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Proof or Pedigree: Prestige of Men's but not Women's PhD Program Predicts Top Placements in Business Schools

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Despite the clear recognition that women are held to higher standards in academia (Trevino, Balkin, & Gomez-Mejia, 2017), there have been few explanations for *how* men are preferentially selected over women. It is unlikely that academic institutions are consciously lowering standards for men and raising them for women. Indeed, many academic standards are quite quantifiable (number of publications, citation counts, and grant dollars). Thus, what can account for the gender gap in attaining placements at top business schools, even when controlling for all these measurable factors? To address this question, we conducted a qualitative study with PhD students who were applying for their first tenure-track position on the academic job market.

Study 1: Qualitative Study

For the qualitative study, we used a list of PhD candidates who were on the job market in the school year 2016-2017. This list appears online as a GoogleDoc, is publicly available, and serves as a resource for PhD students to share information about available jobs, job interviews, and themselves. We contacted all of the students listed on the GoogleDoc via email. 44 students, 18 women and 26 men, agreed to be interviewed. We asked the participants to explain why they received a number of interviews they received. Both men and women mentioned their strong publication records as a key factor in their success. Many of the men mentioned their connections or school. One male said, "One thing that has helped is [...] coming from a school that is widely known. Maybe letters and back channel communications." In contrast, women rarely mentioned the prestige of their school or connections of their advisors. Even when they did mention these factors, they were more likely to explain how their school or advisor helped them attain success. One woman said, "It is hard to say how much the overall Ivy League helps. I am not sure if it is that per se or the people I worked with and the resources I had available to me because I was at that school that made a difference."

Study 2

Our sample consisted of 195 assistant and associate micro/organizational behavior focused business professors from the top 70 management departments in the US. The list of schools is based on the Texas A&M Mays list of department rankings and the variable of department ranking reflects the rank from 2011-2016 on the Texas A&M list. The professors on the list all graduated in the year 2000 or later. Using the list established by the librarian, the research team downloaded each professor's vita to code it on several features. Each professor's PhD program was coded based on its US News and World Report ranking for business schools to

measure prestige, which has been linked to other indicators of prestige (Armstrong & Sperry, 1994). For the measures of prestige and rank, a higher number indicates lower prestige or a worse rank. Some professors ($n = 36$) did a post doc before starting their first job, and this was coded in the dataset as well.

Counts were taken of all publications written before and after the professors received their PhD. Publications were coded as A-level if they were on the Texas A&M Mays list (*Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, Administrative Science Quarterly, Organization Science*). Sex and race (white or non-white) were coded based on photos and names on one's faculty website. There were 119 men and 76 women in our sample.

We use this sample to take a retrospective look at the prestige of one's PhD program, the rank of professors' first tenure track job and their current jobs. There was a significant interaction between sex and prestige of one's PhD program on the rank of one's first tenure track job, even when controlling for publications written during the PhD. The nature of the interaction was such that there was a direct effect of prestige of one's PhD program on rank of one's first job for male PhD students (Effect = .59, SE = .25, 95% CI = [.10, 1.08]) but not for women (Effect = -.13, SE = .28, 95% CI = [-.69, .43]) (see Table 3). The results show that even when controlling for A-Level publications and other publications, men attain positions in well-ranked management departments based on the prestige of their PhD institution (see Figure 3).

Limiting our sample to only those professors who had tenure, we found that rank of one's first job was included as a mediator. We added A-level publications and other publications written after PhD as additional mediators, so the model controlled for these factors. Just as with the previous model, we allowed sex to moderate the relationship between prestige and rank of one's first job. A-level publications and other publications were included as controls along with the controls used in the first analysis. As expected, there was still a significant interaction between the prestige of one's PhD program and sex in predicting rank of one's first job. Moreover, rank of one's first job predicted rank of one's current job as did A-level publications after PhD. There was a significant conditional indirect effect of prestige of one's PhD school through rank of one's first job on rank of one's current job for men (Effect = .18, SE = .10, 95% CI = [.04, .43]) but not for women (Effect = -.04, SE = .06, 95% CI = [-.19, .05]). The results here show that the prestige of men's PhD program is not only related to the rank of the first job that men attain, but also the likelihood that they will hold tenure in a well-ranked management department.

Study 3

Finally, in study 3 I test an intervention to reduce bias – blinding a selection process. To mitigate institutional bias, gender bias, and the interaction between prestige and sex described in Study 2, we removed the names (to blind sex) and affiliations (to blind prestige) from a list of applicants for a tenure-track job in the management department. Two faculty members independently came up with an algorithm to score the applicants' data. The first faculty member scored the results as a sum of A-level publications plus .5 X (A-level publications that had an R&R). The second faculty member scored the results as 1 point for each A-level plus .4 X (A-level publications that had an R&R) plus .02 X (number of conference presentations). The comparison of both lists demonstrated that there was a 100% agreement on the top 13 candidates. Six job candidates in the final pool were male and seven were female. At that point, the faculty considered a more holistic approach to the candidates' vitas, such as their letters of recommendation and areas of study. All of the candidates were interviewed over the phone to assess fit, interest, and research topic. After this step, three female and one male candidate were invited to personal interviews on campus. Finally, a female candidate was hired.

Discussion

There are myriad ways that bias can occur against women faculty. One way is through different perceptions of high status positions. A number of studies show a clear bias in favor of men in academia, even controlling for merit. There are structural reasons that can explain the bias — for example, a qualitative study in the Netherlands showed that men avoid career interruptions and have larger networks than women (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011). There is, however, empirical evidence that, even beyond these factors, women are discriminated against in academia. For example, women get less credit for coauthored papers than men, particularly when they coauthor with all men (Sarsons, 2015). Trevino, Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Mixon (2015) found that women have a lower probability of holding an endowed chair than male faculty, even after controlling for performance, human capital factors, and other variables usually associated with career advancement. Women faculty are also less likely to receive tenure, even after controlling for research productivity and citations (Park & Gordon, 1996). In addition, women faculty are paid less over time than their male counterparts, even after controlling for research outcomes and teaching performance (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). Women even get less credit for coauthored papers than men, particularly when they coauthor with all men (Sarsons, 2015). Our findings also inform previous theories of the different standards used to evaluate men and women by highlighting the differential impact of prestige on the evaluation of men and women (Ridgeway, 2001).

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