DESIGN FOR GENDER EQUITY IN THE ART AND DESIGN TEACHING WORKPLACE

MIGHT A SHRINKING POOL OF COLLEGE APPLICANTS BE INCREASING GENDER BIAS TOWARD ART AND DESIGN EDUCATORS?

Patricia Kovic
Professor
Otis College of Art and Design
pkovic@otis.edu

ABSTRACT
Evidence of gender bias isn’t limited to Hollywood or politics. A search on The Chronicle for Higher Education website, using the term “gender bias” resulted in more than sixty articles published since January 2017. As we settle into and navigate the current socio-sexual storm, let’s take a look at art and design education, especially our role in the preparation of the next generation of educators. This dark time in our gender equity culture, coupled with the higher education crisis of a shrinking pool of applicants, might be just the impetus we need. This paper isn’t about raising your hand more and it resists hastily jumping into a design intervention. It is a presentation of seemingly unrelated, gender data points and experiences, and it includes an invitation to connect the dots in a new way. A different perspective could yield fresh thinking about gender equity in the art and design teaching workplace and set the stage for solution finding.

1. INTRODUCTION
Iris Bohnet, author of “What Works — Gender Equality by Design” claims that de-biasing minds is difficult. Focusing on behavior design does, however show promise. Bohnet’s three-part methodology is straightforward — D= Data, E= Experimentation, SIGN= Signpost. This paper focuses on the first two steps of Bohnet’s process — Data and Experimentation. It begins with a hunch; The enrollment crisis in higher education, coupled with the current socio-sexual climate could be amplifying a “pain point,” which forces all art and design educators to begin a long overdue conversation about workplace gender equity.

This paper starts by examining DATA from the origin of bias in the teaching profession. It takes a quantitative snapshot of colleges’ shrinking enrollment, as well as existing gender inequality in the workplace. A case study, in which art and design students in a K-12 teacher-training course share their gender-based field observations, serves as initial EXPERIMENTATION. Designing SIGNPOSTS, which shape and guide the future of the art and design teaching workplace must address gender equity, and all educators need to be part of the conversation.
2. DATA

**DEFINING TERMS: BIAS**

Bias is a mental shortcut used to reduce, organize and input complex information. Originating from Middle French in the 1500’s, *biais* meant, a slant, a slope, an oblique." It implied "an expedient, means." In the ancient Egyptian game of *Bowls*, it was a technical term used to refer to balls made with a greater weight on one side. This weighting caused the balls to curve toward one side. Over time, this evolved into the figurative concept of "a one-sided tendency of the mind."

Figure 5. In the ancient game of “Bowls,” the term bias referred to balls weighted on one side [source image: Wikipedia]. Figure 6. The uneven weight caused the ball to curve toward one side. Figure 7. Over time, the term bias evolved into the figurative concept of "a one-sided tendency of the mind."

**LESS AND LESS CREATES MORE AND MORE**

Humans have very limited cognitive space and bandwidth. If we focus intensely on one thing, we devote less to other things. In order to prioritize and make decisions, we generalize and reduce information to fundamentals. Bias is one of the ways we do this, as it enables us to prefer one thing to another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humans have little cognitive bandwidth to begin with.</th>
<th>In times of scarcity</th>
<th>Anxiety increases</th>
<th>Resulting in less cognitive bandwidth.</th>
<th>More processing shortcuts are required</th>
<th>Which increase the possibility of bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 8. In times of scarcity and shortage, when we are overwhelmed, bias may increase as a means of survival.

Biology tells us that the animal species seem almost devoid of gender competition under circumstances of abundance. Genders comingle with no fixed rules for hierarchal behavior. Work is shared and collaborative; however, under periods of stress and shortage, things change. Male animals begin to dominate and subjugate females and the field becomes polarized. The current climate of higher education is one in which stress is escalating, exemplified by competition for applicants, shrinking budgets, faculty dissatisfaction and seismic shifts in the digital delivery of education. In times of scarcity, shortage and overload, bias may increase as a means of survival. As we get less and less of what we need, we begin to experience more and more bias.

**HIGHER EDUCATION IS SHRINKING**

*Less College Applicants*

The number of students in colleges and universities has now dropped for five straight years, according to the *National Student Clearinghouse*. Lower birthrates, the cost of higher education, the increase in MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses that are free) and online education may be accelerators, but no one is denying the demographics.
Less Tenure. Less Full-Time
Part-time faculty on campuses has increased 70% and the number of tenured positions has dropped 26% according to data from The American Association of University Professors. Dr. Adrianna Kezar, Professor of Higher Education at the University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education suggests the destabilizing effect of this shift includes “diminished graduation and retention rates and decreased transfer from two to four-year institutions.”

