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“It’s Hard to Be What You Can’t See” - Gender Representation in Marketing’s Academic Journals

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Abstract

This commentary explores gender representation in marketing’s academic journals. We explore three key areas a) the gender composition of editorial boards, b) special issue celebrations and c) awards. We highlight how in 2020, 68% of editorial board positions are held by male colleagues, and consider the consequences of this both in terms of providing role models for female academics – “it’s hard to be what you can’t see” (Wright, 2015) but also in there being less opportunities for women to avail of key indicators of esteem utilised in promotions processes. We argue for an intersectional approach to addressing injustice and inequalities within our academy. We propose a programme for change – revolving around decision-making, quotas, awards, and celebrations - for the gatekeepers in our field to consider.

Keywords academic journals; equality, diversity and inclusion; injustice and inequality; intersectionality; gatekeepers; gender; marketing academia; representation

Introduction

“...there is clearly still a great deal of ground to make up before higher education can truly describe itself as a sector that has embraced equality.” (Williams, 2016)

One of the aims of this special issue is to examine not only the wonderful academic research taking place on inequality and injustice, but as the call for papers also mentions to explore the “sexism, harassment, bullying, discrimination and othering” found in marketing practice and academia. In this commentary we build on this aspect of the call for papers by exploring gender representation in what the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) determines is our elite leading marketing journals. Our focus on CABS journals sets out to assess the current state of representation, but we recognise this is not a complete list of

academic marketing journals. We offer some empirically informed insights and reflections, alongside a programme for change moving forward.

Gender injustice and inequality have improved in recent decades, but there are still significant and persistent issues globally. Indeed, the United Nations lists achieving gender equality as one of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and SDG 5 presents a ‘wicked problem’ (WP) for policy making and evidence measurement (Eden and Wagstaff, 2020). Eden and Wagstaff draw from van Tulder (2018, p 34) in stating that WPs are “systemic in nature, complexly interrelated, and materialize at the interface between public–private and profit–non-profit interests”; as a result, they cannot be handled with “old management or leadership mindsets, or with old organizational structures” (van Tulder, 2018, p 34).

It is well documented that women, through various guises, are discriminated against in the workplace, and academia is no different in this regard (Johansson and Śliwa, 2014; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012; Winslow, 2010). Various inequalities and injustices exist for both female academics and students (Cantrell, 2018; Dizikes and Asimov, 2018; Martin, 2016). For example, the wage gap identified in the 1960s has not significantly improved (Hatch, 2017; Holmes, 2017), and the number of women in senior positions within academia is incredibly low (Sandstrom et al., 2010). In 2016, nearly 70% of all professors in UK universities were male, only 7.3% were Black and minority ethnic (BME) men and 1.9% BME women; and this sat alongside 67.5% of university senior managers being male (Williams, 2016). In the US, Black, Latinx and Native American professors account for approximately 11% of full-time faculty (Espinosa et al., 2019), and only 1.6% of full professors are Black women and 2.1% are Latinx women (Catalyst, 2020). Recent research suggests it will take 40 years to close the gender pay gap in academia (Hall, 2017), and that the gap is increasing (Belli, 2017). This is further exacerbated by evidence of women being held to higher standards than their male colleagues – for example in the peer review process (Hengel, 2017).

All of this is set against a backdrop of female academics being more likely to take on both “emotional” (Tierney and Bensimon, 1996) and “glue work” roles (Lester, 2008) which keep departments together; but which are not typically recognised in promotion rounds. Indeed, Silander, Haake and Lindberg (2013) emphasise that women are not only under-represented in academia, but also subject to *subordination* too¹. Our title quote from Marian Wright Edelman (2015), an American civil rights activist and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund, is an issue we wish to explore in relation to the marketing academy. In 2020, three years after the #MeToo movement took hold on social media (following its first use by Tarana Burke in 2006), and amidst a resurgence of activism in relation to women’s equality, we still regularly witness discrimination against women in all walks of life. Take manels, all male panels, as but one example. That they still exist in 2020 saddens us, and more incredulously, on occasion, such manels talk about increasing diversity or speak to issues primarily affecting women (Kumar, 2020). So much so that there are a number of organisations such as @ManelWatch and @EUPanelWatch which specifically bring these panels to our attention. Indeed, manels continue to be prevalent across academia, and the marketing academy has been called to task in recent years for its ‘all male panels’ and a privileging of the work of male academics within our research endeavours (Gurrieri, Previte and Prothero, 2020). There is a recognition that “A new sexism seems to be stalking us” (Maclaran 2015, p. 1736), alongside calls for further research on gender inequality within the marketing academy (Fischer, 2015).

