

*American Historical Association*

*The Status of Women in the  
Historical Profession*

— 2005 —

Prepared for the AHA Committee on Women Historians  
by Elizabeth Lunbeck

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Copy Editors: Liz Townsend  
Rob Townsend

Layout: Chris Hale

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## *Acknowledgements*

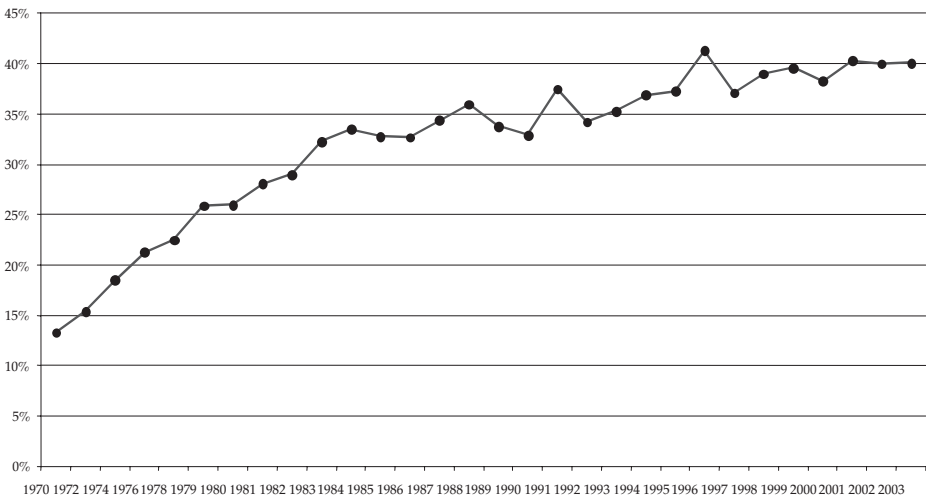
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## Introduction

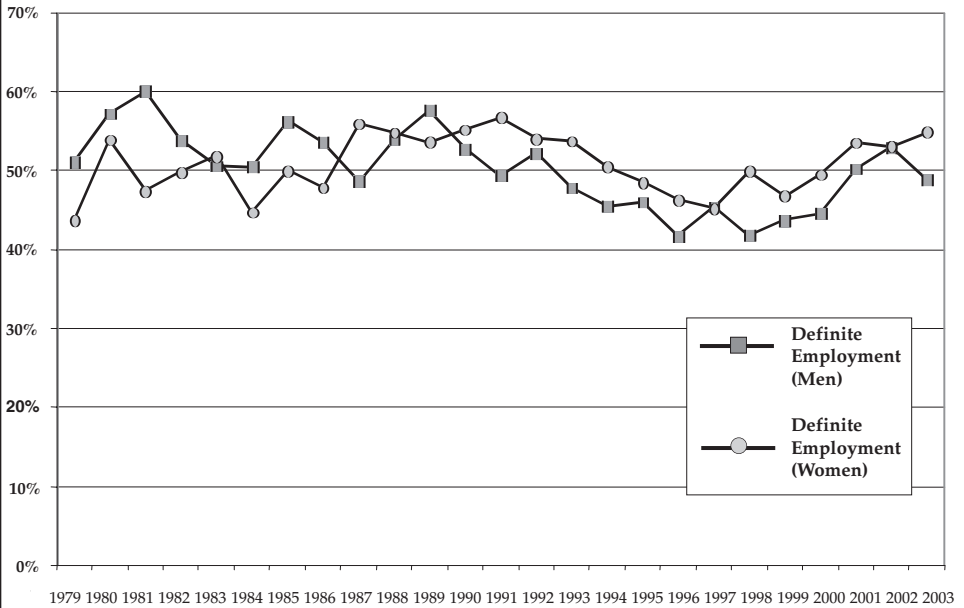
More than twenty years after women began to earn history Ph.D.'s in significant numbers, significant gender disparities of the sort that many believed would be ameliorated by women's entry into the ranks continue to plague departments and the profession as a whole. In 1979, women constituted just 15.6 percent of newly minted history Ph.D.'s and 5.9 percent of full professors of history. By 1999, women amounted to 40 percent of those awarded the Ph.D., and were even slightly advantaged in obtaining entry-level jobs (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**).<sup>1</sup> These figures document a sea change in the profession with respect to gender, and mirror what researchers have found across the disciplines—women, in large numbers, have gained access to professional and scholarly careers that were once largely the preserve of white men. Through the 1970s and 1980s, more and more women entered the career pipeline of graduate training, and optimists assumed that in time, allowing for some fifteen to twenty years for their ascent up the career ladder, the gender distribution of those in highest ranks of the profession—the full professoriate—would reflect the proportions in which their cohort had received the Ph.D.

