



Who is seen to be doing business research, and does it really matter? Gender representation at academic conferences

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REVIEWER 1 COMMENTS	RESPONSE
1. You have done some significant work but you have not built a strong argument for its significance in what it offers to women; academic conference organisers; business research etc.	Thank you for the time taken to provide such comprehensive feedback. We do hope that our responses to your comments have strengthened our argument.
2. I am still a bit confused as why this is about representation at conferences rather than women in business research. But I accept it as a manifestation of women in business research. However I think the title needs significant improvement.	<p>Thank you for your suggestions. We have revised the title accordingly:</p> <p>Who is doing business research, and does it really matter? Gender representation at academic conferences</p> <p>We have also added a paragraph to the introduction on p2 to clarify why academic conferences are the focus:</p> <p>By their very nature, academic conferences allow scholars to be highly visible - whether through attending, presenting their work or giving a keynote speech. Conferences therefore function as a manifestation of the research being conducted within the discipline, representing the type of knowledge that is considered valuable, and who the thought leaders are considered to be. Where there is gender inequality, this raises issues of social justice: what does the representation of women at academic conferences tell women, men, students and society about how we value them? How does the representation of women at academic conferences shape our knowledge of the world, and the distribution of opportunities and rewards to academics? Academia ought to be at the forefront of addressing structural societal inequalities - yet the preceding discussion shows that, instead, it perpetuates them.</p> <p>This study does not seek to add to the growing body of evidence on unequal representation at academic conferences by focusing on one more as-yet unexamined individual discipline or subject area. Rather, the key theoretical contribution of this research is its use of critical theory to investigate whether unequal representation <i>matters</i> to academics and <i>why</i>, thereby providing evidence that can be used to improve the condition of women in academia (Anderson, 2015).</p>
3. Results: Good explanation of the findings. Probably too many quotes. I think the conclusions are weak. What do you want to happen from this? What have you really found?	Thank you. We have addressed the comment about the conclusions in our response to point 4 below.
4. Implications for research, practice and/or society: The implications could be better explained. The conclusion is currently a bit long and goes over the findings again rather than identifying the contribution to theory and the contribution to practice. This should be specific. BE Bolder with what you have done and in considering its significance, its message and its contribution and implication.	<p>We have shortened the conclusion by deleting the repetition of the findings, and have strengthened the discussion of our contribution on p18:</p> <p>This study addresses the existing gaps in literature by building on research that proves the existence of gender inequality in various aspects of academia, and responding to calls for research that extends the contexts in which gender is salient (Britton, 2017). It further articulates the consequences of the under-representation of women at conferences, as a</p>

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<p>This sentence for example is not doing anything - However, it is hoped that the evidence provided here can be a catalyst for much-needed systemic change within academia and acts as a springboard for further work in this area. What evidence, and what change are you pushing for from this evidence?</p>	<p>manifestation of academic practice. It does so by adopting a critical theory approach which enables a representation of the academic world in relation to the interests of women. The six themes presented here provide compelling evidence that equal representation at conferences <i>does</i> matter, thus allowing a better understanding of the problem. We encourage academics with an interest in gender equality to use this evidence to argue for the improved representation of women (and by extension other minority groups) at academic conferences (Anderson, 2015).</p> <p>We have also deleted the sentence you mentioned and added the following instead, on p19:</p> <p>Being excluded from attending, presenting or giving keynotes at academic conferences contributes to poorer career outcomes for women, has implications for earning capacity and thus flow-on effects for their families and for society. Furthermore, where women are excluded from contributing to academic conversation at conferences, the questions and issues that are important to them are not receiving the attention they deserve and this gender data gap has consequences for society at large (Criado Perez, 2019). As noted in the introduction, these represent issues of social justice and organisers of academic conferences can no longer afford to disregard issues of representation. Disciplinary associations must do more to ensure that the benefits of their academic conferences are enjoyed by all. Those conferences and associations that continue to ignore the equal representation of women are holding them back in their career aspirations, and are doing society a disservice through excluding areas of research that are of interest and significance to women.</p>
<p>'Ration' in the conclusion should be ratio</p>	<p>Corrected – this was a verbatim quote from a participant</p>
<p>REVIEWER 2 COMMENTS</p>	<p>RESPONSE</p>
<p>sorry for that, but this is exactly what I meant: the article concentrates on business disciplines only. So it would be useful to know, why this field is of special interest for gender research.</p>	<p>Thank you for clarifying. This has been addressed on p. 1:</p> <p>Much research has focused on gender equality and gendered experiences in the male-dominated science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Burke and Mattis, 2007, Cheryan et al., 2017, Johnson, 2012, Ceci and Williams, 2011, Williams and Ceci, 2015, Kirkup et al., 2010, Morganson et al., 2010, Ong et al., 2011). However, other studies have found that gender inequality is also an issue in humanities, business and social sciences disciplines, and have called for more work to be done in these areas (Pritchard and Morgan, 2017, Robinson and Monks, 1999, Lanier et al., 2009, Ginther and Kahn, 2004, Reilly et al., 2016, Klemm Verbos and Dykstra, 2014). Indeed, Reilly et al. (2016) note that far less work on gender has been carried out in the business disciplines, thus suggesting by omission that gender-related issues do not exist – or at least are not prevalent enough to warrant attention.</p>

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Abstract

Purpose: Gender inequality is evident in many academic practices, but research has often focused on the male-dominated STEM fields. This study responds to calls for more work in the business disciplines which have been overlooked by comparison, and focuses on academic conferences as a higher education practice. Conferences are manifestations of the research being conducted within the discipline, representing the type of knowledge that is considered valuable, and who the thought leaders are considered to be. This study investigates whether equal representation of women at such conferences really matters, to whom, and why.

