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Gender Imbalance Improvements in Academia, Business, and Physical Education

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Abstract: *Traditionally, men have disproportionately held leadership positions in academia, business, and physical education. Fortunately, graduate programs in each field are providing women opportunities that were not apparent a few decades ago. We examine Business and Physical Education for transgressions of discrimination and provide evidence from personal interviews which indicate progress has been made for women in these fields. We provide several cross-disciplinary themes that transcend gender barriers to promote an equitable workforce in addition to field specific recommendations.*

Key words: *Gender Imbalance, Higher Education, Business, Physical Education*

INTRODUCTION

Female representation in academia, business, and physical education have historically been underwhelming. Moreover, leadership positions tend to be male dominated whether it is administration, management, or advancing towards a terminal degree. To combat this phenomenon, graduate programs have focused their attention on attracting and recruiting quality female candidates, to provide a more equitable workforce going forward. It is essential to recognize the gender imbalance within higher education as these faculty aid in the socialization process of attaining necessary values and attitudes towards a job and often the faculty themselves become the individual's mentors (Dodds, 2005). Furthermore, having a mentor with the same gender can enhance the mentee's experience (Blake-Beard, 2011) and lead to advancement in an individual's career (Dodds, 2005). Therefore, to increase career advancement of women in business and physical education, investigation of higher education discrepancy in ranks is warranted.

HIGHER EDUCATION

As females advance through academic ranks, they may be confronted with barriers that do not necessarily plague their male counterparts. This may lead to a gender imbalance (Easterly & Pemberton, 2008) within rank. Though barriers such as motivation, lack of clarity, and timeframe may prevent promotion to any faculty member, gender imbalance at rank is clearly disproportional. As evidence males and female acquire PhDs at equal rates yet have different degrees of success to attain full professor. In 2001, 26% of full professors were female (American Association of University Professors, 2001). Despite a push towards equity, in 2016 only a slight increase has been noted: 33% of females were full, 45% were associate, and 51% were assistant (The Condition of Education, 2018).

This gender imbalance has been postulated across academic literature. A classic study by Long, Allison, and McGinnis (1993), found that with all else being equal, women tended to be promoted more slowly. More recently, in 2015, Heijstra, Bjarnason, and Rafnsdóttir continue this assertion by arguing that women are promoted at a lower rate than men. Men are about twice as likely to achieve the rank of full professor, and women take around 25% longer to attain the rank (Buch et al., 2011). At one private research-oriented university (R2), 48% of women associate professors with 13 or more years since their highest degree had yet to be promoted compared to 21% of men (Geisler et al., 2007). This may be partially because at the associate professor level, women are likely to spend more time on teaching and service than on research (Link, Swann, & Bozeman, 2008; Misra, Lundquist, Holmes, & Agiomavritis, 2011). Additionally, women are often assigned more committee work, especially in the STEM fields. Gardner and Blackstone (2013) had one female participant explain, “You know, I don’t need to be on 12 search committees [*laughs*]. So, it would help if when they ask you for names you don’t give them mine!” (p. 422). Britton (2010) reported high teaching and service obligations for both men and women. However, women had heavier student service loads and were not able to participate in the same service opportunities. One example given of a missed opportunity was traveling to conferences to establish a reputation and make connections to serve on national associations, as women often felt compelled to remain home and not travel (Link et al., 2008).

Women place more emphasis on family life, while research has not indicated the same conclusion for men. Britton (2010) suggested that women might feel obligated to play a significant role in the parenting of children. Females more frequently identify work/family issues as factors that slowed down their careers compared to men (Marcus, 2007). Marcus (2007) argued that deadlines for grants are unsympathetic to women who have children because agencies will not extend due dates. Moreover, Wolfinger and her colleagues (2008) proposed that women progress at a slower rate due to fewer opportunities. The authors substantiated this claim by noting that women who have a child under the age of six years are 22% less likely to attain tenure-track positions.

