

Taking Stock of Gender Equity in Museum Management

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my grandmother, Marion Jameson. She spent her professional life as director of two museums in central Minnesota, in the process helping her youngest granddaughter to grow up well aware of what women are capable of.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Chapter One: Introduction.....	6
Purpose.....	7
Questions guiding the study.....	8
Research assumptions.....	9
Definitions.....	10
Significance of the study.....	10
Chapter Two: Review of literature.....	14
Is gender equity on the radar screen.....	15
Limitations of research into gender equity in museum administration.....	16
The universality of progress.....	18
The roles of education and training, family, and mobility in advancement...	19
Comparison with the for-profit sector.....	21
Conclusion.....	23
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	24
Role of the researcher.....	25
Delimitations.....	25
Limitations.....	26
Research design	
Research approach.....	26
Strategy of inquiry	27
Difficulties with data collection.....	29
Ethical issues.....	30
Expectations.....	31
Chapter Four: Findings.....	32
The numbers.....	32
Qualitative data.....	32
Factors contributing to parity.....	33
Remaining barriers and lasting challenges.....	36
Size does matter.....	36
Attitudes of boards.....	37
Lack of data.....	39
Lack of ongoing discussion.....	40
Backlash and resistance.....	42
Challenges beyond gender.....	43
Enduring inequalities: The pay gap and family responsibilities	44
Implications: changes on the horizon?.....	47
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	49
Recommendations for action.....	49

Collect better data.....	50
Revisit employment policies to solidify a commitment to equality on all fronts.....	51
Improve mentoring programs.....	52
Eliminate the option of discrimination by means of legal action....	53
Generate initiative from within the field.....	54
Suggestions for additional research.....	54

Resources

Appendices

- Appendix A. Questionnaire recruitment letter
- Appendix B. Questionnaire consent form
- Appendix C. Questionnaire
- Appendix D. Questionnaire data sheet

Abstract

Women have remained consistently underrepresented in the administration of American art museums. Though there are significantly more women museum directors today than forty years ago women are still a minority, especially in larger institutions where compensation and prestige are highest. Despite the lack of comprehensive, current scholarship, the significance of gender equity in museum management remains relevant today. *Taking Stock of Gender Equity in Museum Management* draws on the perspectives of present-day professionals to update research into the progress made in attaining equity in the museum field, details the difficulties of gathering data, and offers recommendations for action and further study.

Chapter One: Introduction

I recently had the opportunity to ask four hundred women leaders in the arts about their opinions of the current state of gender equity in the field. Among other questions, I wanted to know who is championing research into the issue of employment equity. The question was met with complete silence. A few seconds later someone called out, “You are.”

This is just one small example that illustrates how little information is widely circulated about the state of gender equity in employment in museums. Yet, the issue of employment equity in museums is hardly new. Though largely understudied, compelling anecdotal evidence reveals the struggle for equal opportunity in museums is now more than thirty years old.

In the 1970s, the American Association of Museums (AAM) identified a need to promote the visibility of women in the field and highlight women’s concerns. In 1972 the Women’s Caucus for Art was established and members became active lobbyists for women’s rights. According to Susan Stitt, a former president of the caucus, the group was dissolved by 1975. “By the mid-seventies we thought those goals were accomplished,” she explained (Stitt, 1994, p. 150). But she and many other women working in museums in the United States went on to find out that women’s struggles in the field were far from solved. The climate in the 70s had promised to improve so dramatically that tremendous optimism boosted what were in fact small gains overall. And, as time went on, the urgency of the issue was mellowed by past success and trumped by other issues that gained in importance. As a result, many of the equity issues acknowledged in the seventies remain unresolved today.

I did not choose to research gender equity because I thought the problems of discrimination in the field were solved—although, in retrospect, that would have been a nice surprise. Instead, I saw an opportunity to find out what has happened since press was last given to the issue of women in museums; I hoped to report on what concerns remain. In conducting this research I never expected to be asked, as I was, whether I thought the assignment might hinder my ability to find a job in the field—evidence to me that this is still a sensitive issue with not-so-subtle consequences for those who take it on in the workplace. My findings and the process that led me down the path to understanding why this issue is not actively studied are summarized in this report.

Purpose

The purpose of *Taking Stock of Gender Equity in Museum Management* is to update research into the progress made in attaining equity in top leadership positions in the museum field and to identify remaining barriers to achieving absolute equity. Though prior research suggests progress over the last thirty years since this issue was first formally examined, this study demonstrates that comprehensive, current scholarship is lacking today. It advocates for continued research on the part of museum leaders, professional organizations in the arts, and lawmaking bodies. Although broader issues of diversity have somewhat eclipsed gender as a subject of focus industry-wide, findings conclude that the issue of gender equity will remain significant of consideration as long as the ratio of women to men in positions of senior leadership remains out of balance and until employment equity concerns are resolved in the broader society.

Continued attention to this matter is necessary because some people believe the issue to be “solved” despite compelling (if limited) quantitative and qualitative data indicating otherwise. Gender is still an issue in the workforce and elsewhere because

representation is not equal among professional leaders, because men and women are still not compensated equally for comparable work, and because the subtleties that prohibit fully solving this issue have yet to be identified and rectified.

This study aims to do several things in grappling with the issue of gender equity in museum management today. It endeavors to provide an honest, current assessment of the gender balance in museum leadership in American art museums based on available literature and the perceptions of leaders in the field. It also voices perspectives that do not appear in previously published literature by widening the participant sample of past studies. The experiences of lesser-known leaders as well as “superstars” of the profession are incorporated.

In addition to the aforementioned goals, the purpose of this inquiry is to advocate for increased data collection to equip future researchers with better statistics, inspire people to act upon the findings, and encourage current and future museum workers to spread the word about the status of gender equity and lobby for intervention.

This study does not exhaust all aspects of the employment equity issue nor does it intend to. Its value lies in placing the deficiencies of employment equity in the museum field on view, documenting current concerns within the profession, deflating claims that deny the existence of gender discrimination, and providing momentum for further investigation.

Questions guiding this study

The main research question driving this inquiry is, “To what extent do women share equity with men with regard to professional leadership opportunities in mid-size and large American art museums?” Sub-questions that focus the topic include:

- What factors have contributed to increased parity and, conversely, which remain obstacles in the road for women in attaining high-ranking leadership positions in the museum field?
- What role are education and training playing in helping leaders to move up the administrative ladder in museums?
- What barriers prohibit women from obtaining directorships in art museums more than in other types of museums?
- How does professional equity in the museum field compare with that of other fields?
- What success is the generation of female museum workers who have entered the profession in the last ten years having in moving into positions of leadership and [how] do their attitudes diverge from women with more experience?
- How does compensation compare between men and women working in the field?
- What accounts for the apparent decrease in scholarship in this area of inquiry in the last several years?
- Does this issue remain a topic of discussion and scholarship in the field?

Not all of these questions are answered by this study. Together, they imply the complexity the issue and indicate the breadth of possible research that may follow.

Research assumptions

There is an inherent assumption set up in the goals and research questions of *Taking Stock of Gender Equity in Museum Management* that gender discrimination does in fact exist in the museum field and that it is an important issue to investigate. This study also assumes that the leveling of opportunities will not occur as either a natural evolution of the field or a shift in society's attitudes toward women. Rather, attaining true equity requires substantive attention and action on the part of individuals, institutions, and society.

Definitions

The following terms are defined to clarify their use in the context of this report:

Equity, in the context of this study, will refer to the equality of opportunities for women and men to secure professional positions of the same rank, compensation, and benefits. Equity connotes the ability of workers to advance within the field without discrimination or exclusion, whether overt or covert, because of gender.

High-ranking positions or positions of leadership refers to jobs at the director level and one step below the level of a director; that is, upper management where there are several tiers of management in the institution. This may include the positions of deputy director or associate director, for example.

Mid- and large-sized museums refers to American art museums with annual budgets above two million dollars. This rank has been observed to be the level in which opportunities for management positions and career advancement become increasingly disparate between women and men.

Significance of the study

Up until the last fifty years, women were largely excluded from universities, professions, clubs, politics, jobs, and even written history. Since that time, much progress has been made. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, women in America have access to training in and the right to pursue virtually every profession. Yet the availability of and access to these choices has taken women only part of the way toward appearing in history books and leading institutions and corporations as readily as men. The opportunities as well as the obstacles facing women today have become more varied and subtle.

The art world has maintained unequal opportunity for women in museums, galleries, and auction houses for generations. Indications of progress in recent times are weakened by evidence that the same old rules still largely apply. A *New York Times* article from May of this year contrasts historical discrimination in the art world with “promising” indications of a level playing field for both artists and art administrators. As evidence, the article cited the inclusion of the Guerrilla Girls at the Venice Biennale and the running of the event by two women. In spite of these and other noteworthy strides, ultimately the author questions whether, perhaps, the art world is still just plain biased against women (Allen, 2005). Allen points to the comparatively lower prices fetched at auction by women’s art work than men’s to defend his argument, coming to the ultimate conclusion that “women’s art sells for less because it is made by women” (2005, p.42). Detailed explanation, according to Allen, is often long, complex, and full of caveats, qualifiers, and contradictory reasons. The same can be said about the administration of museums.