Design/methodology/approach: The research was designed using a critical feminist theory approach. An online survey was disseminated to academic staff and postgraduate students in the 25 top ranked business schools in Australia and New Zealand. A total of 452 responses were received, and thematic analysis was applied to open-ended responses.

Findings: Equal representation *does* matter, for two sets of reasons. The first align with feminist theory perspectives of 'equal opportunity' (gender is neutral), 'difference' (gender is celebrated) or 'post-equity' (the social construction of gender itself is problematic). The second are pragmatic consequences, namely the importance of role modelling, career building, and the respect and recognition that come with conference attendance and visible leadership roles.

Social implications: The findings have implications in regards to job satisfaction, productivity, and the future recruitment and retention of women in academia. Furthermore, in areas where women are not researching, the questions and issues that are important to them are not receiving the attention they deserve and this gender data gap has consequences for society at large.

Originality/value: This study moves beyond simply identifying the under-representation of women at academic conferences in yet another field, to investigate *why* equal representation is important and to *whom*. It provides valuable evidence of the consequences of under-representation, as perceived by academics themselves.

Keywords: gender equality, women, representation, conferences, academia

Introduction

While official commitment to gender equality exists in a wide range of countries and organisations, there remains overt, subtle and institutional discrimination against women in higher education (Reilly et al., 2016, Monroe et al., 2008, Equality Challenge Unit, 2010, Morley and Crossouard, 2015, Savigny, 2014, Silander et al., 2013, Xu and Martin, 2011, Strid and Husu, 2013, Pritchard and Morgan, 2017, Britton, 2017). For example, women make up 45 percent of academics worldwide yet are paid 20 percent less than men and hold only 20 percent of senior academic roles (Pritchard and Morgan, 2017).

Much research has focused on gender equality and gendered experiences in the male-dominated science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Burke and Mattis, 2007, Cheryan et al., 2017, Johnson, 2012, Ceci and Williams, 2011, Williams and Ceci, 2015, Kirkup et al., 2010, Morganson et al., 2010, Ong et al., 2011). However, other studies have found that gender inequality is also an issue in humanities, business and social sciences disciplines, and have called for more work to be done in these areas (Pritchard and Morgan, 2017, Robinson and Monks, 1999, Lanier et al., 2009, Ginther and Kahn, 2004, Reilly et al., 2016, Klemm Verbos and Dykstra, 2014). Indeed, Reilly et al. (2016) note that far less work on gender has been carried out in the business disciplines, thus suggesting by omission that gender-related issues do not exist – or at least are not prevalent enough to warrant attention.

Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the implications of this gender inequality in academia (both for the specific discipline area, and for women and society more broadly) has been largely overlooked and is thus speculative – or at least limited (Savigny, 2014, Reilly et al., 2016, Walters, 2018). For example, it is often posited that the representation of women is important and that a lack of representation has consequences beyond the individual (Munar and Villesèche, 2016) but an analysis of *why* and *how* this is important, from the perspective of academics themselves, has not yet been undertaken. This study takes a necessary step towards addressing these gaps, through a focus on a particular form of academic practice: the academic conference.

Gender inequality pervades many academic practices, such as journal editorships, time allocation, teaching evaluations, promotion, tenure and recruitment, mentoring support, research grant funding and conference leadership roles (Watson and Hjorth, 2015, Pritchard and Morgan, 2017, Kantola, 2008, Reilly et al., 2016, MacNeill et al., 2014, Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012, Munar et al., 2015, Walters, 2018, Winslow, 2010, Todd and Bird, 2000). **By**

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3 their very nature, academic conferences allow scholars to be highly visible - whether through
4 attending, presenting their work or giving a keynote speech. Conferences therefore function as
5 a manifestation of the research being conducted within the discipline, representing the type of
6 knowledge that is considered valuable, and who the thought leaders are considered to be.
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8 Where there is gender inequality, this raises issues of social justice: what does the
9 representation of women at academic conferences tell women, men, students and society about
10 how we value them? How does the representation of women at academic conferences shape
11 our knowledge of the world, and the distribution of opportunities and rewards to academics?
12 Academia ought to be at the forefront of addressing structural societal inequalities - yet the
13 preceding discussion shows that, instead, it perpetuates them.

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21 This study does not seek to add to the growing body of evidence on unequal representation at
22 academic conferences by focusing on one more as-yet unexamined individual discipline or
23 subject area. Rather, the key theoretical contribution of this research is its use of critical theory
24 to investigate whether unequal representation *matters* to academics and *why*, thereby providing
25 evidence that can be used to improve the condition of women in academia (Anderson, 2015).
26 It uses the business disciplines as a case study group, thereby also giving voice to the
27 implications of gender inequality in a disciplinary group that, unlike STEM, may be positioned
28 as unproblematic by omission in the literature. The research applies feminist theory to analyse
29 and understand the reasoning of both those who believe it does matter, and those who believe
30 it does not. Specifically, this paper addresses the following research questions:

- 31 1. Is the equal representation of women at business discipline academic
32 conferences important (or not), and to whom?
- 33 2. Why do they believe it is (or is not) important?