**Figure 1: Women as a Proportion of New History Ph.D.'s Conferred, 1970–2003**



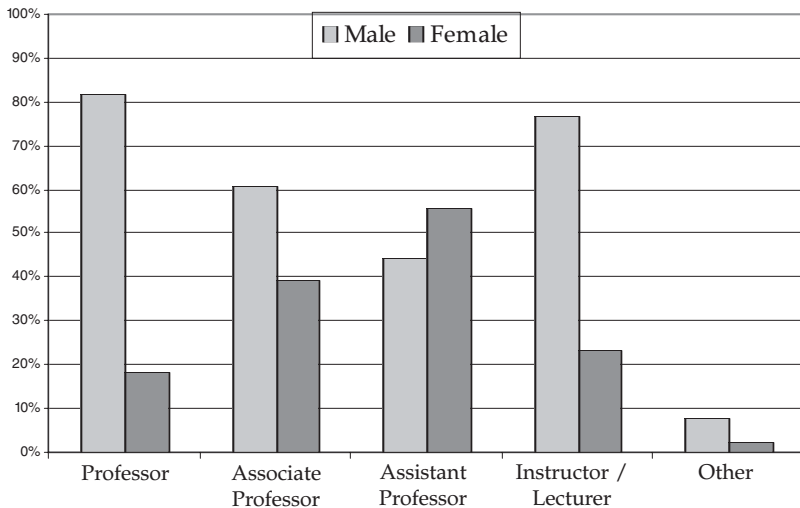


**Figure 2: Reported Employment Status at Time of Degree, by Gender, 1979 to 2003**



1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003

**Figure 3: Proportion of Historians at Rank in U.S. Colleges and Universities, by Gender, Fall 1998**



Source: National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (Washington, D.C., National Center for Education Statistics).

In history, as in many other disciplines, this assumption has proven unfounded. In 1999, women constituted just 18 percent of the full professors in history nationwide (**Figure 3**), a disappointingly small proportion that corresponds to figures for other social science and humanities disciplines. In addition, women's salaries lagged behind those of their male counterparts.<sup>2</sup> In light of the fact that in 1988, 39 percent of assistant professors of history were women, a proportion that should have resulted in a higher representation of women at the top of the profession by now,<sup>3</sup> it is clear that a full pipeline alone has not addressed the issue of gender inequities in the profession. Indeed, as Mary Ann Mason and Marc Goulden have argued in their study of Berkeley faculty, the pipeline is in fact quite leaky, with women dropping out at every step up the ladder that begins with the receipt of the Ph.D. and ends, ideally, with a full professorship.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the studies of history and other disciplines that testify to the persistence of significant gender differences in nearly every aspect of academic employment, and find that women are disproportionately underrepresented at all levels of the academic hierarchy, several recent reports—most notably the landmark 1999 MIT “Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science”—focus on qualitative as well as quantitative measures of women's experience in academe and report findings just as troubling. The MIT study found that even those women at the very top of the hierarchy felt marginalized in their departments, discouraged and unsatisfied in their professional lives, and, most strikingly, that their dissatisfaction and sense of exclusion increased as they rose through the ranks. Junior women were relatively happy, but senior women were not. Gender discrimination, the report concluded, can “take many forms and many of these are not simple to recognize.” It consists in “a pattern of powerful but unrecognized assumptions and attitudes that work systematically against women faculty even in the light of obvious good will.”<sup>5</sup>

With these and other findings in mind, the Committee on Women Historians designed and administered a survey to gather information on women historians' experience of gender in their professional lives and their assessments of policies that have encouraged or impeded their progress both in their institutions and through the ranks of the profession. The survey was intentionally non-quantitative and open-ended, inviting comments on three broad questions:

- ❖ if and how gender had affected the respondent's career as a historian;
- ❖ what factors had facilitated or hindered the respondent's career development; and
- ❖ whether mentoring or the lack thereof played an important role in career development.

The survey also gave two prompts for additional comments on any other issues the respondent felt were important. (See **Appendix A** for the precise wording of the survey.)

The committee sent the survey to all women members of the AHA (excluding those registered as graduate students), and received 362 responses. Nine percent (32) responses came from those identifying themselves as minority: 9 Asian/Pacific Islander, 9 Black, 7 Latino/a, 1 American Indian or Alaska Native, and 7 “Other.” Six respondents, or 2 percent, declined to identify their race.