Although in recent times the increased presence of women directors suggests the cracking of the glass ceiling¹ in museums, available scholarship reveals consistent and continued under-representation of women in positions of administrative leadership throughout the history of museum work. The most successful women, it seems, did little to shatter the glass ceiling. It has been left largely intact for those who follow, repeating a pattern that has been in place generation after generation.

Revisiting this issue before additional time passes and further ground is lost is crucial to keeping equity concerns on the agenda within the museum industry. This

¹ The concept of the glass ceiling was coined in the 1970s to describe the invisible barriers created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices which block women from senior executive positions.

research will also contribute to the conversations happening in wider society about the abilities and rights of women in the workplace.

Though few disagree with the goal of equal employment opportunity today, there are still beliefs about women's abilities that do not support equity in terms of opportunity or compensation. These attitudes appear in academia, in government, in the art world, and in wider society. Inequities are attributed to everything from inherent biological distinctions between the sexes to women's penchant for opting out of careers that offer greater promise for advancement and higher pay.

Sometimes, as in the case of disparate prices between the artwork of men and women when the work goes up for auction, the differences are attributed to "quality." Significant price differences are not attributed to gender "at all...Gender is never a factor" according to auction house spokespeople (Allen, 2005, p. 42). The disparities, meanwhile, are unmistakable.

Another reason for conducting research about the inequities that exist throughout the American workforce is that the federal government's current administration does an inadequate job of advocating closing the pay gap or acknowledging that discriminatory practices may be to blame for substandard compensation. Instead, discrepancies are attributed to women *choosing* to make less money. Diana Furchtgott-Roth, one of the members of Bush's Council of Economic Advisers, stated before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in April 1999 that, "The average wage gap is not proof of widespread discrimination, but of women making choices about their educational and professional careers in a society where the law has granted them equality of opportunity to do so" (Katz, 2004, p. 1).

The issue is also complicated by the efforts of influential scholars whose suggestions revert to the old argument that there are innate differences in ability rather than explore the possibility of a constructed power system. Harvard's Lawrence Summers offered recently that, "In the special case of science and engineering, there are issues of intrinsic aptitude, and particularly of the variability of aptitude, and those considerations are reinforced by what are in fact lesser factors involving socialization and continuing discrimination" (Fogg, 2005, p. A12). The ramifications of his argument have implications beyond engineering and academia and include the cultural sector to which museums belong.

Chapter Two: Review of literature

Past scholarship investigating the extent to which women share equity with men indicates consistent under-representation of women in positions of administrative leadership throughout the history of museum work. The history of women's contributions to and treatment within museum administration sheds light on how much closer these institutions have come to achieving balance and suggests how far they must still travel to attain true equality. Though existing scholarship presents an incomplete, outdated picture of the issue and though more comprehensive data is needed, two and a half decades of research assessing gender equity in museums provides ample evidence that unequal opportunity remains in spite of improved access.

Women and museums: context of the relationship

Women directors are rarities today in spite of the influential role of women in founding and funding many of the major museums in the United States (Taylor, 1990). Several sources agree that the situation has greatly improved in the last forty years (Landi, 1997; Nilson, 1988; O'Donnell, 1997; Taylor, 1990). However, progress has come slowly. The glacial rate of progress is explained by some as lingering discrimination while others cite the fact that a large enough pool of women with proper qualifications does not exist (Landi, 1997). This rationalization is questioned by many researchers who note that this argument is justification for prohibiting diversity in the workplace. Some contend that it is only a matter of time before women begin to share an equitable number of high-ranking positions at museums. Others link the possibility for change to cultural change within the museum world and shifts in training (Nilson, 1988).

Is gender equity on the radar screen?

According to some sources gender has become a less prominent concern in museums as other issues gain attention, raising the question of what significance the issue occupies in current museum practice (Nilson, 1988; Taylor, 1984). Despite evidence that the United States has the most legislation to support the career progression of women (Blake, 1999), research still points toward minimal progress. Attempts to equalize progress have implications both for women and the many groups historically excluded from careers in museums. Several of the issues that have prevented and continue to prevent women from attaining parity with men in the museum field also apply to other underrepresented groups and are gradually becoming more significant issues for the museum community. Recent emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism in many institutions has helped to increase the perception of a need for greater equality in museums, and, as a result, the numbers of minorities and women entering the museum profession have increased. The presence of multiculturalism as an employment issue will facilitate further discussion, planning, and action that may "...include but also go well beyond historical and contemporary social strictures in employment" (Early, 1998, p. 61). Emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity, not only in the interpretation of content within museums, but also in staffing, will maintain the currency of the question of positions of power and authority in the museum. Ultimately the discourse should usher more women into leadership positions.

Equity issues will also remain timely because research has not begun to touch on how a younger generation of female museum professionals is faring in attaining leadership positions. Previous generations of women working in museums forecasted significant improvement. Women holding high-ranking positions in museums have

predicted that younger women will fare better than their predecessors as they move into management positions, in part because they have grown up with different professional and social expectations and greater access to training programs than past generations (O'Donnell, 1997; Nilson, 1988). In fact, two decades ago some predicted that change would happen more rapidly in museums than elsewhere and that the balance would equalize within a short time (Nilson, 1988). Published conclusions about whether this is the case have yet to appear. In fact, Schlatter and Harris-Knox (2004) report that no major investigation into gender equity in museum leadership has taken place in the last decade, although studies about glass ceiling issues have been conducted recently in the corporate world. These studies, too, indicate progress but not equality. The concept of the glass ceiling should neither be ignored nor counted as a thing of the past. It illustrates well the point that when there is no objective reason for women not to rise to the top as men do, there exists inherent discrimination in the structures, processes, and systems of organizations and wider society. Diligence about keeping gender equity on the radar screen of the museum field will continue to be important, and the issue will remain relevant until no discrepancy exists between the numbers of men and women who direct America's largest and best-regarded museums.

Limitations of research into gender equity in museum administration

Existing data undercounts women's economic activities and under-assesses their economic contribution throughout the work force. Although the situation has appeared to improve for women seeking advancement in museum professions, (Landi, 1997; Nilson, 1988; O'Donnell, 1997; Taylor, 1990), research and, along with it, progress, remained limited through the late nineties.

The majority of past qualitative research on this issue has taken the form of personal, open-ended interviews of exceptional individuals who have attained senior-level positions. Reliance on these “superstars” as informants may obscure the overall picture of the situation. Even some of the most recent research conducted by Schlatter and Harris-Knox (2004), acknowledged that although it is possible today to identify several women museum directors at mid-size and large institutions, it is not clear whether these women are the norm or the exception. That individual achievement is often a theme in literature about gender equity is problematic for conclusive overall assessment, and, unfortunately, gains made by extraordinary women in both corporate and nonprofit America have yet to be institutionalized (Alpern, 1993).

Some researchers charge that American museums in particular have ignored the feminist movement since its inception (Brown, 1994). One source reports that in the late seventies 16.7 percent of museum directors were women, but by 1991 that number had dropped to only fifteen percent (Blake, 1999). According to Nilson (1988), no woman headed a major American art museum as recently as the late 1970s. In 1990 the Association of Art Museum Directors counted thirty-three women in the 153-member group (Tucker, 1990); and of its 168 members in 1997, fifty-four were women (Landi, 1997). However, another report found that by the mid nineties, one in seven museum heads was female, indicating the resistance to women as directors was subsiding and that the climate in the museum profession was changing (Nilson, 1988). By the late nineties, the overall number of female directors was nearly one in three according to Landi (1997). Obscured within these incongruent statistics are some important details: some studies report on all museums while others report on art museums only, and many

do not refer to stratification by size of museum. These types of numbers also neglect equity attained in terms of compensation. Far more depth of inquiry is required if these seemingly straightforward numbers are to assess equity accurately.

The universality of progress

The movement of women into managerial jobs is by no means even across different sectors. Women have tended to fare better in areas traditionally dominated by women, which is true within the museum context as well as in the wider society (Wirth, 2001). Some sources caution that the gains may not be as significant as they appear in simple statistics. Women have made real inroads into directorships, but inequities still exist, says Judy Larson, director of the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., (Palumbo, 2003). The most significant of these inequities, beyond comparing numbers of women to men in directorships, include opportunities for advancement and stratification by size and type of museum.