Waning Engagement
A 2015 Inside Higher Ed Gallup Survey, suggested that 52% of higher education faculty did not feel actively engaged in their work. “Faculty expressed serious concerns about academic freedom, job security, and compensation.” Faculty engagement was even lower for women. The higher education “new normal” is exemplified by fear and survival strategies. Under these circumstances, hard-wired behavior kicks in; instead of competing for food, water and reproductive mates, as we would in the wild, we compete for enrollment. We also compete for relevance and inclusion in emerging, streamlined business models with more MOOCs and less mortar and brick. Academia feels this economic shift like any other industry or institution; struggling for market share or enrollment is not really that different. Is this new reality shaping higher education’s future? If bias thrives under conditions of scarcity, are gender roles for faculty becoming more polarized?

GENDER BIAS: UNDERCURRENTS
Rate My Professor: Bias From Student To Educator
In 2015, a history professor at Northeastern University released quantitative data about student attitudes toward male and female professors based on 14 million Rate My Professors responses. Findings showed that women professors were perceived as less competent than male counterparts. Although they were considered nicer than males, they were also considered meaner. A recent study published in PLOS ONE, revealed that students were two to three times more likely to use the words "brilliant" or "genius" to describe male professors than female professors. Eden King, an Associate Professor of Industrial and Organizational Psychology at George Mason University, says students expect professors to act a certain way, based on their gender. Students expect female professors to be nice and, if they aren’t, students react negatively.

If women lead, they are:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Bossy</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abrasive</td>
<td>Strident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When women defend these allegations, they are:

| Emotional | Irrational |

Figure 9. Rate My Professor responses. Figure 10. A recent study published in PLOS ONE.

The assumption that “men lead and women help” was also one conclusion, but behaviors surrounding this idea are more subtle and troubling. They include the idea that women are bossy, abrasive, strident, and aggressive when they lead and emotional and irrational when they defend these accusations.
Faculty Evaluations Are Lower for Women
A recently published paper in the *Journal of the European Economic Association* analyzed data from approximately 20,000 student evaluations of instructors. Ranked on a scale from 0 to 100, the evaluations placed female instructors about 37 slots below males. Students taught by women gave lower ratings even to teaching materials like textbooks and online learning platforms that were identical for all course instructors, regardless of gender.

Women Are More Likely To Be Found In Lower Ranking Academic Positions
While women represent over half (51.5%) of assistant professors and (44.9%) of associate professors, they represent less than a third (32.4%) of full professors.

Men Out Earn Women At All Faculty Levels
Although they have increased, women’s salaries are still 89% of what men earn in higher education. These findings are troubling, because after graduation, college students, who have observed these inequities, are likely to carry them to the workplace, reinforcing existing workplace bias. It’s a wicked problem with no clear or obvious cause. The history of U.S. teaching offers a clue.

![Figure 11](http://example.com/f11.png)
*Figure 11.* Although they have increased, women’s salaries are still 89% of what men earn in higher education.

![Figure 12,13](http://example.com/f1213.png)
*Figure 12,13.* Gender bias patterns follow students from college to the workplace.

AN HISTORICAL LOOK AT THE FEMINIZATION OF TEACHING.
According to data from the *U.S. Department of Education*, over 75% of teachers in primary schools are women. Women dominate elementary and middle schools; but it hasn’t always been this way. Prior to 1850, teaching was a career held by mostly by men.

The Industrial Revolution Brings Bifurcation To Educational Roles
Industrialization changed America’s educational economy and lead men out of the classroom and into the stock market, railroads and factories. Under the thought leadership of Harriet Beecher Stowe, women filled the void left by men and flocked to teaching as a profession that would give them independence.
By the end of the 19th century, nearly 75 percent of America’s teachers were female, but according to the PBS Documentary "Only A Teacher," males dominated the field in administrative positions. Men also dominated the emerging field of Industrial Design and Industrial Design Education. The idea of teaching as “Women’s Work” and leading, managing and mechanization as “Men’s Work” began to be deeply entrenched in the American psyche.