There also may be double standards in the evaluation of those who apply for full professorship in that women are typically held to higher standards in teaching, research, and service when assessed for promotion (Ginther, 2006). A Swedish study found that women needed to publish two-and-a-half times more than men to attain the same competence rating (Wenneras & Wold, 1997). Fear of not being marked “competent” may inspire hesitancy in some women qualified to seek promotion. This hesitancy is one factor that contributes to women remaining as associate professors for a longer time (Zakian et al., 2003). One study reported that only 10% of the male professors reported hesitancy when seeking promotion to full professor compared with 30% of females who reported hesitancy (Buch et al., 2011). Furthermore, the lack of female full professors may cause feelings of uncertainty as well. Gardner and Blackstone (2013, p. 421) report a female participant as stating, “I saw one woman who had tried three times to get promoted and didn’t get it every time ... I saw the men getting promoted only”. The lack of role models can have a detrimental impact on a women’s confidence to be promoted and can lead to hesitancy.

Overall, women are half as likely as men to be promoted to full professor at doctoral granting institutions (Curtis 2007) and stay at the rank of associate professor longer (Zakian et al., 2003). However, promotion to full professor may depend on context, as some institutions have policies that are more conducive to women becoming full professors. Berheide and Walzer (2014) found that women in two different liberal arts institutions with the same classification had varying experiences with promotion. The department in one college was more understanding and did not appear to have policies discriminatory to women. For instance, it was not seen as negative if the mother took a maternity leave after having a child. These participants characterized the process as “fair” between men and women, with both having equal teaching and service loads. The women at the other liberal arts university were less satisfied because of the amount of committee work and characterized their relationship with their department as “poor”. These findings imply that the relationship with the department was a significant factor in promotion of female scholars.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Women have made positive strides in business over the past generation. Like higher education, equality has not been achieved quite yet for women in business. Thirty-five years ago, Steinberg and Shapiro (1982) investigated the validity of the notion that women do not possess the personality traits characteristic of senior managers. Using multiple measures, they found that male and female MBA students did not generally differ on most measures of personality. Their data suggested that female MBA students do possess the personality traits that are commonly used to define a competent manager. Even though the characteristics of male and female managers are similar, MBA students surveyed from 1975 to 1983 expressed a more negative attitude toward female leadership (Dubno, 1985). Furthermore, female executives have demonstrated the same negotiation propensity as males, but see a lesser return (Gerhart, 1991). Burke (2000) found that female leadership that considered themselves workaholics, tended to place less emphasis on the work-family balance. In previous decades, females often had to choose between a family and a successful corporate career. Although top women executives still earn between 8-25% less than male executives (controlling for differences in company size, occupational title, and industry) the wage gap is narrowing (Bell, 2005). Bell (2005) attributed the magnitude of the gender pay gap to be statically related to the gender of the Chief Executive and Corporate Board Chair. Thus, firms with women in key positions tend to have more equality in executive pay when compared to non-women led firms. Although, women are at a cumulative disadvantage compared to their male counterparts stemming from differential rewards to internal and external mobility (Merluzzi, 2015), the literature indicates that the gap is narrowing.

WOMEN IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In congruence with business, historically women in P.E have been discriminated against greatly due to perceived gender roles and motor skill abilities (Cazers & Curtner-Smith, 2017). For instance, it has been noted that men are the perceived “breadwinners” of the family which have historically put women in disadvantageous positions (Bloot & Browne, 1994). Even if hired, transgressions in the past have transpired where women are given lower pay for the same job or have been forced to resign from positions when married (Bloot & Browne, 1994). Due to these insidious acts, legislation has been passed such as The Equal Pay Act of 1963 which aimed at eliminating wage disparity based on sex (Bloot & Browne, 1994). However, despite such requirements, Hegewisch, Liepmann, Hayes, and Hartmann (2010) note that elementary and middle school female teachers make \$933 a week compared to their male counterparts with \$1,022. Furthermore, female teachers have been fired because of same sex marriage (Bornstein, & Bench, 2015).