Research suggests that those women who advance in the profession and secure directorships still have a disadvantage in institutions for which they may be competitive candidates. Leadership of the largest, best-known museums in this country remains predominantly male in spite of gradual redistribution of management positions between men and women; women are more prevalent in top jobs for small organizations (O'Donnell, 1997; Craig and Taylor, 1985; Schlatter & Harris-Knox, 2004). Most women who have achieved director-level positions have been hired to head small museums, those with small budgets, or those with a troubled history or frequent turnover of leadership (Taylor, 1984; Craig and Taylor, 1985). According to the New England

Museum Association, seventy percent of female museum directors in New England in 2002 ran museums with budgets of less than \$500,000 (Palumbo, 2003). Schlatter and Harris-Knox (2004) cite a 2001 *Museums Journal* article in which author Lucy Kerrington claims that “it is perhaps no great surprise that women are still being passed over when it comes to the very top jobs in very large museums. . . but it is alarming that the bottom end of the profession is fast becoming a female preserve.”

Not only the size, but also the type of museum may influence accessibility to top positions. O'Donnell (1997) reports that art museums are tied more tightly than other types to hierarchy and the traditional power structure that favors male directors. This suggests that the numbers of female leaders in art museums may be lower than in other types of museums because art museums adhere to and preserve a patriarchal system. Art museums also tend to be better funded (and thus pay better salaries) and hold more prominent status in communities than other types, which may also contribute to the preponderance of male executives.

The roles of education and training, family, and mobility in advancement

Training and education are cited frequently as tools necessary for moving up in the museum profession and becoming legitimate candidates for upper management positions. For the women who entered the field during the second half of the last century and defied the odds against making it to the top, a high level of specialized professional training was and has remained compulsory.

The same requirements were not always imperative for men in similar positions (O'Donnell, 1997; Taylor, 1990). Several sources (Craig and Taylor, 1985; Taylor, 1990; O'Donnell, 1997) argue that since the seventies women have entered management programs to gain the qualifications that are necessary to be competitive in steadily increasing numbers. In fact women dominate graduate programs aimed at museum management. Yet they do not move as rapidly into the same level of positions as men with similar or fewer educational qualifications. Since the mid eighties, the number of masters' degrees awarded to women has exceeded those obtained by men. Forecasters predicted that by 2000, the total number of doctoral degrees awarded to men and women would be equal (Wirth, 2001). In the last two decades, improvements in the educational qualifications of women and the trend in delaying marriage and childbearing have created, according to Wirth (2001), a pool of women who are both qualified and ready for professional and managerial jobs. These phenomena refute the explanation that educational qualifications have kept women at a disadvantage for administrative jobs.

Another issue frequently cited as a barrier to directorship in museums is family (Nilson, 1988). It remains unclear whether it has been of benefit for women to marry or remain unmarried in professional pursuits, as both have been cited as advantages and as barriers to improving professional status (Landi, 1997). However, tradition allocates the responsibilities of caring for children to women, often making women candidates for promotion less flexible than their male counterparts. The assumption that family responsibilities fall on the shoulders of women appears slow to change. However, research into how Americans balance careers and family life points out that men are increasingly interested in the issue as well (Wirth, 2001).

Other significant complex issues include salary parity, (Nilson, 1988) the historical willingness of women to take positions at low pay (Taylor and Craig, 1985), and questions raised by many boards about the capability of women (Craig and Taylor, 1985). Many in the profession, both male and female, believe that the profession itself is in a state of flux so severe that issues of gender are negligible (Taylor, 1984). Others think that the profession is at a point where the subject of women museum directors is a “non-issue,” a view that has been expressed by male and female directors alike (Nilson, 1988). Other issues have to do with fundraising pressures, burnout, diversity concerns, and the high rate of turnover among directors. Whether such priorities have assisted or proven detrimental to the case for increased equity is debatable, but they tend to supersede the fact that real barriers still exist for women and minorities.

Comparison with the for-profit sector

Like their entry into management in the museum world, women’s entry into corporate America has a long history, too. Female managers have been suppressed by resurgences of so-called “traditional values” that reinforce women’s proper “place” in the home. Women’s advancement has been threatened by backlash to recurring feminist movements for more than a century. Women did not gain substantive access to managerial positions in corporate America until the 1970s when a mere sixteen percent of the managerial workforce were women (Alpern, 1993). This number grew at a slower pace than the overall participation of women in the labor force; that is, it failed to maintain the status quo and instead actually decreased in spite of what appears to be progress based on numbers alone. By 1987 those numbers of women had risen to forty-five percent of the total work force and thirty-eight percent of administrative and managerial jobs (Northcraft & Gutek, 1993), higher than those in the museum

profession. Even then, however, women accounted for less than two percent of the highest executive positions in corporate America (Northcraft & Gutek, 1993). While the numbers of women in the work force was growing they had not yet entered the more lucrative, influential, prestigious ranks. Instead they stayed at lower and middle-management posts when they did enter administrative circles.

During the 1970s and 1980s, women progressed in management—to a point. They gained business experience, earned advanced degrees in record numbers, and formed professional networks (Karsten, 1994). These strategies helped women begin careers in management but failed to propel them into the upper management level. Data on the largest corporations in the United States, like those in the museum field, provide strong evidence that women experienced great difficulty in obtaining positions at the very top in those firms through the end of the last decade. In 1999, nearly twelve percent of corporate officers of the Fortune 500 companies were women; however, women held little more than five percent of the highest-ranking corporate positions (Wirth, 2001). The silver lining, writes Wirth, is the declining proportion of companies without any women corporate officers, down from twenty-three percent in 1995 to twenty-one percent in 1999 (2001).

While some see women managers hitting a glass ceiling that restricts rising to the highest managerial ranks, others see women making great progress in closing the gap with male managers. Debate continues in the for-profit sector as well as the nonprofit. The strongest argument for destroying barriers that prohibit women from holding management positions seems to be economic—that is, the bottom line. According to the research of Northcraft and Gutek (1993), women will provide the competitive edge that increased reliance on the “white male” pool will not.

Conclusion

Taylor (1984) predicts that the male-dominated leadership of America's museums will become a phenomenon of the past. There is no denying that progress has been made. At the same time, many warn against being overly optimistic about the disappearance of the glass ceiling, since inertia will forward the cause only so far (O'Donnell, 1997). It does not necessarily follow that, because there is progress, discrimination eventually will completely disappear (Northcraft & Gutek, 1993). Gender, along with race, point out Northcraft and Gutek (1993), is one of the most salient human characteristics. Thus certain behaviors will always be attributed to one's gender, and traditional associations with power will tend to favor men as long as traditional systems of power are maintained.

Without a doubt, the role of women in shaping the administrative culture of museums will continue to shape the future of museums. Changes taking place in the larger culture will continue to challenge the status quo, but at what rate and with what success is uncertain without continued research and action within the field. The lack of scholarship dedicated to updating the progress of women in administrative positions in museums prevents an accurate assessment of the current situation and draws a picture of slow-moving progress. There have most certainly been limitations both in the kinds of research undertaken and in the scope of prior research samples. Taking stock of the status of gender equity in museum management requires updated research to bring scholarship on the issue up to date and to address emergent issues. We must utilize more comprehensive methodology, undertake representative sampling, and insist on transparent reporting.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Discrimination in the workplace may have subsided somewhat, but is far from having been eliminated; pay discrepancy and gender imbalance linger in upper management positions. Women have indeed gained access to positions formerly barred to them, and the past four decades have witnessed the elevation of women to professional levels formerly unheard of. Even so, women are still denied full equality in the workplace, both corporate and nonprofit. Rooted in feminist philosophy, this study seeks to understand the extent to which women have attained equity with men in positions of leadership within the museum profession. To that purpose it seeks to identify the factors that contribute to increased parity and, conversely, those that remain obstacles to women advancing in the profession and achieving equal compensation. The methodology chosen for this study was designed to meet these objectives by tapping into the experience of current professionals employed at and just below the director level. In an effort to canvass a wide spectrum of experienced professionals, the study relied primarily on questionnaires and participation in conference proceedings specifically addressing this topic.

According to Glaser (1991), who is cited by Schlatter and Harris-Knox as making the most recent significant investigation into the issue of women in museums, there is, “. . . a necessity for younger women to be exposed to good feminist theory as it applies to museums. . .” (2004, p. 182). The topic of this inquiry lends itself to a feminist paradigm, a perspective rooted in gender equity which gives voice to women and rejects sexism in assumptions, concepts, and research questions (Neuman, 2003, p. 88). The study

perceives meaning through the lens of current museum professionals. Since social change motivates research of this kind, the study also suggests action.

In utilizing a feminist perspective, the researcher acknowledges inherent bias in ascribing meaning to subjective perception (Neuman, 2003, p. 85). Certainly, this perspective allows personal values to enter into the study as a consequence of the interaction and interpretation of the researcher. The subjective understandings of the participants in my surveys make up the primary evidence. Because the nature of the research questions implies both a desire to understand and to critique, a critical perspective is essential to this inquiry.

Role of the researcher

I have a personal interest in the findings of this research. I am a woman looking ahead toward a career in museum administration. Additionally, my previous experience working in museums has influenced my perceptions of gender representation in museum administration. Finally, I recognize my own inherent desire to seek out informants in high-ranking or prestigious positions when recruiting informants. However, I have sought to reach a more diverse set of participants through the questionnaire component. My personal motivation has been informed by a desire to uncover those factors that might present obstacles to my own future advancement and ways that those factors might be overcome or addressed. Both understanding obstacles and forming a future path in the museum world have been primary incentives to undertaking this research.

