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WOMEN AND ADVANCEMENT IN NEUROPSYCHOLOGY:REAL-LIFE LESSONS LEARNED

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Abstract

The number of women in neuropsychology has been increasing over the past 20 years while the number of women in senior and leadership positions within neuropsychology has not. The field of neuropsychology has much to gain by facilitating the advancement of women into leadership roles, including access to some of the brightest and creative minds in the field. The purpose of this article is to offer practical advice about how to overcome barriers and advance within neuropsychology. Suggestions for professional organizations, women, and mentors of women are provided that will likely benefit trainees and junior colleagues regardless of their gender.

Keywords

Leadership; Advancement; Advocacy; Women; Neuropsychology

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The number of women in the neurosciences in general and neuropsychology in particular has skyrocketed over the past two decades. According to available APA membership statistics for Division 40 (Clinical Neuropsychology), women's membership increased 7.0%, from 34.7% (1361/3918) in 1997 to 46% (2012/4378) in 2007. A similar trend was noted in its junior membership, with the percentage of women rising 7.5%, from 41.9% in 1997 to 49.4% in 2006 (M. Rivera-Mindt, Division 40 Membership Committee Chair, personal communication, January 10, 2008; 2007 data for junior membership were not available). Despite this shifting demography, there has been a lag in the number of women in senior or leadership positions in the field. For example, only three women have been elected President of Division 40 since its inception in 1980, and the percentage of women Fellows has held relatively steady since 1997, increasing only slightly from 22.1% (46/208) to 24.4% (66/270) in 2006. Similar trends are seen within the National Academy of Neuropsychology (NAN). Although 46% of its general membership in 2007 was comprised of women, only 14% (44/239) of Fellows were women. Since 1975, only two women have been elected President of NAN, and only 15 positions on the Board of Directors have been held by women, some of which were held by the same women (P. Zeifert, Member-At-Large and task force chair of Women in NAN, personal communication, November 16, 2007). An informal survey of the editorial boards of five of the major journals in neuropsychology (i.e.,

Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology, Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology, Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society, Neuropsychology, and The Clinical Neuropsychologist) revealed only one woman editor-in-chief and three women associate editors. Percentages of women on the editorial boards of these journals ranged from 20% to 50%.

Additionally, not only are women under-represented in senior and leadership positions, they are often paid less than men at the same level. The 2007 salary figures for psychologists show the median salary for women with 0–1 years of experience is \$4500 less than the median salary for men with the same level of experience (<http://research.apa.org/t15asalaries07.pdf>). This salary gap holds relatively steady through 4 years of experience but then widens significantly over time so that after 30 years of experience the median salary of women psychologists averages \$15,000 less per year than men with 30 years of experience. Although 2007 salary data specific to neuropsychology were not available, data from a joint survey conducted by Division 40 and the NAN in 2000 documented a gender gap in pay with women neuropsychologists earning a median income \$25,000 less than men (Sweet, Peck, Abramowitz, & Etzweiler, 2003). However, this discrepancy in income is most likely multiply determined: women neuropsychologists were significantly younger with fewer years of experience than men completing this survey and more likely to be working part-time and in non-private practice settings, both of which are variables associated with lower income levels (Sweet, Peck, Abramowitz, & Etzweiler, 2002).

Neuropsychology is not alone in this regard, however. Academic medical centers recruit comparable percentages of men and women to junior faculty positions but fewer women advance to the associate or full professor levels (Ash, Carr, Goldstein, & Friedman, 2004; Bickel et al., 2002). Women who do achieve associate or full professorship often take longer to attain promotion and then are not compensated equally (Ash et al., 2004; Bickel et al., 2002). The proportion of women decreases further at the level of department chair and dean (Andrews, 2007; Cheng, Promes, Clem, Shah, & Pietrobon, 2006). This pattern persists even when considering influencing factors such as attrition rates and productivity (Ash et al., 2004; Cheng et al., 2006).

The paucity of women in senior positions has been attributed to a number of personal, environmental, and social constraints sometimes referred to as the “glass ceiling.” The U.S. Department of Labor (1991, p. 1) defines the glass ceiling as “those [collective] artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management level positions.” Some barriers may be more blatant and obvious, such as sexual harassment and gender discrimination, while others are more subtle and unintentional, such as gender stereotyping, lack of effective mentorship, and a natural resistance to power sharing (Bickel et al., 2002; Pololi & Knight, 2005).