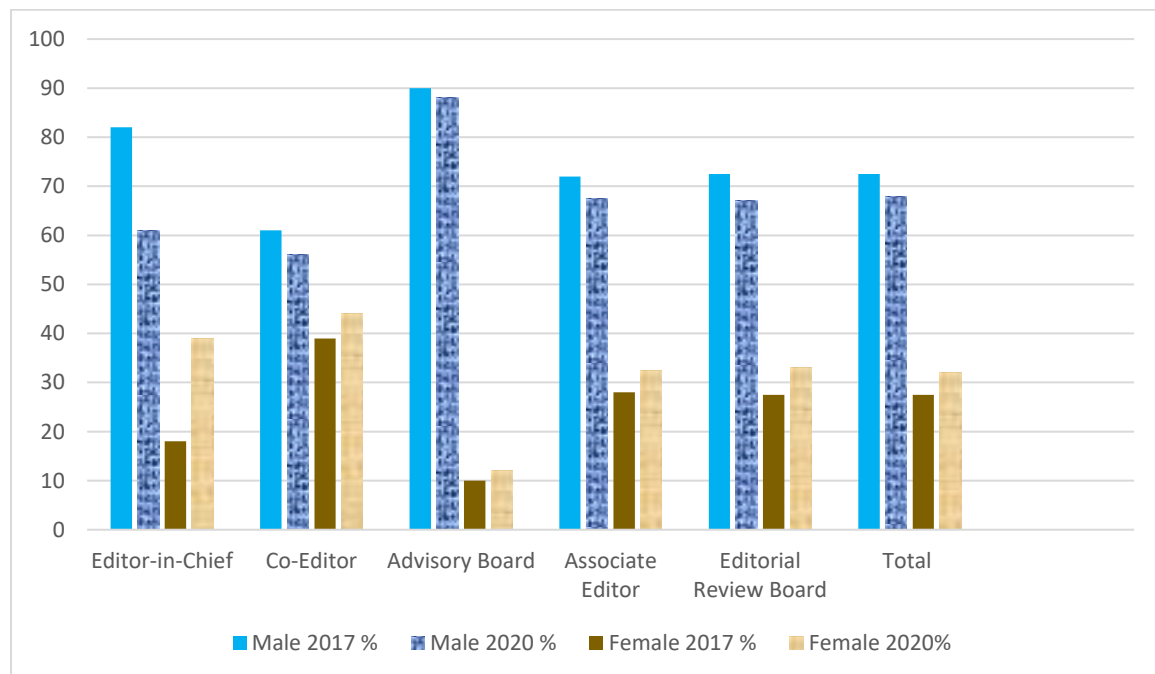
¹ In making this statement, we are not implying any essentialism here. We recognise that not all female academics are constructive, helpful and energising leaders.

For this commentary we are focusing on one issue of discrimination - gender representation within our leading marketing journals. We focus on a) the gender composition of editorial boards, b) special issue celebrations and, c) the awards process.

Gender Composition of Editorial Boards

Between April-June 2017 and June-October 2020, we examined the gender breakdown of Editorial Boards amongst the Chartered Association of Business Schools, CABS 3*, 4 and 4* journal² ranking list, as provided on the journals' websites. Figure 1 provides a breakdown for the Editor-In-Chief, Co-Editor, Advisory Board, Associate Editor, and Editorial Review Board positions within the journals.