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35 In so doing it not only provides compelling evidence that it *does* matter but, equally
36 importantly, it uncovers the reasons *why* it matters, and to *whom* specifically. It finds there are
37 both tangible and intangible consequences of unequal representation, and argues that such
38 evidence cannot be ignored: academia must use it to challenge the status quo and improve the
39 representation of women at academic conferences.

Literature review

The role of academic conferences

Despite the availability of online conferencing technology, the face-to-face conferences under examination in this research are still seen as more positive and effective for delegates than virtual meetings (Mair et al., 2018). Such conferences are viewed as an important part of academic life, for postgraduate students and early career academics through to established professors (Blumen and Bar-Gal, 2006). They provide opportunities to enhance one's visibility through getting one's name, work and intellectual contributions more widely known. Implications of this visibility (arguably a form of social capital) are significant: Kriwy et al. (2013) showed that visibility is related to success and greater earnings in academia. Conferences allow postgraduate students and early career delegates to disseminate research, gain feedback, start to establish their reputation in a field, and meet potential employers, colleagues and top scholars in their discipline. Conferences provide opportunities to present research and to join discussions such as question-and-answer times that follow presentations. For tenured academics, conferences are frequently part of maintaining a vibrant research agenda and as such play a valuable role in achieving promotion (Bos et al., 2017). Even where it is journal publications rather than conference attendance per se that are important for academic promotions, conference attendance can assist with gaining feedback on research prior to publication, and establishing networks that may lead to new research collaborations – with a flow-on effect of more journal publications (Mair et al., 2018).

Academic careers often rely upon one's ability to establish networks (Mair and Frew, 2016). The nature of conferences suggests that they can be an ideal fora for starting, maintaining or strengthening one's networks, thus further emphasising the significance of conference attendance as a contributor to a successful academic career (Mair and Frew, 2016, Sang, 2017). The networking opportunities provided by attendance at academic association conferences have specifically been found to be important for women in establishing their reputations amongst peers and, as a consequence, advancing their careers (Ramirez et al., 2013, Mair et al., 2018). This relationship-building made possible by regular conference attendance also confers other benefits on delegates. These include: finding new solutions or ways to think about an issue; future collaborations; increased motivation; a sense of belonging to an academic community; and improved productivity (such as journal publications), performance and satisfaction with work (Jago and Deery, 2005, Mair et al., 2018, Wu et al., 2008, Hixson, 2012,

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3 Foley et al., 2014, Edwards et al., 2017). That these studies have come from Australasia,
4 Europe, the UK, the USA and Scandinavia suggests that the benefits of conference attendance
5 hold true for academics regardless of their geographic location.
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9 Conference attendance and involvement also provide valued opportunities to showcase thought
10 leadership within a discipline through, for example, keynote speaking roles and other high-
11 profile positions such as conference chair, session chair or discussion panellist. These roles are
12 not always equally distributed however, with research finding that women are consistently
13 excluded from these visible leadership and ‘expert researcher’ roles in many discipline
14 conferences (Munar et al., 2015, Walters, 2018). A study by Blumen and Bar-Gal (2006) raised
15 concerns that women’s appearance in high-profile leadership positions at conference is
16 proportionally less than their overall conference participation. In another study, Walters (2018)
17 analysed gender inequality in 53 academic conferences in tourism, hospitality, leisure and
18 event studies, and found women were under-represented in a number of key roles, including
19 keynote speaking and membership on Honorary Committees. These public embodiments of
20 expertise can imply that only [white] males can be thought leaders, thereby devaluing the
21 perspectives and knowledge that women bring and excluding their voices from the
22 conversation (Biggs et al., 2018, McCurry, 2017, Eden, 2016).
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34 The role of conference attendance, particularly of such higher-level involvement, in building
35 academic careers is therefore widely accepted (Mair and Frew, 2016, Mair et al., 2018). At the
36 same time, there is also widespread recognition of the unequal representation of women in
37 different roles at academic conferences. However, the significance of the nexus of these two
38 aspects of conference practice - the importance of equal access to the benefits of conference
39 attendance for women - has not been theorised and requires further examination.
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45 *Conceptualising gender equality: An analytic framework*

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48 Critical theory ‘must (a) represent the world in relation to the interests of the oppressed; (b)
49 enable the oppressed to understand their problems; and (c) be usable by the oppressed to
50 improve their condition’ (Anderson, 2015). Aligned with these goals, the underpinning
51 rationale for this research is the need for improved representation of women at academic
52 conferences. As a form of critical theory, feminist theory is therefore highly appropriate in this
53 study. It provides a lens that is capable of recognising different perspectives and ways of
54 theorising about gender equality, and can offer representations of the academic world that are
55 of more use to women (Anderson, 2015). Within feminist theory, the conceptualisation of
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3 gender equality links to three distinct principles: equal opportunities, difference and post-equity
4 (Squires, 1999, Verloo, 2005), and these are used as the main analytic framework for the
5 current study.
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9 The 'equal opportunities' principle is based on the notion that men and women are equal and
10 have equal rights (Squires, 1999). The strategy of inclusion associated with this politics of
11 equality aims to include women in the world *as it is*, rendering gender as neutral. The lack of
12 transformative potential in this strategy prompted Verloo (2005) to argue that this strategy
13 simply seeks to extend dominant values to everyone regardless of gender.
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19 In contrast, the 'difference' principle recognises and celebrates gender differences rather than
20 seeing women as inferior (Verloo, 2005), and thus attempts to include women in the world *as*
21 *it should be*. The attendant strategy is one of reversal that problematizes the dominant values
22 of men and their cultures and practices, 'revaluing that which is devalued and claiming
23 recognition for that which is excluded' (Squires, 1999, p. 122). Rather than being gender
24 neutral, this strategy is transformative in that it seeks to make room for non-hegemonic gender
25 identities and cultures (Verloo, 2005).
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32 The 'post-equity' (or 'diversity') principle sees gender as a social practice that constructs norms
33 and standards (Squires, 1999). What is problematic is not only the exclusion of women or
34 existence of the masculine norm as argued by the 'equality' and 'difference' principles, but the
35 gendered world itself, which needs to be challenged for change to happen (Van den Brink et
36 al., 2010, Verloo, 2005). Here, the strategy of displacement is used 'to move "beyond gender"
37 ...and displace patriarchal gender hierarchies and to deconstruct discursive regimes that
38 engender the subject' (Verloo, 2005, p. 346).
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47 **Methods**