Women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teach</th>
<th>Help</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop</td>
<td>Nurture</td>
<td>Foster</td>
<td></td>
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Men:

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<tr>
<th>Administer</th>
<th>Superintend</th>
<th>Mechanize</th>
<th>$$$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>Systematize</td>
<td>Industrialize</td>
<td></td>
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Figure 17. The idea of teaching as “Women’s Work” and leading, managing and mechanization as “Men’s Work” began to be deeply entrenched in the American psyche during the Industrial Revolution.

3. EXPERIMENTATION

CASE STUDY: GENDER BIAS IN THE CLASSROOM: K-12 ART AND DESIGN “TEACHERS IN TRAINING” SHARE THEIR FIELD OBSERVATIONS

The undergraduate teaching program featured in this case study prepares students to become socially engaged artists, designers and educators in K-12 schools, museum education departments and community arts organizations. Students in this program participate in first field experience/ internships during their junior and senior year and are actively engaged in critical pedagogy.

This asynchronous course uses online learning when students are working at their internships. This enables the teaching of critical pedagogy to be integrated into the internship experience. At midterm, students return from their field internships and digital learning environments to the physical classroom and participate in a High Impact Practice internship reflection. High-Impact Practices are active and collaborative and explore “big questions” in history, culture, science, and society, inviting students to “get real” and use shared “intellectual
experiences” with timely issues to tackle big problems. It’s significant to note that the Harvey Weinstein media explosion coincided with this midterm that focused on gender bias in the classroom.

Focusing the midterm on gender bias helped start a conversation about beliefs, attitudes and the larger implications they have in a cultural context. Internships are a powerful “access point” for recognizing gender bias. These K-12 teaching internship partners varied and included a traditional fine art classroom, a digitally focused design classroom, as well as an alternative school’s art program, focused on social justice.

**Midterm Overview**
The two-hour midterm was in seminar form. Each student took the Harvard Implicit Bias Test, designed to measure the strength of a person’s bias. They read two articles: “Recognizing (Almost) Invisible Gender Bias in Teacher-Student Interactions” and “Gender Bias Exists in Professor Evaluation” (Rate My Professor) They watched “Flip it to Test it” a TEDx Talk by Kristen Pressner, an HR Executive at Roche who recommends flipping gender stereotypes to test implicit bias. Several questions guided a 30-minute discussion. This was a fluid, thought provoking discussion, filled with candid energy, as well as palpable, awkward silences. Select student responses are organized below.

**Midterm Discussion**

1/ **Take the Harvard Implicit Bias Test.**
   When we took the test, I became hyper-aware (of my own bias). I did not like my results.

2/ **Read “Recognizing (Almost) Invisible Gender Bias in Teacher-Student Interactions”**
   (The Harvard Implicit Bias Test defined a helper is a female trait and leader as a male trait.)
   She (the girl who was the teacher’s helper in “Recognizing (Almost) Invisible Gender Bias in Teacher-Student Interactions” was very happy to be a helper. She was praised for doing a good job. There is an argument to be made that she wanted to be a helper. I don’t know why helper and a leader are opposites. (Isn’t it possible that a helper is a leader?)
   So much of this “I want to help” is conditioning. Boys often want to be helpers. It’s just not a role they are accustomed to. At my school, the rough boys have a lot of helper qualities.

3/ **Student: Is the Midterm connected to Harvey Weinstein? What happened this week?**
   A famous Hollywood producer sexually assaulted and raped several women.
   Actually, a Hollywood producer was accused of sexually assaulting and raping several women.

4/ **Faculty mentor: Does gender bias exist in the K-12 classroom or in community engagement environment?**
   In the school where I intern, students call the gay teacher *fag* and the woman teacher *bitch*. They use these violent terms. If you are not coddling them, they call you a *fag* or *bitch*. Students use your unprotected identity to attack you. I feel like we are back in the jungle.
   In K-12, girls are better at art. Girls can color in the lines. The girls are neat. In K-12, art is seen as a craft that girls are good at. It’s a hobby. It’s Etsy. But that’s not reflected in the art world. The art world is male dominated. This is awful.
   I intern in art classes from TK- 5th grade classes. The bias increases incrementally as they mature.
   The teacher who supervises me is very sarcastic with the boys and never with the girls. This is bias. — treating the girls as if they are fragile. But you can get into a lot of trouble these days with women students. A friend of mine, who is a teacher is taking a course which teaches strategies to protect him from getting into conflicts with women students.

