2015) found that men, especially STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) faculty, are more reluctant than women to accept the results of research on gender bias in STEM fields. van den Brink (2015) uncovered defensive patterns on the part of academic managers when she presented on gendered practices in academic recruitment and selection. They would laud gender equality in theory. Yet, by acknowledging gender inequality as a problem but locating it in the past or in other organizations, they avoided their own responsibility for, and commitment to, structural change. Academic managers also challenged the validity of van den Brink's research. This attitude allowed academic stakeholders to hold on to the status quo instead of reflecting on gendered norms, practices, and power structures, on both individual and organizational levels (van den Brink, 2015). In a case study intervention at an American university, Bird also uncovered paradoxical stances towards knowledge on gendered structures in some men stakeholders. While almost all said they were committed to gender equality, they did not perceive the discussed issues as gendered. She concluded that if decision-making stakeholders "accept as valid only those strategies that

assume that the problems to be resolved are all individual in form, strategies aimed at altering structures or systematic practices will never be implemented” (Bird, 2011, pp. 221-222). Kelan (2009) also recognised the construction of discrimination as an individual problem concerning singular instances of, mostly past, events. She characterised this navigation of the prevalence of gender discrimination and the image of one’s own organization as gender-neutral as “gender fatigue.” If academic managers are resistant to knowledge about gender inequality and to organizational approaches to change, the question remains how the remaining university staff can be expected to support such policy measures. It is here that the connection between gender equality and diversity policy attitudes of this study can make a contribution. First, it is important that the problem at hand is acknowledged, and second, just how this problem is perceived and framed will impact the choice for certain policy measures. Critical diversity scholars have already warned against an individual, economical approach to diversity – an umbrella term for sociodemographic characteristics, abilities, and skills to be seen as assets – which can lose sight of any structural power analysis or inequalities between sociodemographic groups (Klein, 2016; Zanoni *et al.*, 2010).

In light of this discussion on (resistance to) knowledge about the issue and policy frameworks at stake, the way I presented and measured attitudes towards gender quotas was limited to the formal principle, namely the obligation to obtain at least a one-third two-third gender balance in decision-making compositions. Arguably, *who* holds *what* kind of knowledge about the gender quota decree and subsequent implementation at the university could play a (mediating) role in the variation of attributed importance. For instance, in her experimental studies, Zehnter (2012) found that good knowledge about quotas lessened negative stigmatization of women beneficiaries. Yet, the timeframe of my case study possibly interfered with knowledge accumulation. The decree of 2012 offered one year before commissions and boards had to comply in October 2013. Respondents were questioned about their attitudes in

fall 2014 and were not reminded of the specific formal context. Lack of knowledge about the policy measure could explain why a quarter of them remained undecided. This means that academic and administrative managers, representatives, and (candidate) members involved in composing decision-making bodies had a knowledge advantage. Though, the difference of attributed importance between (full) professors and administrative-technical personnel and the above discussed resistance towards knowledge on structural gender inequality would suggest that the knowledge effect is ambivalent regarding support of or resistance to gender quotas. Thus, in addition to studying the effect of the different staff categories and work units, it would be interesting to include knowledge of gender quotas as variable in future research and to apply a longitudinal approach to untangle discussed ambivalences. Furthermore, as the overall survey focused on the organizational context of the university, respondents were not reminded of and not questioned about the central role of the government in decreeing gender quotas. In addition to the effect of attitudes towards certain policy frameworks, attitudes towards who adopts specific policy measures within such frameworks could further our understanding of support or resistance to these measures. In the case of *Tham* quota, this top-down ministerial intervention was met with institutional resistance and was therefore limited in its implementation (Mählck, 2006, as cited in Castaño *et al.*, 2010). In the Flemish case, all five Flemish rectors resisted the proposed gender quotas of the government – questioning the feasibility and effectiveness – but turned this into a broader effort to enhance gender equality by establishing gender action plans (VLIR High Level Task Force Gender, 2013). This brings us to organizational governance. As the gender action plan initiative of the Flemish universities show, gender quotas are but one policy measure to enhance gender equality. Although broader attitudes towards gender equality and diversity policies help us understand attitudes towards gender quotas in decision-making, we should be careful with the reverse relation. Resistance for a specific policy measure – gender quotas – does not necessarily entail individual or organizational resistance to other gender

equality or diversity initiatives. Furthermore, I investigated attitudes towards one type of gender quotas. I expect that attitudes towards a governmental gender quota decree targeting recruitment would be met with higher resistance than the type I have studied. While the latter target compositions of decision-making boards, the former would target the actual decision outcomes of these boards and commissions. Arguably, this could be perceived as even more invasive to a tradition of self-governance and related values of meritocracy, excellence, and neutrality. For this reason, it would be interesting to include not only attitudes towards state intervention but also perceptions of organizational values as potential explanatory/mediating factors of support of or resistance to gender quotas.