48 *Data collection*

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52 The objective of this research is to examine the importance of women's representation at
53 academic conferences within the business disciplines, at an overall global rather than location-
54 or institution-specific level. For reasons of manageability, and reflecting the geographic
55 location of the researchers, a convenience sample of the top 25 universities in the 2018 Times
56 Higher Education rankings (20 from Australia and 5 from New Zealand) was selected for
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3 inclusion in the research project. Two universities were excluded and were substituted with the
4 next two Australian universities listed in the rankings. The first was excluded as this project
5 potentially fell outside their 'acceptable use of staff directory' policy, and the second because
6 it was not possible to easily (or accurately) identify its business school academic staff. There
7 is a little variation, but the following disciplines are commonly domiciled within business
8 schools in Australia and New Zealand: management, marketing, economics, accounting,
9 finance, tourism (and allied hospitality/leisure studies), event/sport management, international
10 business, entrepreneurship, information systems, business law, human resource management,
11 actuarial studies and property.
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20 A database of all academic staff in business schools was developed rather than requesting a
21 single leadership point of contact (such as Head of School or Head of Faculty) to disseminate
22 the survey widely. The reason for this was twofold. First, to avoid the possibility of
23 'gatekeepers' who did not agree with the research topic refusing to pass the survey on
24 (Figuroa-Domecq et al., 2015). Second, in recognition that faculty management roles are very
25 demanding and it would be easy for an email request such as this to be overlooked. During
26 database development, a record was made of academic staff with responsibility for PhD
27 students (such as Heads of Department, Academic Deans, Faculty Heads, Higher Degree
28 Research (HDR) Deans and similar). An email was sent to 110 such staff, seeking their
29 approval to disseminate the survey to their PhD students via a third party in order to maintain
30 student privacy; 39 gave permission.
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39 An online survey with a combination of Likert-scale and open-ended questions was developed.
40 The survey was piloted with nine academic staff members and one recent PhD graduate, then
41 revised based on their feedback. A link to the survey was emailed directly to 3343 academic
42 staff and the 39 identified postgraduate contacts who disseminated it to at least 1007 PhD
43 students (not all contacts responded with the number of students on their list as requested).
44 While it is unclear how many emails were stopped by spam filters and an accurate response
45 rate cannot be given, a total of 452 people completed the survey. This is acknowledged as a
46 limitation of the study, and as such the study does not seek to generalise the findings.
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54 Following a series of questions about the proportions of men and women at various levels at
55 academic conferences (as delegates, keynotes, other visible leadership roles), respondents were
56 asked, 'Do you believe it is important for women to be equally represented at academic
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3 conferences in your discipline area?’ They were then prompted to explain why/why not in an
4 open-text question. The responses to these questions form the basis of this paper.
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7 *Data analysis*

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10 The answers of those who responded ‘yes [it is important]’ were subjected to an iterative, two-
11 phased qualitative thematic analysis, a method suited to capturing the nuances in participant
12 responses to complex social questions such as that under investigation here (Attride-Stirling,
13 2001, Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the deductive first phase, the principles of equal opportunity,
14 difference and post-equity were used as the main analytical frame and they formed the three
15 initial overarching themes. The material was read multiple times, and responses that displayed
16 elements of these principles were coded accordingly. In the second inductive phase, the
17 material was re-read to identify more nuanced subthemes within the three principles, and any
18 further themes lying outside the three principles. The open-ended responses of those who
19 answered ‘no [it is not important]’ were inductively analysed.
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27 *Participant demographics*

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30 Demographic information including university name, discipline area, academic status (staff,
31 postdoc or student, permanent or casual, full or part time) and gender was collected from survey
32 participants but only discipline area was mandatory. All responses were anonymous. Table 1
33 shows the number of responses received from each of the universities.
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38 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE
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41 There were more female respondents (57.8 percent) than male (39.3 percent), and the majority
42 of respondents were permanent full-time academics (68.2 percent). Full time PhD students
43 comprised 16 percent of respondents, and casual or fixed term academics made up 9.4 percent.
44 Most respondents were from management, accounting and marketing (Table 2).
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51 **Findings and discussion: Yes, it matters!**

