

GENDER TRANSFORMATION IN THE ACADEMY

SUMMARY REPORT



INSIGHT INTO GENDER EQUITY

An accurate understanding of the state of gender equity within the academy is essential when making informed policy choices. In this report, we take a look at *Gender Transformation in the Academy*, the newest volume in Emerald Group Publishing Ltd's Advances in Gender Research series

CONTENTS

- 2 How does gender shape career progression?
- 2 Is it possible to have a successful academic career and a happy family life?
- 3 What is the impact of female leadership?
- 4 What practical steps can be taken to address gender bias in the academy?
- 4 Policy implications
- 5 Gender: a global issue



CONTRIBUTORS

EDITED BY

VASILIKIE DEMOS

University of Minnesota-Morris

CATHERINE WHITE BERHEIDE

Skidmore College

MARCIA TEXLER SEGAL

Indiana University Southeast

Cynthia D Anderson
Ohio University

Maxwell O Awando
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
State University

Diane C Bates
The College of New Jersey

Deborah Belle
Boston University

Elizabeth Borland
The College of New Jersey

Erin L Cadwalader
Lewis-Burke Associates, USA

Elsa Camargo
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
State University

Molly Carnes
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Valerie Martin Conley
Ohio University

Fay Davidson
University of Western Australia

Lisa M. Dilks
West Virginia University

Mychel Estevez
Washington State University

Eve Fine
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jo Handelsman
Yale University

Joan M Herbers
Ohio State University

Beverly Hill
University of Western Australia

Amy L Hillard
Adrian College

Mary Anne Holmes
National Science Foundation

J Kasi Jackson
West Virginia University

Sarah M Jackson
Wright State University

David Koonce
Ohio University

David M LaHuis
Wright State University

Melissa Latimer
West Virginia University

Peggy Layne
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University

Amy Lubitow
Portland State University

Maria de Lourdes Machado-Taylor
Center for Higher Education Policy
Studies, Portugal

Christine Mattley
Ohio University

Julia McQuillan
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

James J Nolan
West Virginia University

Lauren M O'Brien
Boston University

Marjukka Ollilainen
Weber State University

Helen Peterson
New York University

Alice Popejoy
University of Washington

Christine Pribbenow
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Sue V Rosser
San Francisco State University

Julia Savoy
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Tamera R Schneider
Wright State University

Judith Secker
University of Oxford

Jennifer Sheridan
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dianne Shober
University of Fort Hare-East
London, South Africa

Laurel Smith-Doerr
University of Massachusetts

Catherine Richards Solomon
Quinnipiac University

Leslie E Tower
West Virginia University

Susan Walzer
Skidmore College

Amy Wendt
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Amy S Wharton
Washington State University
Vancouver

Kate White
Federation University Australia

Patricia Wonch Hill
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Ashley Wood
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
State University

Angela Wroblewski
Institute for Advanced
Studies, Austria

Kathrin Zippel
Northeastern University

GENDER TRANSFORMATION IN THE ACADEMY

ENGENDERING CONTINUED DEBATE

Emerald Group Publishing Ltd's *Gender Transformation in the Academy* brings readers a select yet varied collection of original manuscripts that deal with the tough questions facing investigators in the field today. The research focuses on the changing role of women in the academic environment – and particularly in the STEM disciplines. This report presents an overview of the key findings emerging from the book



HOW DOES GENDER SHAPE CAREER PROGRESSION?

“Women have conquered the universities,” claims Dr Angela Wroblewski, author of chapter 14 – and indeed, the evidence of graduate and postgraduate communities, which are now predominantly female in most Western countries, supports this assertion. Encouragingly, a mixture of innovative policy and gradual social change has been responsible for removing many of the obstacles that previously prevented women from entering the academic environment and the careers it offers. The problem is far from resolved, however; the fact remains that women are underrepresented in university management positions and full professorships, and the ways in which gender impacts on the trajectory of an academic career, *Gender Transformation in the Academy* reveals, are manifold.