Disparities are not attributed to external forces in the workplace alone but may often be influenced by factors associated with female gender roles or characteristics, which Bickel (2004, p. 289; 2007a, p. 684) has referred to as the “personal glass ceiling.” These factors include increased family responsibilities, lack of assertiveness, tendencies to personalize and internalize difficulties and underestimate abilities, and failure to negotiate (or negotiate well), all of which contribute to the slower advancement of women (Ash et al., 2004; Bickel, 2004, 2007a). Differences in career aspirations are another potential explanation, but this topic has not been well studied (Bickel, 2007a). Finally, women more often than men place their career aspirations on hold in order to raise their children, although this pattern is increasingly changing (Wright et al., 2003).

Regardless of the reasons, the field of neuropsychology suffers when women fail to advance into senior and leadership positions since some of its brightest and most creative minds are not utilized fully. On a more pragmatic note, since a growing percentage of neuropsychologists are women it is only wise to invest in the advancement of the field's up-and-coming constituents and to promote women's abilities to reach their career potential. In other words, the development of women leaders in neuropsychology is central to its longevity and financial success. Women leaders are essential for effective marketing to women looking for women neuropsychologists and to trainees seeking female role models (Bickel et al., 2002). Although at present women do not reach leadership positions as readily as men, the good news is that medical specialties with higher proportions of women have more women in leadership positions (Cheng et al., 2006; Kværner, Aasland, & Botten, 1999). In fact, organizations have increased their emphasis on preparing women as leaders and developed intensive training programs (e.g., Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine; ELAM). In 2008, APA's Committee for Women in Psychology (CWP) hosted the inaugural meeting of the Institute on Leadership for Women in Psychology. Given the large percentage of women neuropsychologists, neuropsychology is a specialty field where women are well positioned to advance into leadership roles. The purpose of this article is to offer guidance about how to overcome barriers and advance within the field of neuropsychology.

FOCUSED GOALS

Since none of the research investigating barriers to advancement among women is specific to neuropsychology, the focus of this article will not be an in-depth review of available literature. Rather, combining lessons learned from pioneering women in our field, peers, and personal experience, along with relevant literature across multiple professions, the focused goal of this article is to facilitate the advancement of women into leadership positions by:

1. calling attention to existing efforts of professional organizations
2. reiterating and suggesting ideas for future efforts of professional organizations
3. offering guidance to individuals about how to reach their career potential
4. highlighting the significance of mentoring and assisting earlier career level women to move up the ranks

We emphasize that the primary focus of this article is facilitating the advancement of women; however, many of the suggestions in this article should prove helpful to advancing the careers of our male colleagues and trainees as well. This article is intended for both those seeking to advance or to assist others in advancement.

PREVIOUS AND CONTINUING EFFORTS

Within neuropsychology, Division 40 of the APA has made some important inroads in increasing the representation of women in leadership positions. For example, the gender composition of their board of directors has been approximately 50/50 for the past several years. In addition, they were the first to organize a concerted effort to address the unique needs in facilitating the advancement of women. Women in Neuropsychology (WIN) was established as a standing subcommittee of Division 40 in 2000 to a large degree by the work of Dr. Paula Shear. WIN sponsors workshops at the annual conferences of APA and the International Neuropsychological Society (INS) to support early and mid-career level members (Shear & Marcotte, 2002). Topics addressed by WIN include "The do's and don'ts of career development: What I wish someone had told me," "Women pioneers in neuropsychology: A perspective from the beginning," "Tips for Successful Job Negotiating," and "How to become a journal reviewer." WIN also hosts a list serve open to

women and men, pairs mentors and mentees with similar career goals, and surveys the needs of its membership. In 2006 NAN appointed a task force to explore how the organization can better meet the needs of its women members. This task force became an advisory committee to the NAN Board of Directors in 2008 and sponsors an event at the NAN annual conference. Many of the suggestions below resulted from discussions at WIN and NAN events.

FUTURE EFFORTS

Advice for professional organizations in neuropsychology

The initial efforts of APA's Division 40 and NAN are encouraging and highlight the pivotal role professional organizations can play in advancing women leaders. Neuropsychological organizations can further promote women's advancement by clearly defining leadership competencies and then providing workshops or seminars that promote such competencies through hands on training and role modeling. In addition, because women often have less exposure to the hierarchical systems of leadership that currently characterize many academic departments (e.g., following the chain of command), they must develop a clear understanding and a pragmatic approach to working within these types of systems in order to follow a successful career trajectory. Thus, women's opportunities to advance will be enhanced when they are better educated about leadership competencies and how to navigate hierarchical systems successfully, both of which can be addressed through broad educational efforts.