Delimitations

This study is confined to surveying and interviewing museum professionals in mid-size and large art museums within the United States. Narrowing the sample

segment of the museum field to this manageable portion contributes more focused data for use in future studies and makes recruitment for participation a manageable task.

Limitations

I targeted what I assumed to be the ideal cohort to provide the information I sought, but the sampling procedure decreases the ability to generalize findings. I recruited from mid-size and large institutions intentionally in order to target the segment of the museum world that is slowest to move toward gender equity. The limited availability of potential respondents in the sample population decreases the transferability of findings, as well. Because of the limited number of respondents, findings cannot be applied to all circumstances. An inherent limitation in a study of this type is the difficulty in identifying potential informants for whom barriers have prevented advancement in the field.

Research design

Research approach

In undertaking a study that seeks to link qualitative findings with quantitative statistics, I recruited a participant sample of museum professionals in mid-size and large art museums around the United States. Institutions were selected based on information available through the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) which includes only member institutions that have budgets over two million dollars. Recruitment of participants took place through solicitation via mail and email, depending on current contact information available. Notification of the confidential protection of respondents' responses was assured upon initial recruitment, and participants were asked to indicate

their willingness to participate in either the survey component of the study or both the survey and interview components through consent forms.

Although I solicited over one hundred participants, only ten recruits responded to the questionnaire. Criteria for including the responses and comments of participants were consent to participate, association with an institution of the stated size and focus, and significant experience as an administrator within the field.

This study took place between fall 2004 and May 2005. I began a literature search in September of 2004, and, over the fall, drafted and outlined research methods and design and submitted a proposal for review by Arts & Administration faculty. By January 2005, I submitted a proposal to the University of Oregon Office of Human Subjects Compliance which was approved in early April. I distributed recruitment letters, consent forms, and questionnaires immediately thereafter. From April sixth through ninth I attended the ArtTable Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Conference in New York City which assembled women leaders in the visual arts from around the country and allowed other members of the field, students, and the public to attend. The conference was conceived as both an assessment and celebration of the last twenty-five years of women's leadership in arts organizations nationwide. At this conference I was able to ask questions during panel presentations and conduct short, informal interviews of various attendees. During April and May, I analyzed data gathered from the questionnaires, conference proceedings, and interviews.

Strategy of inquiry

More qualitative evidence has been gathered than quantitative statistics by previous studies. Thorough, diversified research about the topic is limited. Most often inquiries have taken the form of personal interviews conducted with small numbers of

highly successful women occupying top-level positions. Highlighting a handful of exceptional women who have defied the odds and overcome myriad barriers in securing directorships may have drawn concern away from the difficulties experienced by many others facing similar obstacles and may constitute an incomplete representation of the overall situation. Identifying and celebrating these women also carries the effect of pointing out the very small percentage they constitute in the professional setting and, thus, what a disproportionately high percentage are male. Related research into the museum profession conducted by Osland (2000) indicates that literature thoroughly documenting information of this nature is scarce and, furthermore, that the heavy use of interviews in past research often lacks a link to quantitative research.

In evaluating the extent to which gender equity has been attained in museum administration and in identifying the barriers to advancement, I sought to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to compensate for the lack of breadth of prior inquiries. The timeline of the study and the availability of participants were of critical importance and ultimately restricted my ability to be comprehensive in my approach. With more participation, quantitative links might have been possible.

I developed a twenty-four-item questionnaire that incorporated themes described in existing literature and issues that remained untouched. My intent in utilizing a questionnaire was to accumulate a breadth of sources and extract from that body recurring responses and emergent themes. It examined four main areas:

- (1) perceptions of the gender balance among leaders in the field;
- (2) perceptions of barriers to gender equity;
- (3) perceptions of initiatives taken to remove or reduce these barriers; and
- (4) perceptions of the continued relevance of equity issues among museum professionals.

A handful of questions that asked for the work history and educational background of the respondent were included. Several of the same questions were utilized in informal interviews at the ArtTable conference.

Sampling targeted professionals in the museum field employed at mid-size and large American art museums with specific interest in women participants. The questionnaire was sent to 102 museum directors, deputy directors, associate directors, and other high-level management professionals. It was distributed to female members of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) membership and participants in the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary ArtTable Conference, the membership of which is composed of distinguished women professionals in the visual arts. Members of ArtTable were included both because I received limited response from AAMD members and because I assumed they would be interested in the topic by virtue of their association with ArtTable. I anticipated that careful selection of the sample group would increase the chances of participation and the relevance of responses.

Response to the questionnaire was minimal. Ten women and one man responded in part or in whole. Participants' level of experience in the field ranged from ten to thirty years. An additional four prospective participants declined to take part in the study, citing lack of time or simply an "inability to take part." The remaining eighty-seven offered no reply at all.

Difficulties with data collection

The poor rate of return (ten percent) underscores the hurdles involved in gathering information and comprehensively reporting on this topic. Analysis of the information offered by those who did participate, though rich in content, reflects the opinions of a select few. Although respondents to the questionnaire differ from the

participants in prior studies, their small number presents a problem similar to those studies. The few opinions I gathered reflect a diverse range of views without suggesting which are most representative across the field. The difficulties involved in conducting research into the problem of gender inequity in the management of museums, demonstrated by the lack of interest shown in my queries, may help explain why so little written documentation exists to date.

The findings from this study, therefore, underscore the obstacles to developing definitive conclusions about gender equity. Foremost may be the lack of data available and the difficulty involved in securing the participation of museum workers in a broad-scale study. The poor rate of response may be explained by several factors:

- Access to professional listservs was not granted for submitting the questionnaire. Such listservs could have helped me reach a large number of potential participants easily and inexpensively,
- Some museum managers do not perceive achieving gender equity as a priority,
- Those who have succeeded may perceive the issue to be resolved,
- Researching this issue requires the leadership of respected professionals in the industry,
- The risks associated with contesting the power structure may have dissuaded prospective participants from jeopardizing their reputation or ability to advance, and/or
- Discrimination is still a taboo topic in the workplace and society.

I anticipate that a study with backing by the AAMD or another professional organization that could act as an intermediary or sponsor would garner more substantive participation. Future researchers should seek such support.

Ethical issues

Because the topic is gender equity in museum management, questions of ethics that concern my motives arose. Furthermore, research results may create controversy among groups with competing interests or different perceptions of the findings. The

sampling of participants might call into question the intent and interpretation of the researcher because it highlighted only women's perceptions of the issue. A more comprehensive approach would include men as well as women.

Expectations

Initial expectations for this study were that progress in equalizing the gender balance in museum management over the past several years would be evident. I also expected to find that progress has not come close to truly equalizing the situation in terms of opportunity or compensation. Furthermore, because inquiries into the topic have been absent from scholarship for more than a decade, I expected to find concerns that differ from those discussed in the literature from the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. Because current knowledge still relies heavily on decades-old literature, I anticipated finding different attitudes about employment equity from new women leaders on the scene. Naively perhaps, I expected participation in this study to far exceed the rate obtained.

Chapter Four: Findings, implications, recommendations

The numbers

According to analysis of the current membership of the Association of Art Museum Directors, less than thirty percent of mid-size and large institutions are led by women today—higher than the figure reported in 1990 (22%) but down from both 1997 (32%) and 2003 (34%). These statistics demonstrate that gender equity among the leadership of art museums is still a long way off. Trends over the past fifteen years provide little assurance that women will attain equity in the near future and shaky justification for projecting significant growth in the number of women in top positions.

Qualitative data

The following findings are derived from the ten questionnaires cited previously and informal conversations that took place at conference proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Conference of ArtTable, held in New York City in April 2005.² They are informed by the extensive review of available literature on the subject of gender equity in museum management.

The setting is the twenty-fifth anniversary of ArtTable, an organization of accomplished women professionals in the visual arts. More than four hundred women have gathered at Sotheby's Auction House in New York City to look back on the history of women's leadership in the field. Recognizing that women remain underrepresented in the art world, they wish to move forward better equipped to "change the equation." The following comment is offered by a woman who quit her job at the Museum of Modern Art because of "the hoards of women in lower positions" there. "We're here celebrating

² Information gathered from ArtTable Conference attendees was obtained from informal conversation with members of ArtTable, observation of facilitated panel discussions, and participation in question and answer sessions.

our progress,” she says, “but I don’t know how much progress was made.” The irony of this situation seems to exemplify the fact that little can be said with any certainty about the status of gender equity in museum management. Skeptics admit some progress, but also point out that advancement is verified only by the victories of a few good women. We do not find widespread equality universally today, even if women occupy top posts in greater numbers than they did thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago.