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54 Both male and female respondents agreed the equal representation of women at academic
55 conferences was important, although a higher proportion of female respondents (85 percent)
56 than male (74 percent) subscribed to this view (Table 3).
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6 The deductive thematic analysis of reasons given for their response revealed a common
7 alignment with the *equal opportunities* or *difference* perspectives, with few able to be
8 interpreted as fitting the *post-equity* perspective. However, the inductive phase of the analysis,
9 in addition to providing subthemes that contributed more nuanced findings within the equal
10 opportunities, difference and post-equity perspectives, led to the identification of three further
11 themes in the material. When asked why they believed equal representation of women at
12 academic conferences in their discipline was important, respondent comments could be
13 grouped into three other pragmatic reasons related to the consequences of equal representation:
14 *role modelling*; *career building*; and *respect and recognition*. All six themes will be unpacked
15 in what follows.
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23 24 *Equal opportunities perspective*

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26 Amongst both men and women there was a strong philosophical belief that women should be
27 equally represented on the basis of equal rights. A number of contributing subthemes were
28 identified in the responses: women should be treated equally; they have equal talent,
29 contributions and/or qualifications; it is democratic and fair; conferences should represent the
30 industry or discipline area; and that women make up half the population. The emphasis of these
31 subthemes is on men and women being equal or 'the same', and thus they need to be equally
32 represented at conferences (Van den Brink et al., 2010). Disregarding the differences between
33 men and women, these responses tend to draw attention to women's ability to compete with
34 men on equal terms (Nentwich, 2006). Illustrative quotes include the following:
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43 Women make up half the academics in the area and half the delegates at the conferences
44 so there is no acceptable reason why they should not be equally represented (Female)

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46 Women researchers need publications and opportunities to present their work just as
47 much as men (Female)

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49 Do we need to justify why? Woman should have a voice at conferences just as much as
50 men (Female)

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52 Women are as intelligent as men, and their contributions to the discipline should be
53 publicly recognised (Female)
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3 Since, the qualification and experience are equal there is no question of women being
4 not represented equally (Female)

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7 Approximately half the population is women hence accounting research should be
8 equally represented by women who are just as clever (if not more clever) than men
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11 (Male)

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13 Because women are human beings too, contrary to the opinion of some who should
14 know better! (Male)

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17 It's just fair! (Male and female)

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20 These comments aspire to objectivity and impartiality (Squires, 1999, Verloo, 2005) by
21 claiming that women should be equally represented. They frequently use comparison as the
22 justification for their thinking, positioning women as being *just as* [intelligent, capable,
23 qualified or experienced] *as men*.

24 25 26 27 28 *Difference perspective*

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30 This theme was comprised of three subthemes related to the benefits generated by having an
31 equal representation of women at academic conferences: including women increases the
32 diversity of thought and opinion; women bring different research agendas that broaden
33 understanding of the discipline; and women's participation changes the conference atmosphere
34 for the better. Here the argument made by survey respondents is that due to their distinct
35 differences, women 'can provide different insights' (Female), 'make the tone of the conference
36 more supportive, participative and empathetic' (Female), promote 'a more inclusive
37 atmosphere for potential attendees' (Male), 'get a mix of perspectives and academic lenses and
38 experiences' (Male). The comments acknowledge a 'woman's way' of doing things and value
39 how it differs from a 'man's way' (Nentwich, 2006).

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49 Male and female responses were comparable:

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51 To give voice to different experiences, perspectives (Female)

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53 Because there are too many men. We need a diversity of perspectives other than white,
54 privileged, males (Male)

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58 Women research different issues and approaches to research (Female)

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3 I believe there is an inclination to research areas based on gender, hence, the exclusion
4 or limited representation of women will affect the overall contribution to the knowledge
5 pool, especially for certain topics (Male)
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9 To improve the 'macho' culture of my discipline (Female)
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11 Less testosterone (Male)
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14 The final two comments above suggest a 'chilly climate' exists for women at academic
15 conferences in the business disciplines of these respondents and that this is (at least partially)
16 due to an under-representation of women. This was noted by both male and female respondents.
17 Certainly this echoes the work of Biggs et al. (2018) who found that women were more likely
18 to perceive sexism at conferences where they were under-represented, and this unwelcoming
19 atmosphere was a contributing factor to some women's decision to leave academia. It is
20 therefore a reasonable assumption that an equal representation of women would improve not
21 only the tone and atmosphere of the conference, but also help with the retention of women in
22 academia.
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30 *Post-equity perspective*

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33 Interestingly, all responses identified as reflecting a post-equity view had indicated that equal
34 representation of women was *not* important. This theme therefore required a very careful and
35 open-minded approach to interpretation, as the majority of 'no' responses were not considered
36 to conceivably subscribe to a post-equity view (these will be discussed in the following
37 section). This theme was less well developed, with far fewer responses (a total of seven) that
38 could be interpreted as possibly transcending the gender neutral (equal opportunities) or gender
39 dichotomy (difference) schools of thought. Slightly more responses were from females:
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46 I don't think body count approaches to diversity are meaningful, especially not when
47 we focus only on gender at the expense of other axes of identity and power (Female)
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50 I don't think it should be an equal representation of gender, but an equal representation
51 of the issues, which can be raised either by males or females (Female)
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54 Because you are defining them by their gender. We must avoid tokenism or affirmative
55 action if we are to have equality in our conferences (Male)
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3 As highlighted by the quotes, the gendered world represents the problem of gender inequality
4 rather than simply the exclusion of women or men as a norm (Verloo, 2005).
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7 *Role modelling*