DISRUPTIONS TO LINEAR PROGRESSION

One important factor in career progression, especially in an academic context, is linearity. Disruptions to study, and subsequently to projects, publications and networking, can have a disproportionate impact on career development – and new research presented in this book suggests that this is commonly a gender issue. Based on extended interviews with 43 staff in academic positions, Beverly Hill et al. explain in chapter five that women are more than twice as vulnerable to disruptive events including primary childcare responsibilities, personal health and travel for a spouse's career. Interestingly, the interviews also suggest that males of a younger generation are more likely to suffer as a result of these same commitments than their older counterparts.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

Becoming a full professor is a challenging process, and the criteria for promotion to this rank are not always clear. Generally, however, what is required is a delicate balance of teaching duties and other service against paper publication and research activities. In chapter 10, Maxwell Awando et al. identify this as a prime concern for mid-level faculty members – and discover that women are more often convinced to disrupt their own day-to-day schedule than men, especially when tasked with additional administrative or ‘service’ duties. One of the study's 11 participants, a female, remarked: “I've done too much service [...] it has taken a lot of time [...] I don't see a lot of my colleagues doing that”.

INADVERTENT GENDER BIAS

Other chapters reflect on more subtle gender biases that can nonetheless have a marked influence on career progression. Wroblewski in chapter 14 emphasises the need for reflexivity, highlighting instances where gender bias has gone undetected until its results become obvious. One such case is that of a male engineering professor, who during an interview revealed that he had often noticed that female applicants for professorship tended to have less experience teaching large groups of students than their male competitors, and were therefore selected less often. On further reflection, he realised that their mentors were assigning them to specialised courses to support them – but that in doing so, they were inadvertently hobbling their chances for advancement.



IS IT POSSIBLE TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC CAREER AND A HAPPY FAMILY LIFE?

A perennial topic in gender studies is that of parenting and family, and the research presented in this volume approaches the issue from a number of new angles. Drs Amy Wharton and Mychel Estevez, for example, present the results of their work, which establishes the perspectives of 52 department chairs on work, family and gender. A fascinating insight into the views of these leaders, the chapter reveals that many chairs prefer to take a hands-off approach to managing the work-life balance of faculty members. “Most faculty figure it out,” one chair explained – a view that contrasts with the desires expressed by mid-level faculty, who place a high value on support in the workplace.

AN OUTMODED MODEL

This raises the question of what the ‘ideal’ faculty member is actually like, and how they measure up against the reality – a concern that is comprehensively addressed in the first chapter of *Gender Transformation in the Academy*. The typical research-intensive STEM department demands a high level of commitment from its faculty, and therefore prefers members who have an unemployed partner to support their family life; indeed, there is a strong argument that many departments base their expectations on this family model. Through investigations conducted in one university's STEM departments, however, Patricia Wonch Hill et al. conclude that this

"MOST FACULTY FIGURE IT OUT"

– ONE DEPARTMENT CHAIR ON MANAGING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

'ideal faculty member' is difficult to find – only 13 per cent of their male respondents fit the description, and none of the females. This small group, however, reported the lowest interference between family and work commitments, and the highest job satisfaction – suggesting that the academic culture favours a small minority.

ACTS OF RESISTANCE

This is not an injustice that faculty members are prepared to take sitting down, report Drs Marjukka Ollilainen and Catherine Richards Solomon. In chapter two, they examine acts of resistance against the culture of academe made by faculty of both genders – and find that these behaviours may reflect the beginnings of positive change. Not only do academics at all levels actively choose institutions with family-friendly policies and leave those that do not accommodate them, but they also shape their own work activities to better suit their responsibilities at home. Many respondents reported selectively avoiding conferences, work and service duties that they perceived as non-essential to their success. Perhaps most defiantly of all, faculty members admitted to injecting family life into the academic environment – speaking openly about family commitments, referencing their home responsibilities in official documents and even bringing children to meetings.



WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP?

Authority figures and those in managerial positions have the power to influence people working under them to a great degree, and to control the climate of the environment in which they operate. As the number of women in managerial academic roles gradually increases, therefore, a raft of issues concerning the views and impact of this important group comes to the fore. *Gender Transformation in the Academy* contains chapters that engage with

both the positive potential of this change, and the less predictable complications that arise as cultural shift takes place.

NEW MANAGEMENT STYLES

Chapters 18 and 19 both address the impact of women in leadership roles as agents of change in managerial culture, and in the latter, Dr Helen Peterson identifies the ways in which female managers challenge the masculine management norm – often simply with their presence. This can make a pronounced difference to the working environment; many of Peterson's interviewees identified radical changes to faculty management that have been occurring over the last few decades and appear to be continuing into the future. Both male and female subjects often characterised the transition as being towards a more 'feminine' style of management – less authoritative, and more nurturing.