Factors contributing to parity

In response to the questionnaire,³ the development director of a museum in New York wrote, “The sheer number of women in the industry has contributed to parity.” Another survey respondent indicated the reason women have more opportunity in museum professions today is that “. . .the entire world has become more hospitable to women in leadership roles.” This suggests that progress has less to do with focused efforts in the museum field than with larger social forces at work. At a discussion of women’s leadership in the visual arts at the aforementioned ArtTable conference, Linda Nochlin called the closing gap on parity at this year’s Venice Biennale “a triumph.” Although not referring specifically to museums, Nochlin’s statement expressed feelings common to many in the museum profession. Optimism appears to be a major contributor to perceptions of parity.

Roughly half the participants responding to the questionnaire indicated that the field has become more hospitable to women in management positions during their tenure, and about half believed that perceptions and opportunities remained the same over the last couple of decades. Only one respondent offered a contrary opinion: “I

³ The information cited in this section was obtained through the responses provided to the questionnaire referenced in the methodology section of this report. All information was gathered from these questionnaires unless otherwise stated.

increasingly see that men do not have to work as hard to get respect and trust.” She suggested that even though women can secure high-level positions with greater ease than in the past, expectations of women remain greater than expectations of men. Women face greater scrutiny.

Others credited past and current women directors with providing opportunities and strong examples to other women in the field. These leaders include Anne D'Harnoncourt of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Katherine Lee Reid of the Cleveland Museum of Art, Katherine Halbreich of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and Andrea Rich, who just stepped down from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. “There are many at the biggies” said Ruth Beesch of The Jewish Museum, referring to the fact that there are many women leading major museums.

From these responses, it appears as though the doors to management-level positions have at least been unlocked, if not fully opened. “It is deceptive to look at the superstars,” countered Susan Sollins of Art21 at the ArtTable conference, both because they are in the minority and because pay discrepancies remain significant at the highest levels. Most respondents agreed that top positions—especially those at the largest institutions—are still most often awarded to men. So although several women are notable leaders at well-known institutions, and although women now occupy many of the posts just below the director, women remain in the minority overall. Wrote one development director who has spent the last fourteen years in the field, “I don’t think there is gender inequality for [other] top administrative positions, but I do think there is inequality for director positions.” Furthermore, several of the leading women mentioned by Beesch and others are the same women who have appeared in the literature over the

last several decades. If throngs of women are making their way into leadership positions because of their successes, where are all the new women museum leaders?

The reasons for slow progress towards equity are elusive. Few seem willing to speculate. Some suggest that there are more women moving up the ranks because they are foregoing families in favor of careers. Others speculate that the women who have “made it” have the means and support to handle the family responsibilities that remain largely the province of women’s work.

More subtle clues indicate that class and tradition still play large roles, according to the Associate Director of a major university museum in the Northeast. She writes, “I feel strongly that my original hire as an assistant curator was made, in part, because of my . . . ‘presentability’ (in all senses of that word). . . ‘poise’ and ‘polish’ are important in one’s work as a representative of the museum, but they are valued equally for men and women working in the institution.”

Others indicate that change in perspective about directorships is responsible. Director Peggy Loar suggests that women possess unique qualities necessary to performing the various tasks required of a director and that these have finally started to be recognized as assets in the field. Nurturing is a primary quality cited by Loar and others as an essential component of audience and staff development, as is the multitasking that is required of women whether in the job force or in the home. These qualities, she explains, are essential to today’s museum leader. Loar’s encouraging explanation suggests change is in motion and moving in a direction favorable to women. Her optimistic perspective does not indicate, however, whether leaders in the field acknowledge that gender discrimination is still present. Widespread change is not apparent enough to support the assertion that there has been a change in ideology and

that discrimination does not continue to influence the ability of women to obtain directorships.

Remaining barriers and lasting challenges

If women seem hesitant to talk about the reasons they think progress has been made toward equity, they are perhaps even more reluctant to talk about the reasons equity has not been attained or who is responsible. Nevertheless, responses offered by participants in this study afford some valuable insight. The following issues contribute to remaining inequalities within administrative structures in the museum field.

Size does matter

“Just look at how many women are heading up the major museums,” wrote the director of an art museum at a major Midwestern university, “[there are] lots more women museum directors, but not many in the ‘major’ majors.” This woman’s observation explains what Marcia Tucker has known for years: that there is still discrimination at the larger institutions. “Especially the Whitney,” added Tucker, an institution she left because of the discrimination she faced there. Women can do anything, she said to the crowd at ArtTable’s *Women as Institution Builders* panel, including leading the largest museums in the country; but there are additional challenges for them. Those include enduring old-boy networks replete with traditional networking mechanisms that exclude women, increased scrutiny, and higher expectations to perform. Susana Tourella-Leval, former Director of El Museo De Barrio added that, “It’s very lonely” being at the top in the museum field. She wondered if there are indeed as many women at the director level as some colleagues’ optimism suggests. “Are these women out there and their stories have just not been written yet?” asked Tourella-Leval.

Attitudes of boards

“I think that the museum industry is no different from any other industry,” wrote New Museum of Contemporary Art Director of Development Anne Shisler-Hughes, “burdened with the fiscal responsibilities of their organizations, boards make conservative choices for Museum leadership—they choose men . . . I don’t think there is gender inequality for [other] top administrative positions, but I do think there is inequality for director positions,” which are chosen by boards. This may be due to the small number of women leading boards. Conservatism cannot be blamed on the decisions of men alone, however. Georgiana Lagoria of The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu reports that, “Women directors are often respected less than male directors by Trustees of both genders.”

The issue of boards is an important one. Even when women are at the top, reminds Kimberly Camp of the Barnes Foundation, they are not really at the top if boards are led by men. Boards still hold the power to make many of the most critical decisions in museums, decisions that shape institutional culture as well as policy. The presence of board discrimination may be one of the more understudied components of the equity issue, although Taylor (1985) and Schlatter and Harris-Knox (2004) allude to the lingering resistance of boards to hire women. Data about board perceptions on gender may be difficult to find, given the private nature of director searches.

We can refer to the experiences of those who have been candidates in hiring searches for insight. One woman who has directed prestigious museums on both coasts in both public and private sectors claimed that a museum to which she applied “dithered for an additional month over ‘whether a woman could handle this job’, and they told me that!” Clearly all boards neither adhere ideologically to the precept that women and men

are equally competent to lead museums, nor act in accordance with equal opportunity employment laws.

Deputy Director Ruth Beesch of The Jewish Museum cautioned against talking about museums as though ideology and practice is standardized. “It’s impossible to generalize,” said Beesch about the presence of the glass ceiling and institutional approaches to hiring. She agreed that the level of equality in a museum “. . . usually . . . has to do with the attitudes and beliefs of the top executives and boards.” At The Jewish Museum, an institution with 130 staff and a budget of \$14 million, the board is an example of increasing equity. Since 2001, the board has elected two consecutive women chairs. The Jewish Museum, where the senior administration is all women and only four of fourteen departments are headed by men, appears to be an exception to the norm in terms of gender balance in top positions. The Jewish Museum may be an example of what Cooper Jackson (2000) calls a “gendered organization.” When an organization has many more men than women (or vice versa) in influential positions, the culture tends to adopt attributes that favor the dominant gender. Most directors still report to predominantly male boards that are most often also chaired by men. Thus most organizations with significant gender imbalances in administration (which includes the museum field) still adopt a culture and practices that favor men.

Beesch’s reflections imply that the most significant barrier to attaining gender equity stems from institutional culture. Its intangibility explains the difficulty of isolating and addressing it. Changing institutional culture that favors men requires more

than sensitivity to issues concerning women and their advancement into higher levels of management. Awareness must be turned into practical policy and then into action.⁴

Lack of data

Statistics presented by Dr. Heidi Hartmann of the Institute of Women's Policy Research at the Arttable Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Conference of Women's Leadership in the Visual Arts indicate that overall female representation in museum careers is increasing. The statistics may indicate greater access overall. Census data shows a 3.3% increase in the number of women working in museums from 1989 to 2002. However, parallel data indicating the percentage increase of representation in administration was not and is not currently collected, warranting Hartmann's suggestion for the collection of better data.

Hartmann testified that arts professions on the whole are understudied in workforce statistics. Current data available does not differentiate between types or sizes of institutions, and museums are lumped together with institutions like zoos and libraries. The cultural sector risks being eliminated altogether in future collection efforts according to Hartmann, thanks primarily to the lack of interest shown on the part of the field itself. Hartmann recommended that individual museums and regional and national organizations lobby the Department of Labor and the Census Bureau for more detailed statistics about representation and earnings of women within arts professions. She encouraged lobbying for more meaningful occupational categories that separate art museums from other cultural organizations and thus permit greater assessment of quantitative measures of equity.

⁴ For more on institutional culture with respect to gender and power consult Mats Alvesson's *Understanding Organizational Culture* (Sage, 2002).