To conclude, Benschop and van den Brink (2014) have emphasized that resistance is inevitable, as power is inherently at play when implementing gender quotas. Not only does the implementation of gender quotas often require the use of hierarchical power, e.g. top-down decisions or sanctions, gender quotas also challenge the status quo of certain positions, interests, and values, such as fairness and quality. However, Benschop and van den Brink (2014) argue that these resistances can actually be useful in organizational change processes. They could start an open debate on values and how these are constructed, possibly rendering practices of discrimination and inequalities visible again. Understanding the individual staff attitudes underlying resistance towards gender quotas can inform such a debate in greater detail. While the results cannot be generalized without a comparative or sector-specific valorization of the hypotheses, I believe that these findings, taking into account perceptions of the problem and policy framework, can supplement existing thinking about the support for, and resistance towards, gender quotas both at other universities and beyond academic organizations.

Conclusion

Gender quotas are controversial within academia, where they are seen as breaching the core values of meritocracy and objectivity. In this article, I used ordinal logistic regression models to research predictors of support for, or resistance towards, gender quotas in decision-making bodies. Although almost a quarter of the staff in the case study considered gender quotas to be a/n (very) unimportant policy measure, a small majority of respondents considered them (very) important, and close to another quarter was rather undecided. Based on the sample composition, I assumed that the overall population is less likely to favor gender quotas. Which attitudes can help us understand these varying levels of support? Denying persistent gender inequality in contemporary society and, to a lesser extent, holding on to benevolent gender stereotypes negatively affect the support levels. Additionally, supporters of diversity policies, women (assistants), and staff from respectively the humanities and social sciences and other/external units are more likely to support gender quotas as a policy measure. Based upon these results, it is important for managers who want to successfully target gender inequality to highlight the underlying reason for adopting and implementing the policy, namely structural gender inequality, so as to increase the legitimacy of the measures throughout the organization.

There are a few limitations to this first analysis of the staff attitudes towards gender quotas at a Belgian university. First of all, as discussed, self-selection bias hampers the external validity of the study. The overrepresentation of women, young, administrative-technical, assistant academic, and humanities and social sciences staff could already indicate a different level of awareness to the topics of gender equality and diversity policies. However, I have controlled the analyses for these sociodemographic variables, and the study included all staff members, not only academics, nor only elite stakeholders or gender-quota beneficiaries. Still, results should not be generalized before this study is repeated at other universities, aiming for more representative and comparable samples. To supplement these findings on the individual

level, further research could also look into the extent to which informal implementation practices of gender quotas are supportive or resistant at an institutional level.

The second limitation is the inclusion of only one survey moment. I studied staff attitudes to actual, implemented gender quotas, hereby moving beyond normative debates and common-sense arguments. It would be interesting to study possible attitude changes over time, before implementation and further along, especially within different policy contexts and to address the impact of increasing knowledge about, and experiences with, gender quotas. This might not be a progressive, linear process of experience and acceptance. Furthermore, the place of gender quotas within certain policy frameworks might also change over time and attitudes with them.

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The quote in the title was taken from one respondent's comments in the survey.

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APPENDIX: TABLE 1

6 Items and 2 Subscales for Modern Sexism (MS)

Women should be cherished and protected by men.	Gender stereotypes (MS_GS)
Men are less likely to fall apart in emergencies than women are.	Gender stereotypes
Men are more suited to leadership than women.	Gender stereotypes
Discrimination of women is no longer a problem in this country.	Denial (MS_D)
Society treats men and women the same way.	Denial
Better measures should be taken to achieve equality (between the sexes) in the workplace.	Denial [reverse coding]

APPENDIX: TABLE 2

7 Items for Attitude towards Diversity Policies (DP)

In recruiting new staff, I think it's good that there is a preference for certain minority groups if candidates are equally competent.

The university should offer a tolerant and diverse work environment.

It's the task of the university to teach its staff to appreciate diversity.

I think that more diversity within the staff and student population will increase tolerance.

I think that working in a diverse surrounding contributes to my personal development.

For the university, the advantages of diversity outweigh the disadvantages.

I think we should make extra efforts to promote equal opportunities at the university.

APPENDIX: TABLE 3

Ordinal Logistic Regressions of Importance of Gender Quotas as Policy Measure, by Sociodemographic Variables Gender, Age, Staff, Work Unit and Language; and by Attitude Variables Modern Sexism (MS_D and MS_GS), Diversity Policies (DP), and DP & MS_D.