The individual survey responses make for fascinating, if sometimes painful, reading. Pointed and sophisticated analyses of their own and other women’s gender-based predicaments figure prominently in them—and not only from those whose primary historical interests are in the field of gender. Many point to the double-edged sword of women’s and gender history, noting that the opening up of the field has led to increased opportunities for hiring, and thus demand for their expertise, but also noting that too often they are expected, regardless of their area of specialization and preferred personal style, to teach women’s history to undergraduates, to offer the “women’s point of view” in meetings, and to constantly perform femininity to both students and colleagues—to be, as one put it, “endlessly available, nurturing, and accommodating.” The complaint of being “run ragged” by these expectations coursed through the responses. There is more than enough resignation, bitterness, disillusionment, and discouragement to warrant a more serious and extensive consideration of gender in the profession than we were able to carry out in this survey. At the same time, there is among respondents no lack of appreciation for the sustaining qualities of collegiality and intellectual life, and for the opportunities for personal satisfaction and intellectual excitement a full-time professorial career affords. It is worth pointing out that most of the respondents to the survey have jobs (and, many of them, tenured), have been published, and enjoy teaching. Many have been recognized with prizes and major fellowships. The profession as a whole should be concerned that so many successful women feel they have suffered from gender discrimination. Female talent is being squandered in fights over large and small issues that could be ameliorated by the attentiveness of administrators, department chairs, and colleagues, and the establishment of more transparent institutional procedures.

## *Overview: Generational Divides and the Reproduction of Discrimination*

It is no secret that women who received their terminal degrees before the early to mid-1970s were true pioneers, many of whom faced outright discrimination and harassment without mentoring or support. One woman remarked that when she began teaching in the early 1960s, “many universities simply did not hire women.” Another, graduating second in her undergraduate class, was denied a graduate fellowship because, as she was told, “the department would not be able to crack dirty jokes” were she to join the Ph.D. program. This generation of respondents reported numerous instances of blatantly discriminatory remarks: the male faculty members who “openly said there would be a woman on the faculty over their dead bodies”; those who justified denying women employment at a public institution in 1976 on the grounds that it “only had one faculty restroom and that was for men only”; or the department chair who told a job candidate in 1968 that her application would not be considered because “there are too many skirts on my campus as it is.”

Respondents in this group noted that their salaries lagged behind those of their male colleagues, that time to promotion was longer for them than for men in their departments, and that they had struggled long and hard for what they’d achieved. As lone women faculty members, they report having been subjected to annoying slights—for example, being asked to do photocopying on the assumption they could only be secretaries—and full-blown sexual harassment, on the job and on the job market. Forward-looking chairs and administrators smoothed the way for some, and the slow trickle of women onto campuses in the 1970s provided support for others. The state of California was apparently something of an exception to the general pattern. One respondent reported “equal and fair” treatment during graduate school there on the way to her 1963 Ph.D., and another (after conceding that “all states are not like California”) said that she “never felt that being a woman hurt” her career. Overall, however, this generation of respondents stressed the high price paid for their achievements—as one put it, having worked twice as hard to get half as much as male colleagues—balanced, in many cases, by considerable satisfaction in a job well done.

Women who received the Ph.D. between 1975 and 1985 were the most optimistic and satisfied of survey respondents. They entered the profession as the women’s movement was gaining momentum, and as women’s history was beginning to be recognized as a legitimate scholarly and teaching field. Communities of women on campuses—in women’s studies programs, for example—and in the profession at large (most important, the Berkshire Conference of Women’s Historians), offered intellectual sustenance and camaraderie.

Even as new laws ruled some of the more blatant forms of discrimination out of bounds, discriminatory behavior persisted. One woman, now a full professor, was told by her dissertation advisor that since she was married, she should “stay home and just write books.” Another noted that as she entered graduate school at a major research university, the chair of the department told the incoming class that “most of the women were ‘affirmative action’ admits, that he thought this was a scandal, that most of us would fail, that we were taking the place of ‘breadwinners.’” Yet another was told by her department that she was ranked lower than two men for a prestigious graduate fellowship because “they would have to support a family later in life.”

Nevertheless, many women in this cohort are well aware they benefited from favorable conditions on the job market, as the demand for women faculty and historians of women exploded. One said she was hired “because students sat-in demanding more women faculty, [and] suddenly recruiting someone like me became a priority.” Another wrote that she felt as if she “moved from being a black sheep in the profession to being a pet lamb” when women’s history was embraced. But with these advances came challenges as well, as women fought “old-boy network” cronyism and an often chilly departmental climate. One woman received the silent treatment from two men in her department after her university’s provost overturned their “no” votes for her full professorship, noting that “one of them did break the silence long enough to [say] that he would not listen ‘to the likes of me comment on the accomplishments of men.’” Women in this group regularly felt that they were held to a higher standard than were men, or had to prove themselves in order to be accepted as scholars, whereas men were accepted as competent until they proved otherwise.