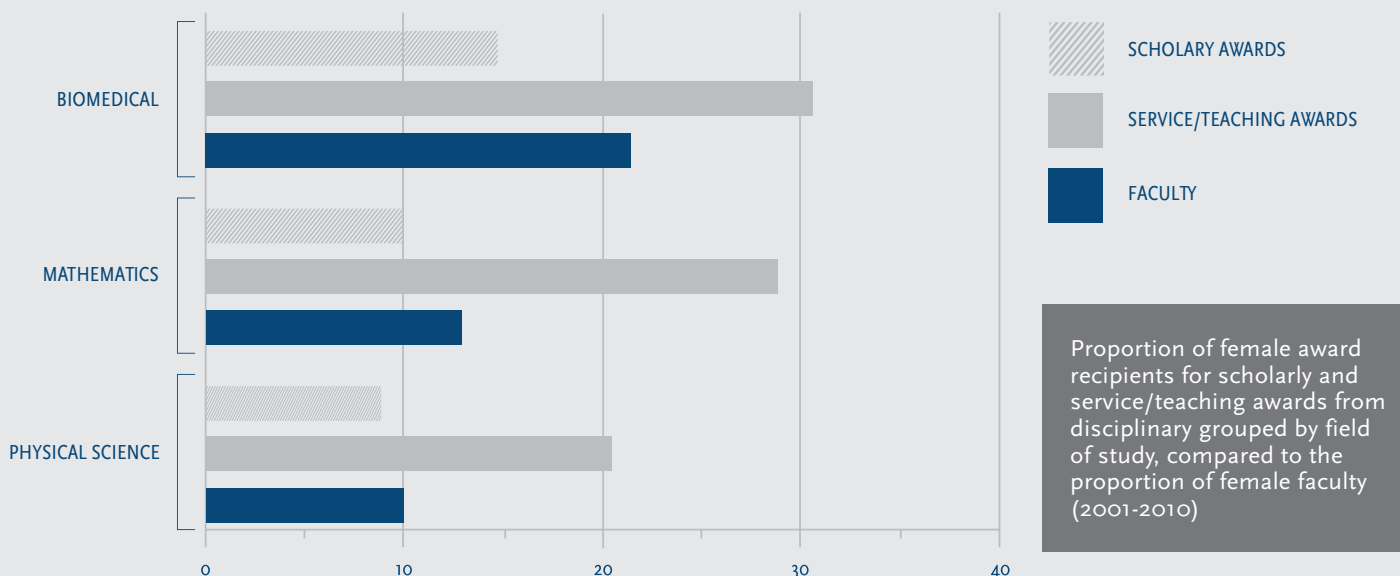
Explaining her influence on colleagues, one female dean explained: "I take a different view on things and think differently [...] I am able to see the full picture in a way they can't. [...] I contribute to the group as a woman". The findings of chapter 18 corroborate the perceived value of this new perspective, suggesting that the presence of women in managerial roles broadens the range of managerial styles on offer, ultimately strengthening the faculty leadership.

APPROACHES TO PREJUDICE

Female leadership has many facets; however, and the overall effects of a growing contingent of women in management are not yet certain. Interestingly, of the 52 department chairs interviewed in chapter 7, two offered diametrically opposed views on the treatment of women and other minorities in faculty positions. One male chair stressed the need for sensitivity and honesty in dealing with prejudicial treatment, asserting that "all of the factors that make the faculty diverse can also make their jobs more challenging". The other, a female, felt that calling attention to differences such as gender was counterproductive, and argued that everybody faces challenges: "you should get the best person that you can to fill the job".

PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

This is not to say that women who achieve managerial positions have it all their own way, by any means – indeed, chapter 11



compares the challenges faced by junior and senior female faculty, and finds that many women acknowledge that although the problems may be different, they are no less pressing. One respondent, for example, highlighted the fact that junior women had the advantage of remaining closely connected to the networks of their mentors – and that they could often receive preferential treatment from male superiors based on their physical appearance. Another argued that, for senior women: “The stakes are higher, the competition greater, and the challenges from men more serious. The ‘old boys’ club is still strong at the senior level”.



WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS CAN BE TAKEN TO ADDRESS GENDER BIAS IN THE ACADEMY?

An examination of these issues would be incomplete without suggestions as to how progress can be made towards a fairer, less biased and more universally rewarding academic environment. Every chapter of *Gender Transformation in the Academy* – and, indeed, every contributing author – has its own suggestion for the next steps that might be taken at the level of policy, administration and even personal reflection. Moreover, several chapters go further, taking a critical look at prospective and past solutions aimed at precipitating meaningful change.