Other reasons of discrimination have been noted in regard to motor skills which has prevented some women to attain administration positions or advance into higher education until recently as more female mentors have arisen. Cazers and Curtner-Smith (2017) noted, in their case study of a women physical education teacher, instances of her being not taken seriously pre- Title IX; this is legislation that prohibits discrimination based on gender in any federally funded education program or activity. Robin, the participant, missed opportunities and could recalled several salient experiences growing up in which she asserted there was no P.E teacher to assist her to shoot a basketball because she was not in the boys P.E. program. This inspired her to become a P.E teacher and eventually a professor. Because of legislation such as Title IX, and eventually, more females entering the field higher education such as Robin, there have been more role models. Dodds (2005) explored women PETE faculty mentees’ perceptions of mentors during induction years. Mentors were characterized as having the women’s best interests at heart, being enthusiastic, and making them feel valuable from the start. In addition, mentors help build collaborative relationships among other faculty members and were open to answer questions. These mentors helped women be successful within the field of higher education including: (a) induction into postsecondary culture, (b) tenure and promotion, (c) writing and research, and (d) teaching. Because of

the increase of mentors for females, Boyce, Lund, and O'Neil (2015) note there are now more female lectures than male in physical education teacher education. Legislation and mentors have positively impacted women in the field of physical education.

IMPROVEMENTS OVER TIME

Female Physical Education Scholars

We interviewed four women in Physical education about discrimination they encountered over their career. Participants were discussed early frustrations in the profession but noted increasing quality in academia. For anonymity, they will be referred to as Lisa, Edna, Marge, and Helen. Of note, most of the gender bias was witnessed anywhere from 20-30 years ago. At that time, it was difficult to envision women teaching a sport. Lisa remarked at her first job that she was told by some faculty and students "You're a girl! What could you possibly know about sports?" This blatant gender bias was apparent for the other women. Others, such as Marge, articulated instances of "stick to only sports you know." These included more "feminine" games as the participants described it. Helen had an experience in which faculty expressed the necessity for her to teach "gymnastics and dance" because she was a female and "probably" had more experience with the sports. However, other than athletics, promotion proved to be difficult as there were limited institutional knowledge in regard to women's needs. Edna remarked "When I was first starting out, I got pregnant with my first son. There were no rules in the handbook for how it would impact tenure and promotion." She felt that there was a need for things to be explicitly stated in the handbook. After, her first pregnancy she got together with the dean of her school to work out instances of maternity leave. These transgressions of discrimination did not deter Lisa, Marge, Helen, and Edna and facilitated a need to be excellent in the field in regard to teaching, research, and scholarship. Each professor was promoted to associate professor in the normal five to seven years and eventually all became full professors.

These women did state that there has been an improvement on gender equality because of clear expectations and consistent improvement over time. Edna explains "I think a lot of things are written down, especially with promotion and tenure. It's a lot less nebulous." She states that there is now a maternity section in their universities policy for promotion. As Lisa explains "Well everyone is evaluated on the same rubric, so if you don't do your job, it's your fault." Besides more well-defined expectations, participants alluded to improvement over time. Helen postulated "Well think about how far back Title IX was.... things have come a long way. It will only get better, as long as we are aware." All four participants stated that gender in their workplace is a nonissue currently.

Female MBAs

As higher education professionals alluded to, instances of discrimination in business have decreased over time. We interviewed five recent Valparaiso University MBA graduates, who completed their degree within the last 2-3 years go gather their experiences of workforce discrimination. According to the program director, Cindy Scanlan, the Valparaiso University MBA program has seen an increase in female representation in the last five years. Female enrollment has risen steadily, from 31% in 2013 to 43% in 2017. Cindy herself is a Valparaiso MBA graduate, who transitioned to higher education after a career in banking. She was promoted from Assistant Director of the program, to Director of Graduate Programs in Management. She was also influential in the local community by serving as both president and board member of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program of the Catholic Charities Advisory Board for LaPorte and Starke Counties. She has seen an increase in both numbers and success of female attendees and graduates at the MBA level. Our interviewees were professional females in the fields of higher education administration, engineering, business management, and healthcare management.