Lack of ongoing discussion

In spite of evidence suggesting otherwise, some professionals, women as well as men, believe the issue of equal opportunity is resolved. Many in the field accept evidence that women occupy many high-ranking positions as sufficient indication of progress despite acknowledgment that few women lead major museums. Some women speculate that gender equity is not a concern of many members of the profession today because they are either convinced it has been achieved or are unaware of potential barriers. Museum Director Georgiana Lagoria of The Contemporary Museum in Honolulu speculates that many younger women "... see gender divisions as their mother's issue, not theirs." Lyndel King, Director of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota reasons that many young women "don't know yet that barriers still exist." Each of these perceptions may stem from the lack of an ongoing discussion of the issue. Several questionnaire respondents confirm that this is the case. Without continued discussion, gender discrimination will continue while acknowledgment of it is swept under the rug.

Still others answer that they do not *know* if discussion takes place around these issues, providing evidence that discussion of gender equity is not a priority among administrators. Nor is there agreement about whether it should be a priority. Writes one respondent who believes gender equity is not an issue of discussion among museum directors today, "Since it has improved it is less of an issue than it has been in the past." Another is more critical of those who believe the issue should still be studied: "There are many directors of both genders today. The issue should be competence, not gender." When asked for additional thoughts about gender as a factor in advancement or

compensation, this administrator who has completed just less than three years in a senior management role, wrote, “A useful study would be one that identifies the qualities that make museum directors successful.”

The director of a southern art museum with a \$9 million budget speculated that the answer to whether and why discussion takes place is simple. Gender equity is an issue of current discussion among women but not among most men for “pretty obvious” reasons. Women suffer from gender inequity but men continue to advance unaware or unsympathetic to differences in opportunity. Barriers for women translate to decreased competition and increased opportunity for men. This woman director’s comments imply that men are just fine leaving it that way and because men tend to be in the positions of power that can address the issue, they choose not to.

Marcia Tucker, too, believes that gender equity is still an issue. “Of course it’s not a ‘non-issue,’” she responds, although its discussion is clearly not at the forefront. “Salary is in no way equal. Barriers certainly exist.” Many are the same barriers that have always existed. Long-time director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art Anne d’Harnoncourt expands the question beyond museums. “How many [women] are mayors, senators, governors, heads of universities?” Her statement echoes Marcia Tucker but also distances her answer from the issue. “Why should gender equity exist in museums if it does not exist in the rest of the world?” asks Tucker. “Obviously there are far more men in these positions and I venture it’s not so different from the academic and business world,” writes Ruth Beesch of The Jewish Museum. “But it’s impossible to generalize.”

Even if generalizations cannot be made, I expected more unified acknowledgement of gender inequity and vehement statements that inequity had no place in museums. I had hoped to find answers indicating more active engagement with

the issue. It is not sufficient to claim that museums are no different than academia or business. Museums, at least public museums, are founded in the public trust and for the public good, and thus *can* and *should* be held to standards that aspire to society's ideals.⁵

Backlash and resistance

The drop-off in scholarship related to gender equity in museum management over the last several years may have as much to do with wider political trends as industry-specific traditions. According to Susan Faludi (1991), backlash against women's rights is nothing new in America; it tends to return every time women begin to make headway toward equality. American women have had to settle for "breaking ground" for the sake of the next generation time and time again, when in fact there has been little evidence to suggest that successive generations truly benefit from the gains of individual progress in prior generations. Still, this claim to breaking paths for future generations has been the mantra of generations of women who have managed to make their way into top positions in museums. Nevertheless, women who achieve directorships today continue to find that they have few women colleagues at the top. But the museum power structure is far from eager to agree with charges of inequity. "When you raise your voice, you'll be greeted with resistance," testified a former employee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁵ The inequality of men and women under the Constitution has been an issue of contention for more than a century. The first visible public demand for equality came in 1848, at the first Woman's Rights Convention, and took on many forms throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The proposed 27th Amendment to the Constitution was passed by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and was sent to the states for ratification in 1972 in the form of the Equal Rights Amendment. The amendment sought to clarify ambiguities and inconsistencies in the legal system that tolerated discrimination based on gender. It failed thanks to opponents primarily representing traditional sectors. The Equal Rights Amendment was reintroduced in Congress in 1982 and has been before every session of Congress since that time, still shy of state ratification by three votes. The 1963 passage of the Equal Pay Act and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, both of which outlawed discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of gender, support the notion that equal opportunity in employment is a societal ideal.

Assertions like that of the woman who told a room of 400 fellow accomplished women arts professionals that women need to “stop whining” about unequal opportunity and compensation do not serve the cause for equality. Instead they encourage women to stop advocating for change in a system that does not treat them as equal citizens. Backlash helps to rekindle the old stereotype that women’s desires and abilities keep them out of management.

One participant in this study blames lingering inequalities on the abilities and attitudes of women themselves, speculating that, “...women are uneasy about managing men and that contributes to the fact that men raise [sic] through the ranks more quickly than women. I also think women have a more difficult time feeling worthy of promotions.” These comments give the sense that the reason little progress has been made in the last two decades lies, at least in part, in the psyches of women; they dismiss the possibility that discrimination is the culprit.

Challenges beyond gender

The most frequently cited reason for gender staying below the radar as an issue in the museum profession today is the current focus on diversity on a broader level. Multiculturalism has taken the front seat in the move to create more diverse boards, staff, and audiences. At the ArtTable conference session “Women as Institution Builders” Emily Rafferty, President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and panel moderator, confirmed that increasing diversity is one of the museum’s biggest issues, adding that it is something “larger” and more urgent than gender equity.

On the subject of diversity, Susan Tourella-Leval, former Director of El Museo de Barrio in New York City, added that museums claim to be interested in promoting diverse candidates of both genders, but notes her skepticism about their effectiveness in

actually doing so. She still faces the question, “Where are the qualified Latinos?” mirroring the questions posed to women twenty and thirty years ago when hiring committees explained that they could not find enough women qualified for the top jobs. Tourella-Leval notes that museums are about the most traditional and conservative institutions society supports and suggests that those interested in change within the field should, in addition to considering the dimensions of diversity, “think about opening the structure of museums to accommodate the needs of younger people with different demands and needs.”

Diversity includes age, race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. But the idea of diversity today largely neglects gender and diversity seems to have supplanted gender equity as a goal. Women agree as readily as men that the significance of racial and ethnic imbalances has sidelined the less severe imbalance of women to men in administrative positions. Leaving gender inequity in place will not serve the cause for greater diversity, but widespread efforts toward greater diversity in a broad sense will combat some of the same barriers present for women. That gender inequity has lingered for decades without nearing true balance should alert us to underlying societal and institutional structures that allow discrimination to endure. The ability to institute change within institutions that are heavily rooted in traditional hierarchy will be a challenge no matter the instigator.

Enduring inequalities: The pay gap and family responsibilities

While virtually all participants in this study indicate that there has been some leveling in opportunity to advance within the administrative structure of museums, nearly as many also report that women are paid less than their male counterparts no

matter the size or prestige of the institution. Compensation inequities are well known but slow to be addressed, especially in a public way.

Wage disparities that arise from occupational segregation perpetuate the image of women as “secondary” workers. So do disparities between salaries paid to women and men in the same positions in the same field. Unequal compensation is not only an issue of education directors being paid less than curators and administrators, but of candidates with comparable qualifications being offered different salaries based on gender alone. One respondent to the questionnaire reported that she was aware of a mid-size art museum who offered a female candidate a lower salary than the male who stepped down from the position in spite of better qualifications and increased responsibility. This is likely not an isolated incident; a number of women cited instances of women colleagues receiving lower pay, including starting salaries, than men for comparable positions.

One of the most important developments in the pursuit of gender equity should have been the 1963 Equal Pay Act ruling that women were entitled to equal pay for equal work (Brodsky, 2005).⁶ Yet data indicate that even thirty-five years later that is far from the case. Information provided by Dr. Heidi Hartmann, President of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, shows that although the wage ratio has narrowed over the past fifty years, it is not yet near equivalent. Fifty years ago, according to Hartmann, women earned 64.5% of men’s wages for comparable work. By 2001, that number had increased to 75.8%. Statistics collected by the National Association for Female Executives shows that the pay gap actually grew last year. Women working full time in 2003 earned seventy-six cents for every dollar earned by their white male peers, down

⁶ It wasn't until the passage of the Equal Pay Act on June 10, 1963 (effective June 11, 1964) that it became illegal to pay women lower rates for the same job strictly on the basis of their gender. Demonstrable differences in seniority, merit, the quality or quantity of work, or other considerations might merit different pay, but gender could no longer be viewed as justification for lower wages.

from seventy-seven cents the previous year (Lewis, 2005). Although statistics are not broken down for the museum field specifically, indications from women working in the field confirm that a significant gap between the paychecks of males and females exists, especially in higher positions.

The family factor looms large over the questions of whether women are able to secure senior positions in museums. One questionnaire respondent reports that her decision against having a family has allowed her to be more flexible to travel and work long hours, both essential to performing her job as director. Another participant mentions that family affects the time she's willing to give to the museum. It also affects her opportunities to look for another job in the field. Yet another testifies to the flexibility required of her spouse in order for her to pursue more senior positions. Others who report having families indicate that they made the choice to have a family before entering the field and did not attempt both concurrently. Only one respondent of the ten noted that family is a recognized priority at her institution, crediting the museum's director in helping make work concerns negotiable with family obligations.