Figure 1 - Gender Composition of Journals – 2017 & 2020



Our first observation is that with one exception (Co-Editor), in none of the categories do females outnumber males. Taking the numbers in the aggregate we can see improvement, and overall there has been a 4.5% increase of women holding editorial positions between the two time periods. However, it is startling to us, that in 2020, over two thirds of such positions are held by our male colleagues. While we acknowledge and applaud the substantial increase

² Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Marketing Science, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Retailing, International Journal of Research in Marketing, European Journal of Marketing, Industrial Marketing Management, International Marketing Review, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Interactive Marketing, Journal of International Marketing, Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, Marketing Letters, Marketing Theory, Psychology and Marketing, Quantitative Marketing and Economics

in Editor-In-Chief positions, up from 18 to 39%, and Associate Editors up from 28 to 32.5%, we are dismayed at the overall figures. This is particularly so for the composition of our editorial review boards. While it could be argued that a lack of female representation in our most senior positions is due to historical factors, the same cannot be true for editorial board positions, which typically include early and mid-career colleagues. While amongst a small number of individual journals there was parity of a roughly 50/50 female split (*Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*), there were also instances where over three quarters of editorial review boards comprised male academics (*Marketing Science*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *Psychology and Marketing*, *Quantitative Marketing and Economics*). While there has been substantial improvement in females as Editor-In-Chief and Co-Editors, in all other categories, there is only one instance, where females outnumber males in advisory board or associate editor posts (*Journal of Advertising*, Associate Editor), and two instances where women are marginally higher represented than men amongst editorial review boards (*Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*).

The most startling picture lies in the Advisory Board role, where in 2020, 88% of advisory board posts are held by male colleagues in the 13 journals which have such a post. Even more concerning are the five journals (*International Journal of Research in Marketing*; *International Marketing Review*; *Marketing Letters*; *Marketing Theory*; and *Quantitative Marketing and Economics*) whereby all of the senior advisers are male.

We acknowledge and applaud the improvements since our initial assessment in 2017, but given the increased attention paid to issues of equality, diversity and inclusion in recent years, it is depressing that this change, for the most part, has been modest to say the least.

Not included in the CABS 3 & 4/4* list, we also considered the editorial make up for this journal. The *Journal of Marketing Management* was established in 1985 by Professor Michael Baker. It has had four editors-in-chief, three men and one woman. Its current composition compares favourably to the CABS list we assessed above. In terms of editorial review board membership, there is almost parity with a 51% (male) 49% (female) split, and similarly with Associate Editors too – 52% (male) and 48% (female). The journal does less favourably for its Senior Advisory Board (with a 67% (male) 33% (female) split), but this is significantly better than the average 88% male for the other journals.

Journal Celebrations

During our research, we noticed another concerning pattern, when our journals and the research within them are celebrated. First, there is the anniversary issue. Consider recent anniversary issues of *Marketing Science*, the *Journal of Marketing Research* and the *Journal of Marketing*. Under its male editor (Shugan, 2006), *Marketing Science* celebrated its fiftieth anniversary issue in 2006 with guest editorials from three former male editors. Edited by A.J. Kohli (2011), the *Journal of Marketing* celebrated its impressive 75th anniversary issue in 2011. Here, the editor invited contributions to the issue “in consultation with a small group [unnamed] of marketing thought leaders” (Kohli, 2011, p. 128) to consider the future of marketing. Nine papers were included, with 3 female contributors and 8 males. The *Journal of Marketing Research* celebrated 50 years in 2014. Here, the two male editors (Meyer and Winer, 2014) invited comments from former editors of the journal, and where former editors were

sadly no longer with us, other colleagues familiar with their work were asked to comment on their tenure as editor. In total, the celebratory issue included fourteen reflections, including one from a practitioner perspective. Sixteen of the contributors were male, 2 were female. The editors of the anniversary issues described the contributors as “a who’s who of major contributors to marketing” (Meyer and Winer, 2014, p. 83).

While we have no doubt that women were not deliberately excluded from these celebrations, we do however witness how structural, systemic and institutional bias towards male colleagues leads to a perpetuation of celebrating the work of men, and thus ensuring that the gate-keepers and the ‘who’s who’ of marketers continues to be male. And, as Marian Wright Edelman stresses, it can be hard to be who you cannot see.