Most of our participants did not feel that they are discriminated against because of gender. However, Lori, who is an Engineer in a male dominated steel industry, has felt discrimination numerous times from her undergraduate to her professional years. Lori further elaborated,

“Organizations will always discriminate and treat females differently. Especially a mother, having to take off for maternity leave. Being treated like we are disabled when we are pregnant. Taking too much company time if we have to express milk at work. They will always prefer a man for certain positions. Why are secretaries always female?”

She achieved recognition and congratulations for earning her MBA before age 30 but feels that advancement and promotion appear to be slower than her male counterparts. As the only female in her department, she experiences odd situations when she needs to take time to pump breast milk for her infant who is in day care. Her counterparts also give the impression that her maternity leave has affected her involvement in projects.

Allie has faced discrimination earlier in her career because of a supervisor who treated her unfairly. She mentioned,

“There was a small window of time I felt discriminated against as a female and it was strictly due to one male supervisor who made it clear he didn’t like working with women. Although I was completing all tasks expected of me, and then some, at a more than satisfactory level, I still felt as though my job was constantly on the line”.

Conversely, Donna indicated that most of her department is female, so she has never felt discriminated against because of her gender. She expressed a sense of support among her colleagues.

All interviewees pursued the MBA for future job advancement and opportunities. Of our sample, only Donna already possessed a Masters. She completed her Master of Science in Organization and Corporate Communication from Northwestern University. Her pursuit of the MBA was primarily for her love of learning and excitement for new challenges. Each participant is proud of their accomplishment of attaining an advanced degree while balancing career and family commitments. Lori endured the most direct impact of gender imbalance as she was the only female in her department. She has since switched organizations with a positive outlook on the next stage of her professional career.

Positive Outlook and Recommendations

In the fields of Academia, Business and Physical Education, most of our sample noticed an improvement in gender balance. We notice that the longer the professional career, the greater the observed difference. Though each participants experience will be unique and different, we found several observations that are broadly applicable to females in the workplace.

1. Promote workplace support. Day care, extended maternity leave, and non-discriminatory practices are becoming more common. More specifically, the women in our study have witnessed less discriminatory practices over time. Larger organization typically have specific protocol in place to alleviate some of the work/life balance. Though it’s not universal, even some smaller organizations have found it beneficial to offer additional flexibility to women, beyond what is required by law. Most of the women in our study felt supported by their organization and their co-workers. However, the female engineer, Lori, felt that her male counterparts weren’t as understanding as the organization itself. There appeared to be a disconnect between the organizational support and the employee implementation. One way to remedy this situation is to have all employees take part in a sensitivity training workshop. It will benefit all employees regardless of their personal situation.

2. Women supporting women. One of our interviewees commented, “Some of the biggest knockers of females are females. They really don't give themselves credit for being able to do things, particularly in phys. ed. which has always been that sort of predominantly male area”. The dominance of males in physical education leadership positions is likely due to the impact of gender image of the subject (Blout & Browne, 1994). As more women have key roles in organizations, these perceptions will likely diminish. An example of women supporting women includes a local entrepreneur who founded her own organization. She had a successfully career that was put on hold due to the death of a child. It was in her daughter’s memory, that she began a foundation that supports families who have suffered infant loss and premature birth. Her board of directors is mainly comprised of successful women who have endured similar tragedies. It personifies the example that women can have a successful career as well as maintain family responsibilities. Therefore, it’s becoming less of a choice of one or the other. Women are supporting women to be successful at both.