<i>(base case)</i>	Estimate β	Exp (- β)	Nagelkerke	(1) Sig.	(2) Sig.	(3) Sig.	Empty cells
<i>Gender (woman)</i>			0.059	0.000	0.198	0.202	
Man	-0.974***	2.65					
<i>Age (18-30)</i>			0.005	0.493	0.552	0.575	
<i>Staff (ATP)</i>			0.026	0.018	0.128	0.107	
AAP	0.430						
BAP	-0.011						
ZAP1	-0.323						
ZAP2	-0.983**	2.67					
<i>Work Unit (Sciences)</i>			0.044	0.001	0.611	0.484	1 (4%)
Admin	0.371						
Other/Ext.	1.443***	0.24					
Health Sc.	0.417						
Hum.Soc.Sc.	0.547*	0.58					
<i>Gender & Age</i>			0.071	0.000	0.427	0.332	1 (2.5%)
Man 51 – 60+	0.493						
Man 41 - 50	0.585						
Man 31 - 40	0.713						
<i>Gender & Staff</i>			0.085	0.000	0.125	0.221	2 (4%)
AAP	0.764*	0.47					
Man AAP	-1.241*	1.61					
Man BAP	-0.486						
Man ZAP1	-1.264						
Man ZAP2	-0.674						

APPENDIX: TABLE 3 (continued)

Ordinal Logistic Regressions of Importance of Gender Quotas as Policy Measure, by Sociodemographic Variables Gender, Age, Staff, Work Unit and Language; and by Attitude Variables Modern Sexism (MS_D and MS_GS), Diversity Policies (DP), and DP & MS_D.

<i>(base case)</i>	Estimate β	Exp $(-\beta)$	Nagelkerke	(1) Sig.	(2) Sig.	(3) Sig.	Empty cells
<i>Gender & Work U.</i>			0.097	0.000	0.845	0.783	3 (6%)
Other/Ext.	1.070**	0.34					
Man	-1.083***	2.95					
Man Admin	0.063						
Man Other/Ext.	0.687						
Man Health Sc.	0.595						
Man Hum.Soc.Sc.	-0.015						
<i>Language</i>			0.001	0.506	0.236	0.217	
<i>Hypothesis 1</i>							
MS_D	-0.311***	1.36	0.146	0.000	0.796	0.929	11 (16.9%)
MS_GS	-0.177***	1.19	0.038	0.000	0.081	0.237	6 (12%)
Gender & MS_GS	0.020		0.084	0.000	0.019	0.009	16 (16.8%)
Gender & MS_D			0.190	0.000	0.276	0.771	32 (27.8%)
Man	0.705						
MS_D	-0.172***	1.19					
Man MS_D	-0.295***	1.60					
<i>Hypothesis 2</i>							
DP	0.186***	0.83	0.204	0.000	0.906	0.021	41 (30.4%)
Gender & DP	0.049		0.235	0.000	0.105	0.068	96 (40.9%)

APPENDIX: TABLE 3 (Continued)

Ordinal Logistic Regressions of Importance of Gender Quotas as Policy Measure, by Sociodemographic Variables Gender, Age, and Language; and by Attitude Variables Modern Sexism (MS_D and MS_GS), Diversity Policies (DP), and DP & MS_D.

<i>(base case)</i>	Estimate β	Exp (- β)	Nagelkerke	(1) Sig.	(2) Sig.	(3) Sig.	Empty cells
<i>Hypothesis 3</i>							
<i>DP & MS_D</i>			0.109	0.000	0.246	0.126	2 (10%)
<i>(4.high-low)</i>							
1.low-low	-1.390***	4.01					
2.high-high	-0.811*	2.25					
3.low-high	-2.727***	15.29					
<i>Gender & DP&MS_D</i>			0.151	0.000	0.468	0.174	10 (25%)
Man	-0.734***	2.08					
1.low-low	-1.536***	4.65					
2.high-high	-0.744						
3.low-high	0.495						
Man 1.	0.348						
Man 2.	-0.005						
Man 3.	-3.119*	13.79					

Notes. Model test parameters:

(1) Model Fitting Information; null hypothesis: There is no difference between Intercept only model and Final model in the ability to predict the outcome.

(2) Goodness-of-Fit; null hypothesis: The observed data are consistent with the fitted model; Pearson's chi-square significance test.

(3) Test of Parallel Lines; null hypothesis: assumption of proportional odds.

Cut points and base case parameters, always zero, of all models and parameters of non-significant models are not displayed, but available from the author upon request.

The occurrence of empty cells is not unusual when adding continuous variables to a model, as there are more possible category combinations that need to be accounted for than when used in combination with categorical variables (Strand *et al.*, 2011).

APPENDIX: TABLE 4

Binary Logistic Regression of Importance of Gender Quotas as Policy Measure, by Attitude Variable Diversity Policies (DP)

<i>Thresholds</i>	Estimate β	Exp (β)	Exp ($-\beta$)
> very unimportant	0.159***	1.172	0.85
> unimportant	0.170***	1.185	0.84
> neither unimportant, neither important	0.151***	1.163	0.86
> important	0.291***	1.338	0.75

Coefficients: *, **, *** significant at 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001 level.