Within our leading journals, it is often the case that previous editors are predominantly male. For example, since its launch in 1936 the *Journal of Marketing* has had 28 male and 1 female Editor-In-Chief (see Bolton, 2017 for an insight into that appointment). Similarly, since its launch in 1964 the *Journal of Marketing Research* has had 16 male and 1 female Editor-In-Chief. The *Journal of Consumer Research*, launched in 1972 fairs somewhat better, having its first female Editor-In-Chief, Dawn Iacobucci, in 2003; and with 8 of its 21 editors-in-chief being female. In one case, the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, launched in 1984 has had 13 male editors-in-chief and no female academics in that role. And, if in future journal celebrations, previous editors continue to be called upon for their comments on the discipline as a whole, women’s voices will continue to be excluded from these conversations. And, once again, it is hard to be who you cannot see.

Journal Awards

Another issue of note is the awarding of prizes for contributions to our journals, in the form of, for example, outstanding paper, early career award, and outstanding reviewer. Again, we were perplexed by the lack of female representation in the naming of awards. Not all journals have awards, but for those who do they are either named after celebrated male marketing academics (47%) or not named at all (53%). On the journals’ websites, we did not discover any awards named after female marketing academics. We know from other research that women are regularly written out of history, and a number of campaigns revolving around *Women on Walls* have been established to rectify this. These include campaigns which celebrate the current achievements of women (Wellbery and Mishori, 2018), women written out of history (Cullen, 2018), and as a form of education on the plight of women (Kiwani, 2015). So, while we celebrate the work of our ‘famed’ colleagues as such, the scholarly work of early female academics goes largely unnoticed (see Tadajewski and MacLaran, 2013 for an examination of some early female marketing academics). Consequently, female academics are not celebrated in the same way as their male colleagues (see Wills and Raven, 2020; Bolton, 2017; Fischer, 2018; MacInnis, 2019; and Dholakia, 2019 for some autobiographical reflections acknowledging female scholarship in the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*).

All three of these issues combine, with other structural, systemic and institutional forces, to perpetuate injustices and inequality for female marketing academics. The combined effects simultaneously contribute to an unequal playing field. We discuss the implications of these in more detail next.

Discussion

During our academic careers, we have always sought to hold difficult conversations and ask difficult questions. And we continue to do so with this commentary. We want to ask simple questions of complex systems, such as *why* in 2020 are the gatekeeper positions within our academy held by more men than women? Why is it harder for female academics to have less female role models than men? At the same time, SDG 5 (UN Women, 2020) clearly indicates, “Women and girls, everywhere, must have equal rights and opportunity, and be able to live free of violence and discrimination. Women’s equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, but also integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. In short, all the SDGs depend on the achievement of Goal 5”. Thus, the aim of SDG5 is not only to achieve equality, but to also empower women and girls.

We argue, that within our academy, one way to further both equality and empowerment amongst female marketing academics is to address the inequalities and injustices within our journals. In so doing, we acknowledge that there have been some improvements in this regard since 2017, but there is still a long way to go before we are even close to parity. We also observe, that such parity is important not only for providing role models, but also in affecting women’s careers. Membership of editorial boards is a key indicator of esteem in university promotions applications, and as such a lack of opportunities in this regard is another example of discriminatory practices against women.

The 20 journals we examined are run through nine publishing houses - The Advertising Research Foundation (WARC) (1), Elsevier (4), Emerald (2), Informs (1), Oxford Academic (1), Sage (5), Springer (3), Taylor & Francis (1), and Wiley (2). The issue of gender equality has been discussed in the publishing industry in terms of its own issues of inequality, the publication of research with an inequality and injustice focus, and in terms of the academic gatekeepers for the journals. The Royal Society of Chemistry (n.d.), paved the way for 27 publishers to “ensure a more inclusive and diverse culture within scholarly publishing” and five of the nine publishers on our list are signatories. For example, Elsevier’s (2020) website currently states - “In partnership with the communities we serve, we redouble our deep commitment to inclusion and diversity within our editorial, author and reviewer networks”. Emerald (2020) state on their website – “As part of our real impact commitment, we are already leading the way in sparking the debate, demonstrating leadership, and celebrating inclusion and diversity in everything we do”. Our research shows that these words are not put into practice in current editorial board membership within the marketing academy.