Another suggestion for professional organizations is to continue to focus efforts on facilitating connections between current and future women leaders. Because there are few women in leadership positions, a potential avenue toward achieving this goal could be sponsorship of ongoing peer mentoring groups at annual meetings. Peer mentoring groups work by compensating for the limited number of women leaders, developing self awareness, facilitating spontaneous mentoring relationships, and providing training in the process of mentoring (Pololi & Knight, 2005). Participants benefit from the diverse wisdom of their peers in a safe, collaborative environment.

Suggestions for women in neuropsychology

Because changing the culture of organizations and modifying one's behavior take time and considerable effort and insight, below are suggestions for individuals who want to play an active role in facilitating this change for the better of neuropsychology as a whole.

Find mentors—The value of mentoring cannot be over-emphasized. Identify early a group of mentors (of both genders) with which you can develop a lasting professional relationship. At the bare minimum, find a mentor within neuropsychology who has the accomplishments or the background you are seeking to develop. It is entirely appropriate to ask this person to mentor you. These types of spontaneous mentoring relationships almost always work because they are characterized by respect, support, and compatibility that lead to long-term, mutually satisfying relationships that are not initiated or structured by an institution. It is also helpful to find a mentor within your institution who can advise you on specific rules or criteria for advancement such as the promotion process. If you cannot identify a clear candidate, ask a trusted colleague for suggestions.

Network—Networking is a key activity for finding mentors, and you should network with a goal in mind. For example, identify women whom you would like to emulate based on their having a successful clinical practice or a tenured faculty appointment and find out how they accomplished their goals. Make alliances with forward-thinking male colleagues and ask

them to introduce you to others, suggest your name as a reviewer for grants or articles, or invite you to speak at their institutions. In addition to attendance at conferences and membership in professional organizations that promote women, such as WIN, NAN, and Women in Neuroscience, seek out more specific meetings and resources (e.g., HIV research; addiction research and treatment) that will facilitate your ability to navigate through a variety of networking situations within your areas of specialty interest.

Set goals—With the help of your mentors, set career-specific short-term (3–5 years) and long-term (5–10 years) goals. For example, if your career goal is to have a successful private practice, some possible short-term goals may be to develop marketing materials, build a strong referral base, and secure your own office space or join a group practice. Long-term goals may include achieving and maintaining a specific salary range, recruiting additional staff, and opening a second office. For individuals interested in research careers, short-term goals may include identifying supportive collaborators, submitting a pilot grant, and writing an average of three manuscripts per year. Long-term goals may be to obtain release time from clinical and teaching activities, obtain research funding, and mentor other clinician-scientists. Regardless of your goals, it will be important to monitor your progress regularly and to adjust your goals or strategies for achieving them when needed.

Keep your eyes on the prize—Once you have set your goals, stay focused on them and base choices about use of time and resources on whether or not they will get you closer to your goals. For example, if you are working toward a research career in Alzheimer's disease, attending an all-day workshop on traumatic brain injury may not be the best use of your time. In your day-to-day work setting, identify those tasks that you absolutely must do yourself and delegate out those that can be done by others (for example, your presence is not critical for successful literature searches). Remain cognizant of the current literature and do not spend precious time reinventing the wheel. Protect your time and limit your distractions! Turn off your phone, close your door, and limit time spent reading email to a specified time each day. Be mindful of how much time you are spending assisting others and the risk of neglecting your own work.

Identify (and conquer!) barriers—As indicated above, barriers to advancement come both from within and without. With regard to barriers without, be cognizant of possible gender discrimination within your particular work setting and work toward neutralizing it. If you are searching for a new job, look for settings that have women in leadership positions, programs for developing junior faculty, including guidance for men in mentoring women, and a women's professional group supported by the institution. Look for clues suggesting that unrestricted accessibility at work (i.e., neglect of personal life) is rewarded, flexible work hours are discouraged, and preconceived notions about what women are willing to do to advance are present.