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10 The visibility of women at academic conferences, specifically in leadership roles, is believed
11 to inoculate them against the effects of negative stereotypes (Walters, 2018). Female
12 respondents (almost exclusively) were strong proponents of the need for women to be equally
13 represented at academic conferences to act as role models for PhD students and early career
14 academics:
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19 To give role models to junior women (Female)

20 Because they role model for emerging researchers (Female)

21
22 There appear to be increasing numbers of junior academic staff and PhD students who
23 are women and it is important to demonstrate female leadership and role models and
24 mentors (Female)
25
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29 As role models for the future of the discipline (Male)

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33 However, among the many responses about role models there were a number of more nuanced,
34 considered observations about *why* role models are needed and what it means for other women:
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37 I think women should see other women in roles of power and see that it is possible to
38 be a professor and editor etc (Female)
39
40

41 It's important for young girls to know that women can be successful in economics and
42 that it is not a men-only career path (Female)
43
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45 While the numbers in terms of representation need not be absolutely equal, it is
46 necessary to ensure some level of parity to ensure that both women and men junior
47 scholars do not assume that important thoughts and important deeds are only the
48 prerogative of men scholars (Male)
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54 There was a significant difference between male and female responses in this theme: very few
55 men (a total of 4, or just over 3 percent) referred to the importance of female role models,
56 whereas a far higher proportion of women (16.7 percent) identified this as a justification for
57 equal representation. Research suggests that seeing women in leadership roles at conferences
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3 helps junior women delegates feel comfortable envisioning a future in academia even where
4 males (currently) dominate, see possibilities for themselves beyond their current rank, and
5 identify mentors to help them achieve their aspirations (Kantola, 2008). However, it is not only
6 women who benefit. As some of the above comments illustrate, respondents believe that all
7 junior scholars, irrespective of gender, need to see women in positions of thought leadership at
8 conferences.
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14 This finding supports the claim made by Lanier et al. (2009, p. 53), that ‘one of the most
15 alarming by-products of discrimination against women in academia is the resulting lack of
16 female role models’. Evidence is provided here that women in particular not only explicitly
17 perceive visibility at conferences as an expression of power, success and credibility, but
18 recognise that such visibility makes an important statement to others. Senior women role
19 models have been identified as important for recruiting and retaining women in STEM fields
20 (Beede et al., 2011, Cheryan et al., 2017, Drury et al., 2011, Xu and Martin, 2011), and the
21 findings presented here demonstrate that they are also important within business disciplines –
22 and that academic conferences are a potentially valuable forum for facilitating this.
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30 *Career building*

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33 As discussed in the literature review, conference attendance and leadership roles have
34 significant career benefits in terms of visibility, networking and research collaborations. These
35 reasons were reflected in a number of female respondents’ justifications for the equal
36 representation of women:
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41 Mainly because of the networking opportunities at conferences that can lead to many
42 career opportunities and recognition and invitations etc (Female)

43
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45 Networking, building research relationships, opportunities for leadership (Female)

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48 Social capital is held by male academics, being equally represented gives more
49 opportunity for women to have access to/gain social capital (Female)

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52 The role of women in academic research is as equally important for their career
53 progression, for showcasing their research and for developing their research portfolio
54 and the respect of their peers (Female)
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3 The importance of conferences as career building platforms for women was almost entirely
4 overlooked by male respondents, although one did note that ‘conferences are an important part
5 of academic life and *all* should have equal opportunity’ (emphasis added).
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8 9 *Respect and recognition*

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11 This theme reveals that a number of women feel that their research (or that of other women) is
12 not recognised, valued or respected in their discipline, and that equal representation at
13 conferences would help to overcome this issue:
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18 Women deserve to be recognised for their expertise (Female)

19
20 Women have valuable contributions to make (Female)

21
22 Because there are women doing great work (Female)

23
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25 To provide visible reminders that women are respected and appreciated in our discipline
26 (Female)
27
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29
30 None of these comments refers to the need to be equally as valuable or respected *as men*, which
31 would have been suggestive of an underlying equal opportunities belief. Rather, they were
32 interpreted as women seeking respect and recognition for their research and contribution on the
33 basis that it is deserved, but currently lacking. As with the career building theme, a gendered
34 difference in responses was evident: no male comments were identified in this theme.
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39 This finding is reminiscent of Kantola’s (2008) work. Her interviewees identified hierarchies
40 that influenced what could legitimately be researched – hierarchies that were dominated and
41 defined by male thinking. Female students who were researching outside mainstream topics in
42 political science were made to feel as though they were ‘playing around’ and that their work
43 was not valued or respected, whereas male students doing the same type of research felt
44 supported and part of the political science research community.
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53 **Findings and discussion: No, it does not matter!**

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55 The majority of respondents agreed that the equal representation of women at academic
56 conferences was important, however 15 percent of women and 26 percent of men disagreed
57 (Table 3). Four themes were identified in the reasoning presented: representation should be
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3 based on merit not gender; there should be proportional representation not equal representation;
4 quotas are bad; and inequality is natural.