Gender inequality and injustice permeate all aspects of the marketing academy, from employment opportunities, salaries being paid, to women engaging in the ‘glue’ and emotional work we discussed above. Marketing practice continues to contribute to promoting stereotypes and sexist advertising, through its communications efforts. There remains a miniscule amount of gender research within the academy generally, and even smaller critically-oriented gender research (McDonagh and Prothero, 2018). Harassment and bullying persist within academia, not only in universities, but also on the conference circuit. Quoting other research that we are currently conducting (Prothero and McDonagh, 2018), we evidence the experience of the combination of injustices and inequalities, with one colleague using the analogy of it being like ‘death by a million cuts’. Here we mean that it is the combined force of so many injustices and inequalities across all aspects of female academics’ careers that make inequity and inequality so endemic in our profession. For this commentary, we have focused on three of these issues – editorial board composition, journal celebrations and journal awards. Towards the end of the commentary, we propose a ‘programme for change’ for editors-in-chief and publishing houses in our field to address these inequalities and injustices.

While not a component of our research here, we acknowledge this programme for change should address other injustices and inequalities within our academy. In particular, a focus on race is necessary. Whereas, we conducted our research through journals' websites, we would call for further empirical research which collects data from board members on their race so that race representation can be explored further.

We also acknowledge our own White privileges while conducting and writing our research. For example, one of us (Andy) recently posted an image on Twitter of the excellent books she had recently been reading on various aspects of feminism. A woman of colour very kindly pointed out that there were no people of colour included in my reading list. As such, my (Andy) White privilege was brought to the fore and made me stop and realise how I am often not aware of this, and how this, in and of itself, is part of the problem (Eddo-Lodge, 2018). I always question all-male reading lists, and all-male panels, but found myself guilty of not doing the same with regards to race. The 'death by a million cuts' metaphor also applies to race. For instance, earlier, we talk of limited research on gender within our discipline, and the same is also true for race (Burton, 2009; Grier, Thomas and Johnson 2019), although we note that some excellent papers have been published in recent years (see for example, Davis, 2018; Davis, 2013). And, many of the problems we raise here in relation to gender have been considered with regards to race (Grier and Poole 2020). We also recognise that people do not live their lives based on one identity, or indeed that all women or all women of colour are homogenous groups.

The quote used in our commentary title is from a woman of colour, and was referring to the need for people of colour to be more visible in published works aimed at children. We have used that quote here to help us explain why it is important to have better gender representation in our academy. We do though envisage our programme for change as focusing on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion more broadly. Ultimately, as (Grier and Poole 2020) emphasize, an intersectional approach is required which recognises race and gender, alongside other examples of subordination such as appearance, class, religion, sexuality and ability are not independent of each other. As the founder of the term 'intersectionality', Kimberlé Crenshaw notes,

"That work started when I realised that African American women were not recognised as having experienced discrimination that reflected both their race and their gender. The courts would say if you don't experience racism in the same way as a [Black] man does, or sexism in the same way as a White woman does, then you haven't been discriminated against. I saw that as a problem of sameness and difference. There were claims of being seen as too different to be accommodated by law. That led to intersectionality, looking at the ways race and gender intersect to create barriers and obstacles to equality." (in Eddo-Lodge, 2018, p. 156).

We are optimistic that editorial boards and publishing houses will adopt an intersectional approach and tackle the issues we raise. And we hope, it will not be too long before we have better representation in positions of power, and as senior gatekeepers in our field, and that these gatekeepers contribute to addressing issues of inequality and injustice while simultaneously furthering the empowerment of the emerging and diverse scholars in our discipline.