3. Mentor other women. Females in physical education primarily advanced with the aid of mentors. Mentors were characterized as being positive and helping to alleviate concerns about the job. These mentors did not have to be exclusively female. Helen remarked that her mentor, who was a male, assisted her with publications and to meet people at national conferences. Mentors alleviated stress and facilitated the mentee to meet their most salient roles to be promoted. Lisa stated,

“Aside from answer[ing] every question that I ever had, she encouraged me to do what I was passionate about doing in my scholarship... So, she encouraged me to do what I wanted to do to start with as opposed to telling me to do something different. And, I think that was absolutely key—having people who supported what I was passionate about versus trying to indoctrinate me into what they were passionate about.”

Marge had a similar experience and discussed being able to rely on her mentor: “If I was having an issue, I could ask [Name] how she would handle the situation.” The mentees explained that it was a positive experience and now wanted to aid future faculty members in being successful. These same instances of a gender bias have been noted subjects such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics. According to Browne (1991), the imbalance of sexes in senior positions is of particular concern, because females are not seen to hold status positions, and consequently, girls and other female teachers are not provided with positive female role models.

1. **Persistence pays off.** The entire sample of female physical education faculty was promoted to full professor. Though some of them may have taken longer than others, their persistence towards excellence was rewarded in the end. Similarly, when looking at Valparaiso University’s College of Business, we identified two leaders who have been promoted within the organization. Assistant Dean Toni Spaliaras has been with the university for two decades. While working at the university, she pursued and achieved her MBA. As she grew in her career, so did her responsibility as a testament to persistence. Similarly, at Valparaiso University, Cindy Scanlan, Graduate Programs in Management Coordinator, wasn’t always in her current role. Though she had her MBA prior to joining Valpo, her experience, degree, and performance has allowed her to run the university’s MBA program.

2. **Education is an opportunity for advancement.** Something tangible, like a terminal degree is hard for any employer over look. Granted, education alone won’t necessarily get you promoted, but it’s a qualification that can differentiate the candidate enough to bring her to the next stage of her career. In all three fields, the achievement of the advanced degree indicated an opportunity for

our subjects, regardless of concentration. Though personal sacrifices may have to be made to achieve the degree, the consensus was that the women who completed their graduate studies had zero regrets in doing so.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPECIFIC OCCUPATIONS

Academia, physical education, and business may all benefit from the aforementioned recommendations, however each job has many unique nuances that may facilitate advancement. The following sections are dedicated to the idiosyncrasies of each occupation that will promote successful career opportunities for women.

Academia – Collaborate on Research

Link, et. al, (2008) and Misra et. al, (2011) found that women may have the propensity to spend time on teaching and service rather than research. Given that research is vital to tenure and promotion, scholars must prioritize scholarship among the other commitments. A strategy to combat the “lack of time” (Gardner, & Blackstone, 2013, p. 413) and increase publication rates is to collaborate with senior colleagues on projects. This approach can increase publication rates, presentations, and grants awarded which is significant for tenure (Dodds, 2005). Furthermore, Link et al, (2008) pointed out that woman may feel compelled to remain home and not travel thus limiting their exposure in the field. If travel is a limitation, collaboration is a way to get the research out in the general population, thus leading to additional research opportunities. Ideally, scholars should make a conscious effort to build a national/international network by presenting at conferences (Mabrouk, 2007) despite it being challenging in some cases.

Another suggestion specific to academia can be finding a culture that is conducive for success. Often, information on the history of the school can be found on the website. Items like diversity initiatives and women’s success can all be found. Some top research universities celebrate influential women in the field. For example, Louise Freer Hall, at University of Illinois, is home to the Kinesiology and Community Health department. Louise Freer came to the University of Illinois in 1915. Over the course of three decades, Professor Freer promoted equality among men and women in physical education. Midway through her career at University of Illinois, the school built a separate building dedicated to women’s physical education. Subsequently, the university named the women’s gymnasium, Louise Freer Hall, in her honor in 1968. Today it exemplifies the tradition of strong female leadership by having Dr. Amy Woods as the department head.

