



# Trailblazing women in academia: Representation of women in senior faculty and the gender gap in junior faculty's salaries in higher educational institutions



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 14 January 2013

Received in revised form 19 May 2014

Accepted 19 May 2014

Available online 12 June 2014

### Keywords:

Representative bureaucracy

Wage differentials

Women in academia

Tenure system

## ABSTRACT

This study examines how women's representation at different levels of an organizational hierarchy predicts gender equity in assistant professors' salaries at four-year universities. This study suggests that women's proportion at the full professor rank is positively associated with improved gender equity in assistant professors' salaries, while women's proportion at the associate and assistant ranks is not significantly associated with improved gender equity. Institutions with a female president, however, have a greater wage gap. Overall, the results imply that the presence of women who blazed the trail of tenure and promotion contributes to the improved gender equity for their junior colleagues.

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## 1. Introduction

Research finds that discrimination against women persists in academia despite the efforts made by both scholars and administrators (Roos & Gatta, 2009). One aspect of discrimination against women is tenure and promotion; studies report that female faculty members are less likely to be tenured or promoted compared to their male colleagues, and the proportion of women at the same faculty rank decreases as the rank increases (Bain & Cummings, 2000; Winkler, 2000). While 52% of the doctoral degrees awarded in the United States in the 2009–10 academic year were conferred on women (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012) and female assistant professors outnumber male assistant professors in many higher education

institutions<sup>1</sup>, according to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), women still account for only about a third of full professors in universities and colleges as of the 2009–10 academic year (AAUP, 2010).

The fact that women account for at least a half of the junior faculty suggests that barriers against women's entry to academia have been removed; however, research finds that discrimination persists in terms of promotion and tenure (AAUP, 2010; Dyer, 2004). For instance, women's share in tenured faculty decreased from 38.4% in 1976 to 34.6% in 2009 (Curtis, 2011), while the proportion of doctoral degrees conferred on women more than doubled, from 24% in 1976 to 53.5% in 2009 (NCES, 2012). The 2009 survey by the Modern Language Association (MLA) also reported that, on average, it takes up to 3.5 more years for women associate professors to attain the rank of professor than for men. What is more serious is that the gender gap

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<sup>1</sup> Except at doctorate-granting institutions, women outnumber men in the assistant professor population.

in tenure and promotion is observed even when controlling for discipline and the quality of the doctoral institution (Buch, Huet, Rorrer, & Roberson, 2011; Jaschik, 2011).

Another aspect of discrimination that has received much attention is the salary gap between male and female professors. Although the exact percentages vary, research finds that women are persistently paid less compared to their male counterparts regardless of the institutional type and faculty rank (AAUP, 2010; Barbezat, 2002; Barbezat & Hughes, 2005). The overall average salary for female faculty members on 9/10-month contracts was approximately 81% of the salary for their male colleagues' in the 2001–02 academic year. In the 2010–11 academic year, the gap remained unclosed, with female full-time faculty members earning approximately 82% of male full-time faculty members' salaries (Clery, 2012). This gap persists after controlling for such factors as the productivity of faculty members and the type of institution (Jaschik, 2011; O'Keefe & Wang, 2013). Even more serious, the salary gap also exists at the assistant level. For instance, AAUP (West & Curtis, 2006) reported that female assistant professors earned 91–97% of what male assistant professors earned. While the gender wage gap has narrowed to some extent over the years, given that most of the assistant professors were hired recently and faculty salaries increase by percentage points of the starting salary (Hearn, 1999; Perna, 2001), an initial salary gap is likely to put women at a career-long disadvantage. While researchers and practitioners recognize discrimination against women in terms of both promotion and salary as problematic, what is less recognized is that these problems may be intertwined with the link between passive and active representation. The theory of representative bureaucracy posits that people have diverse values and beliefs according to their demographic characteristics and individuals can promote the interests of the group with which they identify both making direct impacts on policies and indirectly influencing the culture of the organization. This implies that demographic representation of women on the faculty and their active representation in achieving equal compensation are not distinct problems, and discrimination in tenure and promotion contributes to the gender salary gap for incoming members of the community. The present study investigates this connection between passive and active representation in academia by examining the relationship between the women who blazed a trail of tenure and promotion and the wage gap that their female junior colleagues face.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The passive and active representation of women at higher educational institutions

The theory of representative bureaucracy suggests that a public bureaucracy that resembles the population it serves will help ensure that the preferences of all groups are reflected in government decision-making (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011). In other words, the theory posits that passive representation of demographic groups leads to their active representation. Active representation is defined as

when “an individual bureaucrat presses for the interest and desires of those whom he (she) is presumed to represent” (Mosher, 1968, p. 12). The literature suggests that the demographic characteristics of individuals within an organization lead to their active representation in both direct and indirect ways (Lim, 2006; Wilkins & Keiser, 2006). The direct link between demographic and substantive representation means that individuals with particular demographic characteristics may promote the benefits of their social group directly through their administrative behaviors. Lim (2006) lists three direct links between passive and active representation. First, individuals can actively advocate the interests of the group with which they identify. According to Saltzstein (1979), the theory of representative bureaucracy assumes a bureaucrat making a policy responsive to the interests of a group that shares the bureaucrat's demographic background. In terms of women's representation, female bureaucrats can voice their opinions and shape the policies made on the behalf of the organization. However, in many organizational settings, including universities, most individuals do not have direct influence on organizational decisions. Nevertheless, Lim (2006) suggests that minority bureaucrats can increase the benefits of their social group without favoring it against the other groups by acting in accordance with the group's values and beliefs, consciously or unconsciously. In the women's representation context, women's needs and demands resemble those of other women more than their male counterparts, and female bureaucrats serve women's interests even when they do not intend to. Lastly, minority bureaucrats also better emphasize the values and beliefs of their minority group, even if they do not share them. This “empathic understanding” leads individuals to articulate the interests of their social group and take these interests into account in their own behaviors (Lim, 2006, p. 196).

Lim (2006) argues that individuals can also increase substantive benefits for their social group indirectly through their influence on other bureaucrats. First, minority bureaucrats can check the discriminatory behaviors of non-minority bureaucrats. In the context of women's representation, women perceive more men present within the organization, and express their disapproval of discriminatory behaviors by men. Second, a person's behavior is influenced by the anticipation of approval or disapproval from others (Turner, 1956). When minority bureaucrats are present, any actions based on existing biases are more likely to be checked by minority members. Lastly, minority bureaucrats can gradually promote changes in the organization's values and culture (Lim, 2006). The increasing presence of women in the organization changes the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of other members (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

While individuals may identify themselves based on one of many social origins, including region, race, ethnicity, and gender, the literature suggests that women identify themselves as “women” when certain conditions are met. For instance, Keiser, Wilkins, Meier, and Holland (2002) and Wilkins and Keiser (2006) point out that the linkage between passive and active representation for women depends on the political and institutional context (Keiser et al., 2002; Wilkins & Keiser, 2006). They propose that

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