Other accomplished professionals appear to base family decisions on career priorities. In an informal conversation Jennifer Russell, Deputy Director at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, says she "never could have raised a family with her job," backing up her belief by citing several of the directors of major museums who have also foregone spouses and families in favor of career choices. After a distinguished career at the Smithsonian and other institutions, Peggy Loar says she has "finally decided to be married to a man instead of an institution."

Though family affects both men and women, care of children in particular is still perceived to be the primary responsibility of women. Childbearing and childcare continue to emerge as the primary barriers to greater numbers of women pursuing upper management. This has apparently not changed much in the past twenty-five years, although reforms in family-leave policies have allowed for more equal distribution of duties between fathers and mothers. Some see this as a choice, while to others it remains an obligation that will never be lifted from women (Brocas, 1997).

Implications: Changes on the horizon?

According to Peggy Loar, the future of directing museums will not be based on the standard of the past, which may bode well for women. It may be that the role of the museum director is due for major change. Jennifer Russell of the Museum of Modern Art speculated in a mentoring session at the ArtTable Conference that in the future directors will not hold the same position for twenty-five or thirty years. She argues that the job of director has become so large that it may soon no longer be the province of one person, but rather that of a team. The expectations involved are simply too much for one person, male or female. This will likely favor women's interests, building flexibility into a notoriously inflexible career. For such dramatic change to take place, traditional notions of authority will need to be open to compromise at the board level as well as among staff.

Marcia Tucker adds that globalization promises to change structures of power rooted in traditional models of hierarchy, which include museums. The idea of the museum as it has been known for decades stands to be altered by larger social, political, and economic forces, and alterations will likely include how and by whom museums are led. We have already started to see the results. It is becoming less of a rarity to see former

CEOs from large corporations leading large museums and it is now more common to see leaders from museum divisions other than curatorial departments move into the director's office. This is true especially of professionals in the development department thanks to the expectations of directors to fundraise.

Museum leaders raised the issue of gender equity more than twenty-five years ago and professionals in the field are still not able to unpack the reasons why parity has not been achieved or devise a convincing campaign to change the status quo. Future professionals will talk about the same things as long as the issue continues to be met with vague or disinterested response by the majority of leaders, male and female.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Recommendations for Action

Action to institute change, in whatever form it may take, absolutely must emphasize collective resolve among museums to establish standards of equity that should and must be followed by the entire field. Such action can benefit from the support and prodding of associations like ArtTable, the American Association of Museums, the Association of Art Museum Directors, equity-minded activist organizations like the Women's Equity Action League and the National Organization for Women, and coalitions like the National Committee on Pay Equity. A successful approach will require a strategy that integrates economic, legal, social, and political components.

The efforts of individuals to encourage and lead such efforts cannot be discounted, but "It's time for collective action," says Linda Nochlin, longtime feminist author and professor at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York City. Some doubt whether past efforts were ever truly collective, but agree that future action with any chance for success must be. The literature suggests that past efforts were neither collective nor representative of the breadth of experiences of women in the field. Past failures should provide additional motivation for combined, comprehensive voicing of equity issues of concern to women museum professionals.

Sarah Lewis, Curatorial Assistant at the Museum of Modern Art, suggested that the kind of action that was effective in the past will not be employed by her generation (women in their twenties and thirties just entering the profession). We are no longer "in a generation of movements" said Lewis, noting Robert Putnam's work on the breakdown of social capital as indication that we lack the social infrastructure once required to

facilitate collective action.⁷ Lewis suggested that today's email, listservs, and web logs provide more effective conduits for meeting and organizing than were available in the past. Today's approaches might be more invisible to the general public but can become more accessible to a wider network of museum professionals and ultimately provide promise of wider participation in future discussion and research.

Collect better data

More complete data may provide the most promise for placing gender inequities on the agenda in museums. Whether gathered by the U. S. Census Bureau or by researchers from within the museum field, more accurate and comprehensive statistics will help clarify women's representation and focus debate on the most critical issues. Better methods for unpacking complex attitudes and perceptions about gender and class are essential to developing effective remedies to systems of discrimination. There must also be conduits for publicizing data collected and bringing the results to the attention of boardrooms and directors' offices. Collection and dissemination of this data will occur only through the organized initiative of members of the field who lobby for and take part in future studies.

Revisit employment policies to solidify a commitment to equality on all fronts

Just as museums still need to shed the public image of elitism, they also need to let go of certain internal practices that perpetuate discrimination. Consciousness-raising is not a one-time experience. Criteria and procedures utilized in hiring and advancement must

⁷ Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) discusses how Americans have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and democratic structures. Putnam draws on evidence over the last quarter century to show that Americans sign fewer petitions, belong to fewer organizations that meet, know their neighbors less, meet with friends less frequently, and even socialize with their families less often. Putnam shows how changes in work, family structure, age, suburban life, television, computers, women's roles and other factors have contributed to this decline.

be scrutinized to eliminate both overt and covert discrimination. Perceptions of “traditional” social and occupational roles of men and women that can influence decisions regarding appointment must be reprogrammed to ensure objective and fair assessment. Practical measures that institutions should undertake, maintain, and revisit regularly include:

- A clearly stated employment equity policy underlying a commitment to a fair and non-discriminatory work environment that links quality and equality goals and details tangible manifestations of that commitment within the organization. This policy should include a measurable evaluation component and regular schedule of review.
- Succession and promotion guidelines including expectations regarding professional development, education, and experience requirements for advancement, and basis for assessment and promotion of candidates.
- A clearly outlined pay scale accompanied by written policy assuring comparable pay for comparable work
- Training opportunities on the practical application of policies for managers
- Regular audits to ensure appropriate implementation of policies and accountability to institutional guidelines

Above all, decision-making structures (such as museum boards) that remain predominantly composed of men or headed exclusively by men and rely on old-fashioned ideas about gender and ability must be replaced with those representing true equality in ideology and membership. Past grounds for excluding women from qualifying for professional managerial positions can no longer be acceptable reasons to assume women cannot perform the job.

The fruits borne of equal employment opportunity policies will benefit all and should be the goal for all museums. Making the criteria on which salaries are awarded more transparent improves accountability on the part of the institution and trust on the part of all employees. Though more dramatic action—such as instituting quota requirements—might speed up the process of ushering women into executive positions, it may also elicit backlash and ultimately hinder women from gaining respect and

acceptance in high-ranking positions. Furthermore, it is likely unpalatable to a field unwilling to undergo significant change.

Improve mentoring programs

It is apparent that widening educational choices for girls and women does not go far enough to providing equal opportunity for management positions (Wirth, 2001), and formal policies will go only so far in providing access to the subtleties of success necessary to advance. Mentoring is one method museum administrators can employ to help foster greater access to the professional tools and strategies for advancement for all people. Typically, mentoring involves the pairing of potential managers with experienced senior managers who provide support, visibility, and access (Wirth, 2001). Mentoring is often conducted *ad hoc*, but it has been an important part of the experiences of many accomplished professionals. Several informants to this study cited mentoring as key to opening doors to success in their museum careers and, according to Marcia Tucker, “the single most important thing that young women looking for jobs in museums can do.” Mentoring, however, is not as prevalent as one might suppose. According to one respondent who directs a mid-size museum and has spent the last thirty years in the field, “I am sorry to say that women directors take less opportunity to mentor younger directors or those with director potential.”

Expanded mentoring opportunities facilitated by organizations like ArtTable, the American Association of Museums, and the state and regional museum associations would improve access to all looking for entry points to careers in the field and improve the ability of women to identify and emulate those who have successfully advanced.

Mentoring has met with great success in pilot programs in the for-profit sector at companies such as Cargill, Inc., a provider of food, agricultural and risk management

products and services with over 100,000 employees. Its concept is part of a diversity policy that encourages “reverse mentoring,” in which junior employees volunteer to mentor more-senior managers. The idea is to facilitate discussion between employees at different levels of seniority, allow the junior staff to set the agenda for the mentoring experience, and expose senior executives to the concerns of employees. Similar mentoring in the museum setting could provide junior employees with access to professional superiors outside of traditional networking structures and encourage upper-level managers to demonstrate commitment to equal opportunity policies and recognize talent in candidates overlooked in past hiring and promotion practices.

Mentoring may help women move en masse into positions within museums, but it is only one tool. It may, however, build a framework for discussion between the strata of employees in an organization and provide insight into the field for prospective employees in the future. Without industry-wide practices that foster equal opportunity, mentoring will continue to afford some individuals the opportunity to rise to the top even if the discriminatory practices are not eliminated.