INTERVENTIONS AGAINST BIAS

In chapter 13, Eve Fine et al. test the efficacy of a series of workshops designed to change the way faculty search committees think about gender. The Searching for Excellence and Diversity® workshops consist of two two-hour sessions, and encourage participants to reflect on their own status as a subject influenced by unconscious biases, as well as proposing possible exercises and concrete strategies to counteract this. By collecting and analysing data on offers and hires at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the researchers show a significant positive correlation between workshop attendance and offers made to female candidates.

Dr Melissa Latimer and her collaborators took quite a different approach to their intervention, which is designed to stimulate gender equity without addressing gender bias directly. The implementation and assessment of their approach, directed at STEM departments within two colleges at the same research-intensive university, is documented in chapter 16. The flexible eight-hour intervention was designed to fit with the schedules of most departments, and focused on answering questions relating to the improvement of the department through group discussions and activities as well as individual brainstorming and writing. Interestingly, this measure proved effective in heightening participants’ sense of group efficacy, and reducing conflict between individuals across all departments.

CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

Beyond isolated interventions and workshops, some chapters delve even deeper into the systemic conditions that could bring about gender equity in academic institutions. One provocative study conducted by Hillard et al. challenges past reports that a ‘critical mass’ of women within a department is the key to achieving a better climate for female faculty members. The study found a number of correlations between department characteristics and the number of women

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The papers presented in *Gender Transformation in the Academy* demonstrate, in many cases, novel findings with immediate implications for effective policy making in an academic setting. This guidance pervades the volume – but many vital points are also laid out explicitly for the reader

ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

“...we advocate for policies and programs such as parental leave for faculty men and women, tenure extension policies, onsite childcare and flexible scheduling.”

ON NETWORKING

“Efforts to support women in departments without a critical mass of women should focus on ensuring that all women scientists have adequate opportunities to collaborate with colleagues in their department and beyond.”

ON PROMOTION

“Faculty members need consistent information about promotion criteria and process. Our findings suggest that the university needs to frequently re-evaluate how it communicates promotion guidelines to faculty members.”

ON MENTORING

“...a formal mentoring process, overseen and rewarded by administrators at the departmental, college or institutional level, translates into more equitable mentoring for both women and underrepresented minorities.”

ON GENDER EQUITY

“...policies aimed at changing gendered practices have to (1) build up gender awareness as well as gender competence and (2) encourage reflexivity as well as agency among all stakeholders involved in a practice.”

employed – but these correlations were linear, not quadratic – indicating that there is no ‘magic number’ required for gender equity. Instead, they conclude that change is incremental – and that every woman entering the department makes a difference to the general perception of gender equity within the group.

GENDER: A GLOBAL ISSUE

Supported in large measure by a series of ADVANCE grants from the National Science Foundation, the US is a leading contributor to gender equity research, and this is reflected in the many chapters contributed to *Gender Transformation in the Academy* by prominent American authors. Gender is a truly global issue; however, and one advantage of the diverse work provided by this volume is the chance to learn from the challenges and successful approaches found in other cultural environments.



AUSTRALIA

National equal opportunities legislation has been effective in Australia since 1984, and improvements in institutional cultures around the country advertise the benefits of decisive policy shift made sooner rather than later. Lasting change takes time – but after three decades, chapter 18 contends, Australian academics have moved from a heroic, authoritarian conception of management towards a softer, more sympathetic approach.



AUSTRIA

Gender disparity does not go away overnight, and this is well demonstrated in the Austrian setting – where continued legislative efforts have not been entirely effective in producing equity, Dr Angela Wroblewski argues. In her provocative chapter, she suggests that many traditional practices remain stable in Austria's 22 universities, although discrimination is becoming more and more subtle – highlighting the need for vigilance and flexibility when tackling the problem.



PORTUGAL

Findings published for the first time in *Gender Transformation in the Academy* suggest that traditional approaches to the familial roles of men and women are more prevalent in Portugal than elsewhere – a cultural feature that is common to many countries, and can be disruptive. In this setting, female management is often viewed as a problematic alternative to more masculine leadership styles, producing a combative response that must be fully understood and dealt with carefully.