5/ **Does gender bias exist at this school from teacher to student?**
I had a disheartening experience with a male teacher who used terms like “sweetie.” When my study group was talking too loudly, he would say “Ladies!” I felt like he was using my gender to “settle me down.” He never said “gentlemen.” As black, woman and feminist, I am part of several protected classes and I need to be hyper aware.

I feel that although girls make up a majority of our fine arts courses, boys get more attention. Every year first prize for painting goes to a guy. It’s an all women jury, but all boys win.

As part of the fine arts programs, we have mentor meetings. I am a male student. The mentors have said that I have a feminine art style. I use a lot of pinks (laughter). Its weird. It’s other guys saying that to me.

6/ Do you feel any gender bias toward me or other female faculty?

Reading the “Rate my Professor” article was interesting because it flipped the discussion. Instead of the teacher being the culprit, the teacher became the victim. I associate different words and expectations with women instructors. I expect a female teacher to be more caring. I have bias. The expectations for women instructors are different.

7/ Consider the midterm reading and the evidence indicating gender bias in the field of education. How do you feel about entering that field?

I think it is the same anywhere. It is becoming a hot button issue with #MeToo.

8/ Other Comments?

Overall, it was a good discussion.
It’s good to be more aware. I feel acknowledged.
I think we have found some common ground, today.

4. SIGNPOSTS

BEHAVIORAL DESIGN MEETS HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES

The midterm case study presented here involved a DATA presentation as well as a beginning EXPERIMENT combining internship observation, high impact learning, current events and a seminar based reflection. Plans for the fall semester include activating all three of the steps of Bonnets’ process. It will look at engaging students with the concept of behavioral design so that they might propose art and design classroom EXPERIMENTS as well as SIGNPOSTS. In regard to the inclusion of High-Impact Practices and “Real Life” content, the current socio-sexual storm, promises a plethora of future opportunities for gender-focused current events that provide engaging context.

In the case study presented in this paper, the instructor modeled positive behavior by asking students. “Have you observed any biased behavior from me to you?” Clearly the question put everyone in an awkward position. The traditional power relationship of faculty and student was firmly in place, but posing questions like these can be powerful modeling for students. For the students in this class, it was a SIGNPOST directing them toward their own self-scrutiny as future educators.

THE FUTURE: A SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE TEACHING WORKPLACE NEEDS FEMININE SKILL AND LEADERSHIP

Gender bias and inequality are tied directly to the economics of the workplace. Since inequality is about power, it’s no surprise that it thrives in academia where women have been systematically kept out of powerful roles.

The stress caused by shrinking enrollment and the seismic shift shaping higher education is palpable in the classroom and workplace environment. This tension, along with the current socio-sexual cultural environment...
has polarized us and increased the likelihood of implicit bias. With women already at risk because of historical gender models, we are vulnerable. This vulnerability however is an opportunity for reimagining a sustainable education model, built on fairness, inclusion, flexibility and yes, nurturing.

Women’s educational blogs implore us to “not help too much,” “stop mentoring new faculty” or “never cut the cake at academic parties” lest we fall into gender stereotypical traps. They recommend we learn “how to play the game,” “be more aggressive and stop apologizing.” But there is an argument to be made that we need to do just the opposite and make room for women (and men) who have more traditionally feminine skill sets that are essential for leadership in the challenging future we face. This future we face may be one of less: less enrollment, less clean air, water, and housing; less empathy, effective human communication and less tolerance.

Feminine skill sets align with skillsets experts say are required for all future designers, problem solvers and global citizens. These skillsets need to be mastered, embodied and taught by all art and design educators, no matter what their gender. Just hiring more women in higher education or having them hold higher positions, will not create gender fairness. The more diversity in thought, personality and opinion we have in the college workplace, the stronger, more relevant, more sustainable and equitable the future of education will be.

1. A high emotional intelligence
2. An instinct for tapping into “collective intelligence”
3. A talent for creating and nurturing a strong support system
4. A communication style that’s informative and inclusive
5. Deep Listening and empathy for others needs
6. Consideration and Inclusion of “Outlier” needs
7. Leadership that’s collaborative, not controlling
8. Major flexibility and individualized responsiveness
9. Ability to recalibrate behavior, expectations and strategies based on circumstances

Figure 18. The New Feminization of Teaching Skillset is required for future designers, problem solvers and global citizens.

5. REFERENCES


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