Association of Art Museum Directors

The Gender Gap in Art Museum Directorships

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Summary of Findings

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Introduction and Context

In the past two years, there have been high-profile discussions on women's leadership prompted by events such as the publications of Sheryl Sandberg's *L I* and Anne-Marie Slaughter's article "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" in *T A* .[1] Across many sectors in the United States, women are underrepresented in leadership and receive comparably less compensation than their male counterparts. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that women have made advances in workforce participation and educational attainment in the last four decades but that women's pay still lags behind that of men; the median pay of women is 82% of that of men.[2] In government, women only held 18.5% of the seats in Congress in 2013.[3] Within the for-profit sector, less than 5% of Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 companies are led by female CEOs.[4] At non-profits, the GuideStar 2013 Nonprofit Compensation Report cites that the median pay for female CEOs lags behind that of men across all budget categories. In addition, less than 50% of CEOs are female at non-profits with operating budget categories above $1 million. At the largest non-profits, those with budgets of over $50 million, women only hold 16% of CEO positions.[5]

Within the research on the broad set of museums (and not exclusively art museums), the work of Marjorie Schwarzer traced the history of female employees. Her book chapter "Women in the Temple: Gender and Leadership in Museums" discusses the changing role of women in leadership and discusses the historical bias towards male leadership. She found that in 2007, women across all levels earned 78% of what men in comparable roles earned, women were directors of only 47% of small and mid-sized museums, and that only 25% of the largest museums were led by a female director.[6] The American Alliance of Museums' (AAM) *2012 N C Mu u S S u* , which used different metrics, shows that 57.2% of directors/CEOs/presidents are female, but that the median income for females in this leadership role was 78% of the median income for male directors/CEOs/presidents.[7]

Our research seeks a greater understanding of how art museums fit into this picture. Through a combination of quantitative analysis and interviews, we examined the current and historical factors of the gender gap in art museum directorships. Following the research findings, we will also introduce potential resources and considerations from other industries, and finally suggest some areas for further research in the conclusion.

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1 Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," *T A* , last modified 13 June 2012. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/

2 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Women in the Labor Force: A Databook," *BLS R : R 1040*, February 2013. http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook-2012.pdf

3 As of January 2014, women held only 18.5% of the seats in congress (20/100 senate, 79/435 house). "Women in the U.S. Congress 2014," *C A P* , last modified January 2014. Accessed 1 February 2014:

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Research Findings

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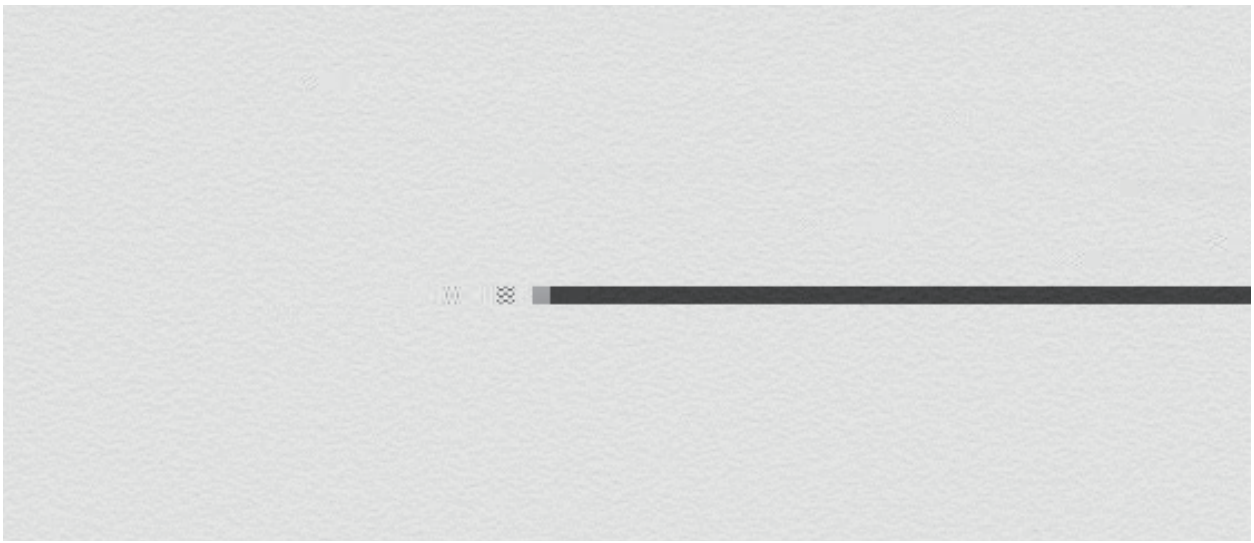


To equalize across institutions of varying budget size, we created a new metric: variance in salary as a percent of operating budget from category average. For example, the average director in a museum with a $10-15 million budget has a salary that is 2.3% of the operating budget. If a director at a museum in

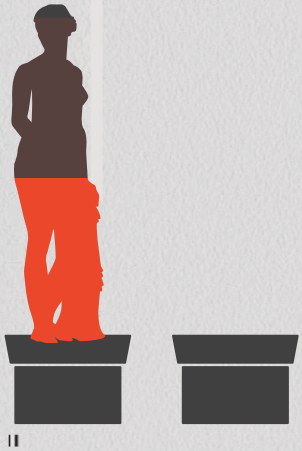
In general, consultants cited two major types of barriers to women's equality in art museum directorships: internal or personal factors, and external or institutional factors. Our interviewees did not emphasize both areas equally; they tended to discuss one or the other more based on their personal experiences and observations. Of the external factors, consultants discussed board and search committee composition, board member beliefs, museum size and collections focus, institutional support, training programs, and the gender split of the executive search/recruiting space itself. Of the internal factors, candidate assertiveness or confidence, negotiating skills, loyalty to current situation (family or institutional), and desire for a larger institution were the most commonly mentioned areas. However, one important dynamic

differences between how men and women interview. The dissenting half spoke about the differences in types of language used by men and women as well as the amount of confidence projected. For example, women were said to speak more in terms of tasks (and thus to sound more like deputy directors); in general, women were also more cautious in discussing the museum for which they were interviewing. On the other side, men were generally said to speak in terms of broad visions, to be more prepared with key metrics, and to be less cautious about making assumptions about their potential organization. Regarding confidence, the executive search consultants shared stories on both sides – of women who did not project enough confidence to convince the board that they were capable leaders, to women who did project confidence but were seen by some board members as "too aggressive." One interviewee discussed this paradox for women: the need to be seen as a strong leader but the simultaneous need to be aware of how others may perceive the leadership projections of a woman in a different light from that of a man.

Beyond interviewing, there was general agreement that the quality and type of references provided were equal across both male and female candidates. Within negotiations, two consultants stated that women

Women art museum directors are at or near parity with men at AAMD museums with

budgets under $15 million



Women hold **48%** of art museum director positions

Female art museum directors earn **$1.02** for every dollar earned by male art museum directors

and founder of think tank Center for Talent Innovation, Sylvia Ann Hewlett contends that mentorship alone is not enough to help women advance; her group has conducted research that shows that having a sponsor, or “a powerfully positioned champion,” measurably affects career advancement.[15]

museums will realize the benefits of drawing upon a larger number of exceptional leaders with diverse experiences and perspectives. All stakeholders (including board members, executive search consultants, sitting directors, and other museum staff with leadership aspirations) have a crucial role to play in ensuring that museums can continue to deliver upon the promises of their missions for generations to come.