SOUTH AFRICA

In chapter 15, Dr Dianne Shober draws attention to the gender equity gap in South Africa, where disparities in positional and financial remuneration are relatively pronounced. Her interviews reveal a still outspoken spirit of resistance against gender equity policies on the part of some male faculty members – but perhaps more importantly, they reveal that both South African women and men exhibit stereotypical thinking when it comes to gender. This is a powerful reminder that implicit bias can be deeply ingrained, and perpetuated by people of both genders.



SWEDEN

Lessons can be taken from Sweden, a country that ranks highly within Europe in terms of the number of women filling senior management positions. Although female managers here still face challenges in establishing themselves and their management style, chapter 19 indicates recent reforms of higher education may have provided a vital chance for more feminine management styles to come to the fore. Opportunities to further gender equity goals, it seems, can come in many forms.

INSIDE *GENDER TRANSFORMATION IN THE ACADEMY*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Gender Transformation in the Academy: An Introduction by Marcia Texler Segal and Vasiliki Demos

DOING FAMILY WHILE HAVING A CAREER

The New STEM Faculty Profile: Balancing Family and Dual Careers Patricia Wonch Hill, Mary Anne Holmes and Julia McQuillan

Carving a “Third Path”: Faculty Parents’ Resistance to the Ideal Academic Worker Norm Marjukka Ollilainen and Catherine Richards Solomon

Community Colleges and the Reproduction of Gender in the Academy: Experiences of Women STEM Faculty Cynthia D Anderson, Christine Mattley, Valerie Martin Conley and David A Koonce

Strategies of Academic Parents to Manage Work-Life Conflict in Research Abroad Amy Lubitow and Kathrin Zippel

Achievement Relative to Opportunity: Career Hijacks in the Academy Beverly Hill, Judith Secker and Fay Davidson

Emerging Gender Parity and Persistent Differences: Cultural Shifts Among Faculty Cohorts at a Primarily Undergraduate Institution Elizabeth Borland and Diane C Bates

Department Chairs’ Perspectives on Work, Family, and Gender: Pathways for Transformation Amy S Wharton and Mychel Estevez

THE ESTEEM OF PEERS: NETWORKS, PROMOTION TO FULL PROFESSOR AND AWARDS

Gendered Networks: Professional Connections of Science and Engineering Faculty Deborah Belle, Laurel Smith-Doerr and Lauren M O’Brien

Processes and Pathways: Exploring Promotion to Full Professor at Two Liberal Arts Colleges in the United States Catherine White Berheide and Susan Walzer

Advancement of Mid-Career Faculty members: Perceptions, Experiences, and Challenges Maxwell Awando, Ashley Wood, Elsa Camargo and Peggy Layne

Senior Compared to Junior Women Academic Scientists: Similar or Different Needs? Sue V Rosser
The Dearth of Awards for Women in Disciplinary Societies Erin L Cadwalader, Joan M Herbers and Alice B Popejoy

WOMEN: FROM BIAS TO LEADERSHIP

Minimizing the Influence of Gender Bias on the Faculty Search Process Eve Fine, Jennifer Sheridan, Molly Carnes, Jo Handelsman, Christine Pribbenow, Julia Savoy and Amy Wendt

Gender Bias in Appointment Procedures for Full Professors: Challenges to Changing Traditional and Seemingly Gender Neutral Practices Angela Wroblewski

Women in Higher Education in South Africa Dianne Shober

Organizational Change and Gender Equity in the Academy: Using Dialogical Change to Promote Positive Departmental Climates Melissa Latimer, J Kasi Jackson, Lisa M Dilks, James J Nolan and Leslie Tower

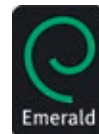
Critical Mass or Incremental Change? The Effects of Faculty Gender Composition in STEM Amy L Hillard, Tamara R Schneider, Sarah M Jackson and David M LaHuis

Women in Academic Leadership Maria de Lourdes Machado-Taylor and Kate White

“Someone Needs to be First” Women Pioneers as Change Agents in Higher Education Management Helen Peterson

VOLUME PUBLISHED BY

Emerald Group Publishing Ltd
ISBN 9781784410704
www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/tk/agr



CONTACT

Cristina Irving Turner
T: +44 (0) 1274 785216
F: +44 (0) 1274 785200
E: C.IrvingTurner@emeraldinsight.com

This summary report was published by



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Contact (quoting code WiS):

Brett Langenberg

Project Manager

T +44 117 911 3477

E brett@researchmedia.eu

W internationalinnovation.com



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