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7 *Merit not gender*
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10 Whereas some of the respondents' comments in this subtheme suggested they subscribed to
11 the post-equity perspective, as discussed earlier in the findings, most subscribed to the merit
12 argument and claimed that gender was irrelevant:
13

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16 I wish to hear from the best academics and scholars - their gender is not important
17 (Female)

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19
20 Representation should depend upon expertise (Female)

21
22
23 I don't care. It's about the individual research impact rather than gender equality
24 (Female)

25
26
27 No, attendance should be based on merit and deserving opportunity, regardless of
28 gender (Male)

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31 These comments were not interpreted as falling within the post-equity argument, as they did
32 not refer to other power relations as being equally problematic in the context of representation
33 at academic conferences or did not seek to problematise the use of gender as a defining factor
34 (Van den Brink et al., 2010, Verloo, 2005). Rather, they were read as simply rendering gender
35 as not salient, or that a lack of equal representation of women was not something they were
36 concerned with (Britton, 2017).
37

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40 The notions that academia is a meritocracy and that excellence is objective, are myths
41 (Bourdieu, 1976, Pritchard and Morgan, 2017, Todd and Bird, 2000). Since the pioneering
42 work of Bourdieu (1976), many other scholars have concluded that the objective evaluation of
43 academic excellence, upon which the meritocracy argument is based, is not 'neutral' as claimed
44 - see, for example, in-depth critiques by Scully (2002) and Liu (2011). Indeed, studies have
45 found that in academic practices including recruitment, promotion and peer review of grant
46 funding applications men are more likely to be judged as excellent than women - even when
47 equally qualified (see for example Wennerås and Wold, 1997, Krefting, 2003, Bornmann et
48 al., 2007). The assessment of academic excellence has been shown to be subjective and
49 influenced by factors such as institutional status, homophily (preferring those similar to
50 oneself), network connections and even personality traits (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012).
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3 Nevertheless, from the statements from survey participants quoted above, it seems the myth of
4 meritocracy persists amongst some academics working in the business disciplines - as it does
5 in others such as the arts and sciences (Roos, 2008, Pritchard and Morgan, 2017, Scully, 2002,
6 Liu, 2011).
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10 *Proportional representation*

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13 In contrast to the equal opportunities perspective where respondents believed that women
14 comprised half the population and thus should be equally represented at academic conferences,
15 this theme is based on the argument that the level of representation should reflect the discipline:
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20 If there are more male academics than female, I won't expect female representation at
21 conference would be equal. Women may be less willing to travel because of family
22 responsibilities too. (Female)
23
24

25
26 I believe the representation should be equitable and match the proportion of women in
27 the discipline. If the ration [sic] of men to women in a discipline is 70:30, then the
28 representation at a conference should be a close match to represent reality with some
29 elements of ideal. (Female)
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33
34 Women should be represented (at least) in proportion to their make-up of the field, but
35 given the large majority of males in the field, it is unrealistic (and an imposition on the
36 workloads of those women who are in the field) to expect a 50-50 split. (Male)
37
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40 These responses suggest an acceptance of the status quo, and do not recognise the argument
41 presented earlier in the findings that if women are not equally represented then they will
42 continue to be under-represented. The first and last comments above are interpreted as
43 'sympathetic' towards women, through their argument that a greater (and unfair) burden would
44 be placed on women if they were expected to be equally represented in a male-dominated
45 discipline. However, they are in fact justifying the proportional representation of women based
46 on the existence and perpetuation of structural inequalities (unequal caring responsibilities and
47 increased workload) without acknowledging the salience of gender (Britton, 2017).
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54 *No quotas*

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56 Despite no mention of quotas in the survey, a number of respondents (more men than women)
57 voiced their opposition to equal representation being enforced through a quota system for
58 women. While this theme differed from the notion of meritocracy, it was nevertheless aligned
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3 with it - some respondents believed the introduction of a quota would lower the quality, or
4 would somehow tarnish the reputation of the women who did attend conferences:
5
6

7 I would never want to be associated with quota programs or some forced representation
8 (Female)
9

10 We can't force gender diversity just because it is a hot topic!!! It will damage the quality
11 (Female)
12
13

14 Gender or other quotas for the sake of numerical equality causes two problems. 1)
15 Women who do attend might be thought of as naturally less able and only there because
16 of the quota. 2) Non-merit based academic activities undermine the credibility of
17 academic pronouncements. (Male)
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23 There is none of the usual gender barriers in terms of physical requirement or even
24 social stigma in the field of marketing. If anything, there are more women than men
25 practitioners. There are just as many men as women at the undergrad and masters level,
26 but women are not choosing to continue to PhD level in the same numbers as men. If
27 they don't wish to join the ranks of academics, we shouldn't force them. (Male)
28
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33 Notably, this theme contains the longest and most detailed comments from male respondents.
34 The last quote above is very revealing, as the author does not appear to see any irony in what
35 he is saying. He sees equal numbers of male and female students in marketing, but fewer
36 females continuing on to an academic career: one must ask why this is the case rather than
37 assuming it is because they do not wish to.
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42 Based on the findings presented earlier about the importance of role modelling, it is posited
43 here that if the female students had women academics and researchers as role models, they may
44 perceive an academic career to be both possible and desirable and therefore wish to 'join the
45 ranks of academics.' Furthermore, and again based on the findings discussed above, equal
46 representation is seen as important in overcoming the 'chilly climate' experienced by women
47 at academic conferences and may contribute to them remaining within the ranks of academics.
48 Interestingly, similar resistance to the enforcement of gender equality policies was found by
49 Van den Brink et al. (2010) in their study on transparency in academic recruitment.
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Inequality is natural

The final theme for the belief that equal representation is not important is that inequality is natural. A few respondents felt that some disciplines are naturally the domain of men:

It's a nice idea but for all manner of reasons, women and men may not self-select in exactly equal numbers into the discipline. This is nobody's fault. (Female)

Naturally there is [sic] more men in this discipline (Female)

Why we must force women to be equal in all aspects; instead, let nature does [sic] its own role. (Male)

These comments support previous research that indicates that, for some respondents, traditional gender stereotyping is still alive and well; males are more suited to work in some disciplines, and women to others, and thus a goal of equal representation is not justified (Silander et al., 2013).