Eliminate the option of discrimination by means of legal action

A research project of the Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL) revealed that in 1970 there were fewer women teaching at the college level than there had been fifty years earlier (Brodsky, 2005). The passage of time did not equate to increased equality. Rather, the clock was turned back. As a result, WEAL charged institutions of higher learning with discrimination against women in hiring and promotions and succeeded in holding up federal funds to certain schools until they developed plans for achieving gender equality. These steps were important landmarks for the education field and could

be repeated in the museum world. If museums do not respond on their own, the option to discriminate should be taken away by strict government mandate or by the action of citizens. As dependent as many museums are on public funds today, they could not ignore legislation that makes funding contingent on compliance. Those that are privately funded may dodge the effects of legislation, but not the costs of private litigation or compromised public image. Instituting similar requirements into the process of accreditation could also encourage reform should museums not initiate it on their own or be encouraged by national laws prohibiting employment inequity. The most substantial national laws prohibiting employment have been around for more than forty years⁸ but enforcement of these laws has been poorly prioritized by administration in recent years.

Generate initiative from within the field

Any action will lack credibility and lasting power without demonstrated support from and participation by museum professionals. As stakeholders they have a responsibility to fellow and future professionals to facilitate better research and policymaking. Without industry backing, gender equity concerns will never be perceived as priorities and will continue to be ignored by both the Census Bureau and individuals.

Suggestions for additional research

In conducting research on the subject of gender equity in museums, I expected to find ample documentation on the more than twenty-five years of grappling with the topic. Instead, I found only a handful of articles, interviews, and scattered statistics. I

⁸ Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin

anticipated finding more indication that museums are on their way to solving employment equity. But that is apparent neither in the ratio of men to women leaders of the nation's museums nor in the recollections of women museum leaders of their individual and collective experiences in the field. As a result, fundamental questions remain: How much progress has there been? Will equity be attained and, if so, when? Measuring this progress will be a tremendous challenge.

Many unanswered questions call for further study. The issues engaged in this study require further investigation to warrant definitive conclusions. Of principal importance is pinpointing the reasons why women still reach the top of the administrative ladder in museums so infrequently. Whether (or if) equity will ever be attained is dependent on the presence of those elusive factors. This will require initiative from the field and the full participation of museum workers.

Methodology will be critical in obtaining sufficient data to speak broadly about equity. Effective means of recruiting participants and communicating the potential positive consequences of their participation should be developed and assisted by the backing of a professional organization in the field in order to obtain comprehensive results. Additional research should also aim to identify and include women who have been unable to move into higher ranks and those who have chosen not to seek careers in upper management. Such informants may provide some of the richest data to explain what factors compel women to seek and secure—or prohibit women from seeking and securing—directorships. Young professionals were largely absent from this study and might be the critical yardstick in the next wave of research.

This study has shown that quantitative data is severely lacking. Prior to collecting more detailed statistics, those interested in continued research in this area must identify

the steps necessary to advocate for the collection of data on a national level and act as catalysts for support of continued study within the industry. Accurate statistics are a necessary foundation for widespread recognition of the imbalances present.

The museum field cannot continue to rely on so few sources for or reporters of data. If, as the findings of this study have shown, there are competing opinions about the relevance and importance of this issue, discourse should take place in a more public way and represent dissenting as well as supporting voices. Both informal discussion and formal reporting will help clarify whether the museum field needs to pour energy into this matter or put it to rest.

In conducting this research I have sensed a passivity about continuing inequity. This is surprising, especially given the gap that still exists between men's and women's earnings in the museum field and throughout the workforce. I presume the current political leadership, its handling of women's issues (or rather its preference for "family issues"), and social ramifications of the swinging political pendulum do not help the cause. I also wonder how, if broader diversity issues are considered more urgent and more important than gender equity, current and future battles will be won if gender inequity remains. In taking on this subject I did not anticipate finding out that the scope of inquiry necessary to understand the issue of gender equity in the world of art museums is as large, complex, and full of contradictions as it is. Nor did I anticipate the amount of work that remains to achieve true equality.

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Appendix A.

Questionnaire recruitment letter

Dear [name],

How equitable do you think the museum field is today?

I am currently collecting data for a master's research project inquiring into the status of gender equity in the management of mid-size and large American art museums. Titled "**Taking Stock of Gender Equity in Museum Management**," the study is dependent on the views and experience of present-day museum leaders for qualitative data.

As it has been some time since documented findings on this topic have been published, my goals are to contribute to the body of literature on gender-related issues within the field and to update the research on gender in the profession.

With these objectives in mind, I have designed a questionnaire. I would appreciate your participation in this study. Your consent to participate is implied by completing and returning the questionnaire. The questionnaire is included in the attached document. Please be sure to also read the accompanying information regarding your rights in taking part in this study should you decide to do so.

I thank you for your time.

Appreciatively,

Allison L.E. Kramer
Arts & Administration Graduate Student, University of Oregon

Appendix B.

Questionnaire consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE & CONSENT TO BE IDENTIFIED

Completing the questionnaire demonstrates your agreement to take part in the study titled *Taking Stock of Gender Equity in Museum Management*, the purpose of which is to understand the extent to which women have attained equity with men in positions of leadership within the museum profession.

Your participation is totally voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

As a participant in this study, your confidentiality will be protected by associating your responses with a data ID number in place of your name. Though, if participating via email, your email address will be attached to your reply, it will be stripped from the document and all responses will be completely anonymous unless you indicate your willingness to release identifying information by signing below. Any information submitted on the attached questionnaire will be seen and accessed only by my research advisor and myself. I must inform you that all email messages are stored in public institutions indefinitely and could be accessed by a party at a future date.

The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Once completed, you are invited to return your completed questionnaire electronically at akramer1@darkwing.uoregon.edu or, if you prefer, mail a hard copy to: University of Oregon, Arts & Administration Program, c/o Allison Kramer, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, 5230 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403.

Please keep a copy of this document for your records.

CONSENT TO BE IDENTIFIED

**Please return with completed questionnaire*

I understand that my consent to be identified is optional. I agree to the following with regard to my being identified:

- I consent to my identification as an informant in this study.
- I consent to the use of quotations based on the responses I have given.
- I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization(s) with which I am associated.

I acknowledge that I have read and I understand the information provided above, that I willingly agree to participate, and that I may withdraw my consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. I sign this consent form freely and voluntarily.

Name (printed)

Signature

Date

Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview?

If so, please provide your contact information below and indicate when might be the best time to reach you. The interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes.

Thank you.

Tel.

Day/Time to call

(note: this document will be kept separate from your questionnaire responses so as to protect confidentiality)

Appendix C.

Questionnaire

1. What is the annual budget of your institution?
2. What is the size of the staff at your institution?
3. What is your official job title?
4. How many years have you worked at this museum?
5. How many years have you worked in museums?
6. How many years have you been in a senior management role?
7. What is your academic background?
8. What other positions, if any, have you held in museums?
9. What fields have you worked in outside of museums?
10. Is equal opportunity a value that you would cite as being stressed in practice at your institution? If yes, how?
11. What would you cite as the critical factor(s) that “opened the door” for you into the museum profession?

12. Do you feel that there was ever a time during your tenure working in museums when gender was a factor in promotion, advancement, compensation or opportunity of any kind—whether a positive or negative factor? (*You may have observed this to be the case for others, experienced it yourself, or both*)

___ Yes

___ No

13. If you answered yes to the question #12, have you experienced or observed gender playing a positive role, negative role, or both?

___ Positive role

___ Negative role

___ Both positive and negative roles

Please explain your answer.

14. If you answered yes to question #12, do you feel that gender *continues* to play a part in compensation and advancement in the field? Please explain.

___ Yes:

___ No:

15. Do you feel that the profession has become more hospitable to women in director-level positions, has the climate stayed the same, or has it become less hospitable during your tenure as a museum professional?

___ More hospitable

___ Stayed the same

___ Less hospitable

___ No opinion/Don't know

16. If you answered “more hospitable” or “less hospitable” in question #15, can you cite reasons that cause you to come to that conclusion?

17. Have you worked at museums **other than** art museums (history, science, children’s, etc.)?

___ Yes Type (s):

___ No

18. If you answered yes to question #18, have you found art museums to be similar to other types in terms of equity in opportunities to move into senior-level management positions? If no, what do you think accounts for the difference?

19. Do you have a family? (i.e. spouse, child/children)

___ Yes :

___ No

20. Does/did your decision to pursue a professional career in museum management influence your decision about having a family? Please explain.

___ Yes:

___ No:

21. Has your decision to have a family (or not have a family) influenced your ability to advance in the field at any point in your career?

___ Yes. In what ways?

___ No

22. In your opinion, is gender equity an issue of current discussion or concern among museum directors?

Yes

No

23. Why or why not?

24. Do you have any other comments to add regarding gender as a factor in advancement or compensation in the museum field?

This concludes the questionnaire.

Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix D.

Questionnaire data sheet

Taking Stock of Gender Equity in Museum Management

Questionnaire Data Sheet

Data ID:

Respondent Details:

Candidate for interview

Date Received:

Consent: ___ OK to Identify ___ OK to Quote

<i>coding</i>	<i>question #</i>	<i>information</i>	<i>notes</i>
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