One of the first steps toward identifying barriers involves soul-searching. What are your personal strengths and weaknesses? Do you tend to get overly emotional or personalize professional matters? Do you have trouble separating from your identity as a junior colleague or trainee rather than embracing new horizons afforded by leadership opportunities? How do you feel about managing family versus professional commitments? The point is not to dwell on your weaknesses but to know yourself and draw on your strengths to counter them. For example, if you are a busy mother of two in a dual career household, draw on your experiences as the household leader with multiple roles and use those well-honed skills of time management, planning, and prioritizing to identify and achieve career goals.

Another important topic to soul-search is what you want out of life. What are your personal and professional aspirations? Decide what is negotiable and what is non-negotiable and use this information to guide your decisions. For example, it may not be wise to take a job that will not allow you flexibility in your schedule when you have children and one of your priorities is to be available when they have school events. Putting yourself in a position that causes emotional angst could interfere with your work productivity, as well as your personal goals and overall well-being.

Know the “rules” of your work setting (Do your homework!)—Because each work setting has its own system or set of rules for doing business, make sure you understand how the system works and what is needed and expected to advance. This includes knowing both the explicit rules, such as requirements for tenure and promotion, and the implicit rules, such as departmental politics and alliances. If you are in a medical school department, for example, understand the hierarchy of the system (e.g., whether or not you agree with your boss, you must respect the position if not the person you report to) and learn to work within it, even if you do not agree with it. Next, be prepared to ask and negotiate for the resources that you need to succeed. The worst that will happen is that you will not get them. However, to increase the likelihood of getting what you need, be sure to ask the right person. You will know who the “right” person is once you learn the hierarchy of your setting. Learn also how, when, and with whom to pick your battles. This, again, is an essential part of doing your homework, i.e., knowing what is worth standing up for and what is better left alone.

Do not personalize—In order to advance within any field, you must be prepared to face resistance and criticism. Do not take this personally! Accept constructive criticism in the spirit in which it is meant—that is, to provide you with feedback that may be useful for improving a particular area or skill set—do not respond with apologies or defensiveness. Information about what to improve is crucial for advancing, and learning how to respond appropriately to this type of feedback will enhance personal and professional characteristics necessary for competent leadership. Additionally, your goal is not to have everyone like you; in fact, if you are attaining success, some individuals will definitely not like you. They dislike that you have attained a position they themselves may have desired. Many times it may have nothing to do with you as an individual. You have to learn to let things roll off your back and move forward.

Show initiative and persistence—Verbalize your desire to advance and ask for what you need to do so. Offer to take the lead on activities that will get you closer to targeted career goals. For example, if you aspire toward a research career, send your CV to journal editors and offer to review articles in your areas of expertise. If education and training is your passion, volunteer to serve on the educational committee of your favorite professional organization. If you seek to be involved in broader service to neuropsychology, campaign for election to a desired position, and if you are not elected the first time, try again. Persistence is key. Odds are that in your efforts to win an election the first time around, you gained supporters and name recognition that will help you succeed on the next attempt. Not succeeding on your first attempt does not equal failure. Also, be willing to start small. Run for office or volunteer in regional or state organizations. Get your name out through well-articulated posts on neuropsychology listserves.

Be resourceful and practical—At the same time that you are seeking opportunities to advance, be selective and do not accept every opportunity that comes your way or you will quickly find yourself overextended and burned out. In determining whether an opportunity is right for you, ask questions about the time commitment involved and the perceived value to

you and your organization. Stay away from committee work that does not further your career goals, entails a lot of time, and is not valued by your department. Accept also that perfection does not exist; painstaking attention to reference sections will only delay your publishing. Mistakes cannot be avoided but can take you down the path of experience to wisdom. Own up to your mistakes and view them as lessons learned. Never be afraid to ask questions, especially of your mentors. Just be sure to ask the “right” person. Your search for answers will minimize mistakes and precious time taken to meet your goals.

Advocate for yourself (Toot your own horn!)—It is critical to be your own advocate. Assuming that your achievements will simply be “noticed” with no effort on your part is doomed to failure. No one knows your achievements better than you, so do not be afraid to take the credit you deserve. Notify supervisors and mentors about awards or recognition earned and take advantage of opportunities to highlight achievements when they present themselves. Because women are not socialized to highlight individual achievements, you may feel uncomfortable with this advice. However, you are the best person to inform others about your unique qualities and achievements. Advocate for yourself by applying for awards and/or seeking fellowship status in professional organizations. If you are not successful on your first attempt, then apply again. Remember, lack of success in these endeavors is not personal and does not equal failure. Persistence is key.

