Description

In the 1940s, genius was widely believed to be a male trait and women were considered more suited for virtuous tasks. However, women played a key role in the era of wartime advances, crucially in signals intelligence and code breaking. History ***clearly*** implicates that the willingness to welcome genius through inclusion, was a reason the right side won the war. However, in retrospect it appears that inclusion was merely a temporary measure. For instance, female code-breakers received minimal public credit, and the recognition of towering icons like Grace Hopper was well overdue. While women had overturned stereotypes and elaborated the power of inclusion, its post-war re-emergence highlights a dire lack of hindsight. Presently, this mind-set has infiltrated academia, Silicon Valley, and financial fields, repetitively forming a proverbial “glass ceiling” of separation. Gender bias in academia is now a trending news.

The Ladies Who Are At The Top Now

In reference to gender equality, the concept of vertical segregation denotes the restriction of genders to specific levels of responsibility. Moreover, a higher percentage of female representation in any field does not guarantee their equal opportunity to ascend a hierarchy. In science, for example, the number of peak positions is less and pace glacially toward gender inequality. This ongoing impulse to discriminate also deprives social advancement. Inclusion, on the other hand, enlarges the pool of talent. Diverse teams perform better and upend the myth that inclusion “lowers the bar”. However, amidst such vertical segregation, an all-female group of current heads in major science agencies includes:

- Diana Bianchi, Director of the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).
- France Córdova, Director of the US National Science Foundation (NSF),
- Anne Kelso, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), and
- Margaret Hamburg, President-Elect of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and so on.

However, their path towards success wasn’t very easy. Apart from gender segregation, some of these women have had to overcome racial discrimination as well. For instance, Margaret Hamburg’s mother,

Beatrix McCleary Hamburg is one of the first three African-American women to graduate from Yale.

The Battle Continues

Gender disparity prevails even at major funding agencies. However, there are a few organizations like the ARC, NIH, NSF etc., which have women heading them. Although the first female NIH director was appointed after 61 years, yet this can be considered as a breakthrough achievement. Institutes like the Royal Society, National Cancer Institute, are yet to have their first female director but can be expected to have one sometime soon.

The number of female scientists heading important positions and the consciousness on the importance of inclusion grew through the 1970s. By the 1990s, a number of senior women were at the cutting edge of science. Some of the women who have had headed some of the important institutions are as follows:

- Audrey S. Penn was the first African-American female Director of an NIH institute.
- Bernadine Healy was the only permanent Director of the whole NIH so far.
- Ruth Kirschstein pioneered female institutional direction at the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) in 1974.
- Yvonne Maddox led the NIH as an acting Deputy Director from 1993 to 1994.

Pioneering women have thus achieved many historical firsts, for the advancement of science and technology.

Gender Bias In Academia, Among Doctoral Students

A recent study among doctoral candidates revealed significantly higher publication rates for male scientists compared to their female peers. In a survey data gathered from 1,285 doctoral graduates, the trends were apparent even within the same institution. Sarah Lubienski, mathematician and lead author of the study noted that differences in publication rates were wider in STEM fields. Statistically, men submitted 7.2 articles versus women's 5.5 articles. However, the study observed similar significant publication disparity among genders in the humanities and social sciences as well. According to the study, women also have a higher teaching to research ratio, and differences in projected career goals. Some of the contributing factors include males receiving better research mentoring, with minimal personal/family hindrances, compared to women. Although the study focused on just one institution, necessitating replication, it offered key perspectives to the pervasive patterns across disciplines. Similar imbalances in female academic faculty positions, have also led to recent legal disputes at the Salk Institute. Additionally, female academics face a chasm of sexist bias via student evaluations, creating yet another hurdle to overcome. The problem is therefore pervasive and early intervention may be able to mitigate disparity, right at the doctoral level.

Overcoming Gender Bias In Academia

The solution to an inherent problem begins by accepting that the problem exists. Following the acceptance, some additional measures can be taken to overcome the issue of gender bias in academia. Some of these are as follows:

- University administrators can start by paying exclusive attention to the female research experience, number of publications, and quality of mentoring.
- Measures should ensure that female academics are not disproportionately serving as teaching assistants.
- Several implemented doctoral programs, that actively strive to overcome systematic and institutional biases, should be formed. Initiatives include the Boston University Women in Economics and the Women in Science at Yale (WISAY), for female doctoral candidates.
- Efforts initiated must aim to provide a collective voice to the female doctoral experience and create mentoring opportunities for career advancement.
- Campaigns like WISE that work for participation, contribution and success of women in the fields of science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM).

How far do you think the roots of gender bias have stretched into the field of academia? If you are a female researcher, have you ever felt the sting of gender bias in your field? Please share your thoughts in the comments section below.

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