Conclusion

This study addresses the existing gaps in literature by building on research that proves the existence of gender inequality in various aspects of academia, and responding to calls for research that extends the contexts in which gender is salient (Britton, 2017). It further articulates the consequences of the under-representation of women at conferences, as a manifestation of academic practice. It does so by adopting a critical theory approach which enables a representation of the academic world in relation to the interests of women. The six themes presented here provide compelling evidence that equal representation at conferences *does* matter, thus allowing a better understanding of the problem. We encourage academics with an interest in gender equality to use this evidence to argue for the improved representation of women (and by extension other minority groups) at academic conferences (Anderson, 2015).

Acker (2006, p. 452) notes that, 'one privilege of the privileged is not to see their privilege. Men tend not to see their gender privilege... People in dominant groups generally see inequality as existing somewhere else, not where they are.' The findings from the current study suggest that this blindness extends to the consequences of conference attendance and participation – the respect, visibility, opportunities for collaboration, and role modelling that are afforded to

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3 male delegates and speakers are so deeply ingrained and taken-for-granted that they do not see
4 it. There is no realisation that women, where their voices are excluded through under-
5 representation, perceive their work to be undervalued, their career progression curtailed, and/or
6 that (particularly for students and junior staff) academia is only a viable career for men. There
7 are also broader implications in regards to job satisfaction, productivity, and the future
8 recruitment and retention of women in academia.
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14 **Being excluded from attending, presenting or giving keynotes at academic conferences**
15 **contributes to poorer career outcomes for women, has implications for earning capacity and**
16 **thus flow-on effects for their families and for society.** Furthermore, where women are excluded
17 from contributing to academic conversation at conferences, the questions and issues that are
18 important to them are not receiving the attention they deserve and this gender data gap has
19 consequences for society at large (Criado Perez, 2019). **As noted in the introduction, these**
20 **represent issues of social justice and organisers of academic conferences can no longer afford**
21 **to disregard issues of representation. Disciplinary associations must do more to ensure that the**
22 **benefits of their academic conferences are enjoyed by all. Those conferences and associations**
23 **that continue to ignore the equal representation of women are holding them back in their career**
24 **aspirations, and are doing society a disservice through excluding areas of research that are of**
25 **interest and significance to women.**
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36 Three avenues are now presented for important future research to build upon this study. First,
37 the current study assumed that academics from the top Australian and New Zealand universities
38 travel to conferences in other parts of the world, and are therefore able to provide a global
39 overview of their discipline based on their experiences. A larger global study investigating the
40 perspectives of academics within business disciplines from other countries would shed light on
41 any location-specific bias that may have occurred. Second, a larger global data set would enable
42 a more nuanced analysis at the level of business discipline. Finally, while this study identified
43 that equal representation of women at academic conferences is important, it is also necessary
44 to examine whether under-representation affects some groups more than others depending on
45 the intersection of gender and career stage (for example, postgraduate students, early career
46 academics or established senior academics) and ethnicity.
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UNIVERSITY	Count	Percent
Auckland University of Technology	24	5.48
Australian National University	16	3.65
Charles Darwin University	4	0.91
Deakin University	14	3.20
Flinders University	3	0.68
Griffith University	21	4.79
James Cook University	2	0.46
Macquarie University	16	3.65
Monash University	32	7.31
Queensland University of Technology	16	3.65
University of Auckland	26	5.94
University of Canberra	2	0.46
University of Canterbury	13	2.97
University of Melbourne	30	6.85
University of Newcastle	6	1.37
University of New South Wales	20	4.57
University of Otago	39	8.90
University of Queensland	25	5.71
University of Sydney	24	5.48
University of Tasmania	17	3.88
University of Technology Sydney	23	5.25
University of Waikato	17	3.88
University of Western Australia	14	3.20
University of Wollongong	22	5.02
Victoria University	2	0.46
Prefer not to say	10	2.28
Totals	438	100%

Table 1: Survey respondents' university workplace (n = 438). NB: this was not a mandatory question.

DISCIPLINE AREA	Count	Percent
Tourism/Leisure/Events/Hospitality	36	7.96
Management	100	22.12
Marketing	63	13.94
Accounting	72	15.93
Finance	40	8.85
Economics	46	10.18
Business Law	20	4.42
Property/Real Estate Studies	1	0.22
Business Information Systems	18	3.98
International Business	19	4.20
Strategy, Innovation and Entrepreneurship	11	2.43
Actuarial Studies	1	0.22
Other (please specify)	25	5.53
Totals	452	100%

Table 2: Survey respondents' main discipline area (n = 452).

Gender	Yes, it is important		No, it is not important		Gender totals	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Female	209	85	37	15	246	100
Male	121	74	42	26	163	100
Gender not identified	9	69	4	31	13	100
Yes/No totals	339	80	83	20	422	100

Table 3. Gender breakdown of responses to question 'Do you believe it is important for women to be equally represented at academic conferences in your discipline area?' (n = 422).