Support women colleagues—It is all too common, unfortunately, for women to discount the achievements of other women by neglecting to offer congratulations or by making disparaging remarks. Support your women colleagues by pointing out to others their successes, especially since you know first-hand how hard it is for women to toot their own horn, and by complimenting and encouraging their efforts to achieve and advance. Women will go farther faster when their “sisters” support them along the way.

Suggestions for mentors of women in neuropsychology

One of the most important methods for increasing the number of women in leadership positions is mentoring. Mentoring has been shown to contribute significantly to professional development in health care professionals, particularly in the areas of research, career satisfaction, and perceived support (Pololi & Knight, 2005). Mentoring women in neuropsychology can help them identify, set, and reach their career goals, as well as learn how to balance professional and personal commitments. Mentors, on the other hand, can benefit through personal enrichment, intellectual stimulation, and even rejuvenation for the profession. Mentoring also is a way to give back to neuropsychology, and by mentoring junior colleagues you will increase the likelihood that your mentees will mentor others, thus continuing the cycle (Pololi & Knight, 2005). This section highlights some of the activities of successful mentors and action items that trainees can ask their mentors to provide for them.

Identify strengths and foster them—Recognize strengths in protégés and find opportunities to showcase them. For example, if strong communication and organizational skills are displayed by a mentee whose career goal is to direct a residency program, encourage her to volunteer for education-related task forces or committee work where her skills will be recognized and utilized and her enthusiasm for education will be appreciated and rewarded. If strengths in manuscript writing are observed in a mentee who aspires toward a research career, ask her to take the lead on more manuscripts and provide her the time to follow through.

Give a gentle shove—Due to the way women are socialized and the low number of women in leadership positions, women are unlikely to pursue leadership positions or to

make waves when they are not considered for leadership positions for which they are qualified. What is needed from you is encouragement and sometimes even a gentle shove in the right direction.

Nominate deserving women—Although women are just as interested in attaining leadership positions, they are less likely to be asked to serve in leadership positions (Wright et al., 2003). Thus, ask capable women to serve as leaders and suggest the same to your colleagues. Use your status to legitimize that of women deserving of recognition. Research shows that an individual's status as a leader can be increased if endorsed by someone perceived as having higher status (Hogue, Yoder, & Ludwig, 2002). To help women overcome their status disadvantage and be perceived as competent and deserving, it also is important to highlight the specific achievements or qualifications that warrant consideration.

Introduce women to colleagues—Because there are fewer women in leadership positions and both men and women tend to seek out and maintain relationships with similar others, women may be left out of informal social gatherings of the male-dominated leadership where important information is exchanged. Mentors can help combat this disconnect by supporting socialization activities that appeal to both men and women, such as leadership retreats and quarterly dinners. Introduce women colleagues to those in leadership positions and foster these relationships by organizing cross-gender social activities. These interactions will facilitate communication and increase familiarity with those in leadership, opening doors to future interactions and opportunities. These efforts will promote an inclusive atmosphere and reduce turnover of women who may otherwise feel disenfranchised or marginalized.

Promote an unbiased, collaborative environment—Raise awareness of department chairs or other organization leaders to the necessity of mentoring and career development. Advocate for parental leave policies and temporary stops on the tenure track, which will enable women to navigate family and work roles more easily. Suggest rewarding outcomes that include behaviors often displayed by women, such as promoting teamwork, advising others, providing information, and mentoring that leads to grant or manuscript submissions (Morahan & Bickel, 2002).

Seek training in supervision and mentoring—Begin by recognizing that much of the advice that worked for you may not work for your mentee due to gender and generational differences. If you are a man, realize also that gender inequities exist and often go unrecognized (Bickel, 2004). There is a growing recognition that mentoring is not always intuitive, and this is particularly true when mentoring nontraditional professionals, such as women. Seek opportunities to gain expertise in mentoring by attending training and mentoring workshops at annual conferences or by conferring with experts within the area.

Suggestions to all who are invested in advancing neuropsychology as a field

In closing, women are a growing source of intellectual capital within neuropsychology as well as other health care specialties (Bickel, 2007b). The responsibility to help women achieve their leadership potential is a shared one, as the entire field of neuropsychology stands to benefit. Future generations will be provided an equitable professional environment where differences in women's and men's leadership styles are embraced and groomed and where options for balancing work and family responsibilities are many. A variety of resources that may be helpful in facilitating the advancement of women in neuropsychology are available in the Resource section.

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