Business – Join associations and network

In-groups that dominant business result from networking and support. Likewise, women may find those opportunities may arise while supporting each other. Women have the opportunity to promote others in a variety of ways. First, woman may be able to amplify the voices of other women executives. In a group setting, having support of others will amplify the point, resulting in a greater likelihood of adoption by senior executives. Second, women should actively mentor other women in business. We have witnessed a strong connection develop between female guest speakers and students in business. Many of the successful leaders that have “made it” are inspired to assist others in their chosen vocation. Similarly, the third suggestion is to branch out and network. Ideally, this will both gain exposure to what you are currently doing as well as provide more knowledge of future opportunities. Potentially, this could even be accomplished by investing in others where you see potential. For instance, a female entrepreneur may be lacking resources to get a project underway. A colleague who believes in her may take that leap of faith and provide an opportunity that would not otherwise exist. Likewise, women have earned top roles in large companies and have showed significant results.

Successful leaders, such as Indra Nooyi, provide examples of how women can succeed at the top. She joined PepsiCo in 1994 and rose through the company with increasing responsibility and subsequent success. She was named CFO in 2001 which led to her becoming president and CEO in 2006. During her 12-year reign, the recently retired Nooyi won numerous awards and accolades while successfully growing the PepsiCo brand (Isidore, 2018).

Physical Education – Specialize

Our sample of female physical education practitioners universally stated that they were assumed to have interest or knowledge in female dominated activities because they were female. Similarly, there was often a divide where women could only teach or coach sports of the same gender. Conversely, men have had a much longer history of teaching and coaching women. For example, Geno Auriemma has been the head basketball coach at the University of Connecticut since 1985. In three decades as head coach, he has accumulated over 1,000 career wins. Women coaching men's sports does exist, but at a far less frequent rate. Fortunately, the past decade has included several influential female pioneers in profession men's sports. Table 1 includes a small sample of the many women who are working towards reducing the gender discrepancy in male sports (Feldman, 2016).

TABLE 1 – PIONEERING WOMEN IN MALE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

Name	Position
Becky Hammond	San Antonio Spurs Assistant Coach Hired in 2014, became first full time female assistant coach in NBA
Nancy Lieberman	First woman to coach men's professional team, Texas Legends of the NBA Development League. Became second female NBA assistant coach with Sacramento Kings.
Jen Welter	First NFL Assistant Coach. Arizona Cardinals hired her to work with the linebackers for the 2015 training camp and pre-season.
Kathryn Smith	First full time female NFL assistant as the special team's quality control.
Sarah Thomas	In 2015, became the first full-time NFL official (referee).
Justine Siegal	First female to coach a men's professional baseball team as the Brockton Rox's first base coach in 2009. In 2011, she became the first female to throw batting practice to an MLB team with the Oakland Athletics.

Women in the above table specialized in a specific sport and demonstrate vast knowledge. Women should specialize in their area of interest so that they are not positioned as a generic substitute. For example, if a woman is seeking employment, and has several workshops, assistantships, and experiences for a position, they are more likely to receive the application positively. This means young women should start with practical experiences from an early age. Such is the case for the women listed above.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our study found evidence that the gender imbalance that was historically in academia, business, and physical education has shown improvement. The conscious effort of women (and men) in these specific fields has provided additional opportunities for women that may not have been realized in previous generations. Women that are interested in pursuing a career in these industries can learn from strong examples set before them. Furthermore, current practitioners can promote additional inclusion so that the imbalance in these fields further dissipates.

CONCLUSION

The consensus of the participants in the three fields is that the gender imbalance in these three traditionally male dominated fields is decreasing. Most participants we interviewed felt they did not face overt discrimination. In the case of Lori, who felt marginalized for being female and a mother, the best choice was to switch companies. With her MBA, she was able to find a better opportunity that may have not been possible without her advanced degree. It is important that all female professionals understand their value to help reduce gender imbalance in academia, business, and physical education.

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