Programme for Change

- 1. Decision-Making** – The Royal Society in the UK (2015) has called for selection and appointment panels to slow down decision-making, while also ensuring unconscious bias training has taken place amongst its members, and that it considers cultural stereotypes within its board. We ask for marketing's journals to adopt these principles for their editorial boards. As Logan (2016) reminds us “think about the community that your journal serves; think about roadblocks facing your authors at their institutions, in their home countries, in their research”. We urge our journal editors to develop more diverse boards, and also to consider the geographic location of board members, and the research endeavours of those members. And in so doing, provide the academy with diverse role models, in diverse locations, while also encouraging diverse research practices.
- 2. Quotas** - We ask for Editors-in-Chief and publishing houses to come together and devise quotas on our editorial boards which reflects the diversity of our discipline. We have focused on the publicly available composition for Editor-In-Chief, Co-Editor, Advisory Board, Associate Editor, and Editorial Review Board positions, but we also ask for the same policies in terms of manuscript review boards (reviewers) too. We expect a backlash here! Colleagues indubitably will argue that quotas are not merit-based, and thus not fair. However, as Eddo-Lodge (2018) reminds us in her excellent best-selling book *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, this assumes that existing and previous systems were also fair, and the statistics prove they are not. While, the fairness of quotas is discussed, alongside quota efficacy, and in particular how symbolic and normative quota policies are ineffectual (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2005; de Cabo et al., 2019), we argue that within our own academy, a quota system for editorial board representation should be introduced. We recognise this might be challenging to operationalise, but still argue it is a necessary requirement to address existing problems. Such a system could have both immediate and longer term impact on reducing inequality and injustice within our academy.
- 3. Awards** – Building on the work of (Guerrieri, Previte and Prothero, 2020), we ask for our academy to reimagine the awards process. This requires us to move beyond naming awards after White male academics. It is wonderful to have emerging scholar and outstanding reviewer awards, and indeed many of these have been awarded to female colleagues, but we argue for the inclusion of other initiatives such as mentoring, and ethical leadership, alongside recognising individuals who challenge our various academic associations to do better. Let's re-characterise what success looks like, and celebrate diversity in the process. We acknowledge that awards themselves are not without criticism, particularly when it comes to objectivity. Nevertheless, we argue that reimagining the awards process to be less pale and male, while also more diverse in what is deemed successful can benefit our community and play a role in addressing existing injustices and inequalities.
- 4. Celebrations** – When celebrating important milestones within our journals, we ask Editors-in-Chief to pay particular attention to who is invited to contribute – ensuring a diverse set of commentators. Furthermore, as well as focusing on a ‘who's who’ of current thinkers, let's provide intellectual space for emerging scholars to contribute to such issues. This not only benefits the emerging scholars, but also our discipline. It is often those new to a field who have their finger on the pulse and could provide more

contemporary food for thought than more established colleagues. Listening to diverse voices at differing stages of their career can only enrich and reinvigorate our discipline.

To conclude, we applaud the many positive developments in terms of gender inequality and injustice in academia generally and marketing academia in particular. We have been excited in recent years by the increase in the number of female Editors-In-Chief and Associate Editors of our leading journals. The Gender, Marketing and Consumption (GENMAC) organisation has been revived, and promises great hope for the future. From a race perspective, the Race in the Marketplace (RIM) research network has recently been established. We have witnessed a number of special issues, including this one, recently published or forthcoming, exploring gender and marketing (Coleman, Fischer & Zayer(forthcoming), Ostberg & Dobscha, (forthcoming), Gurrieri, Previte & Prothero, 2020). There are two forthcoming special issues and an editorial volume on race in the marketplace and crossing critical boundaries (Thomas et al., 2020; Wherry & Perry, forthcoming; Johnson et al., 2020). And, there are two other current calls for papers for special issues with a focus on race (Williams, Cross and Dellande, 2020; Shabbir, Hyman and Kostyk, 2020). However, we also maintain that there is so much more which remains to be done within our discipline with regards to injustice and inequality. This commentary focused on just one aspect – gender representation - within our journals. We hope that this commentary serves as a catalyst for reflection and change from the gatekeepers who publish our research as well the publishing houses which support this process.

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