As a group, women who have received the Ph.D. since 1986 proved the most voluble and discouraged of all the survey recipients. The optimism and belief in progress characteristic of some of their predecessors is largely absent in this group, few of whom see improvements on the gender front. Many feel that gender knots have only become tighter. This is dismaying but not inexplicable. None of those surveyed suggested that hiring more women into tenure-track positions, and tenuring a portion of them, constitutes anything less than a welcome development. It is clear, however, that this is only a first step, and that, paradoxically, it has upped the gender ante in many departments and universities. With a larger cohort of women on faculties, more subtle and less easily addressed gender inequalities have come to the fore. Too many had assumed, as one woman put it, that gender problems would be “fixed” by hiring a few more women. Instead, it appears that the full range of ways in which gender discrimination is manifest in the world beyond the academy has only become more visible—and, seemingly, intractable—within departments.

At the same time, some of the discrimination these women report is quite overt. Issues that older generations of women and men might have thought solved have resurfaced anew, in some cases quite starkly. For example, egregious cases of sexual harassment were reported by enough women to warrant concern. Surprisingly, the proportions of respondents mentioning they had experienced harassment *increased* over time: none of those holding Ph.D.'s dating to 1970 or earlier mentioned harassment (over the course of their careers), compared to 5 percent in the 1970–79 and 1980–89 cohorts, 8 percent in the 1990–99 cohort, and 10 percent of those who received their degrees from 2000–02. One woman, who received her Ph.D. in 1996 and is now a tenured associate professor, wrote of the job search: “I have had senior male historians touch me and make it clear that sex could be part of the ‘interview’ process.” Another woman, serving as the junior person on a search committee, was subjected to sexual innuendoes from a young male candidate. He did not get the job, but his actions in her opinion reflected the sort of unexamined male privilege that is all too prevalent in the academy. Many of the women with recent Ph.D.'s reported similar instances, and told more generally of being “bullied and threatened,” and of being “shocked to see how much hostility there remains in the profession.” Some of them despaired that gender neutrality can ever be achieved in an atmosphere where the intimidation of women is woven into the fabric of everyday life in their departments—in the form, for example, of female graduate students being advised that “a graduate education is wasted on a mother.”

The survey results make clear that much progress has been made in opening the profession to women and to addressing issues of concern. But it is just as clear that much remains to be done. A number of recently minted Ph.D.'s reported that gender only became a real issue for them after they had left graduate school and joined faculties as assistant professors, where the stakes are higher and the rewards fewer.

## *Issues*

Three broad issues dominated the responses to our survey:

- ❖ **Work and family.** Finding a way to balance work, family, and scholarship loomed as the most pressing issue facing the youngest cohort of respondents, many of whom are of child bearing age. It was also an issue that caused their older counterparts much distress, and, for some, has taken a new form in the guise of elder care. Even those employed by institutions with relatively clear and enlightened maternity and childcare policies find that managing children and producing scholarship is a difficult balancing act, which often results in exhaustion and resentment. There is much agony and despair surrounding this issue. Concern about it is not limited to

women with children, or to heterosexual women, but is shared across categories. It is also of concern to many men, a fair number of whom are married to or partners of women historians.

- ❖ **Formal equality.** Numerous respondents commented on glaring salary inequities in their departments and institutions, with many linking these to the issue of women's generally slower progress through the professorial ranks.
- ❖ **Departmental climate.** Respondents poured forth an enormous amount of frustration and anger on the issue of chilly or even hostile institutional climates, testifying to annoying slights on the one hand and to shattering dismissals and exclusions on the other. The everyday practices of gender in many departments are in serious need of attention. Respondents report that dealing day in and day out with seemingly minor forms of discrimination is dispiriting, and represents a huge waste of female talent. Other issues of concern that fall under this rubric of informal gender inequality include the overwhelming character of service commitments demanded of women; expectations about female personality and style; scrutiny under a higher standard than male colleagues; and recognition of gender work over other fields of expertise.

Clear and transparent policies, enlightened leadership on the part of chairs, and the establishment and enforcement of an ethos of equity and fairness would address many of the survey respondents' concerns. Recommendations at the end of each subsection below suggest straightforward ways of working to ensure greater gender equity.

# *I: Work and Family*

## *Maternity Leave/Tenure Timeline*

An enormous literature documents the difficulties women face in attempting to balance the claims of work and family, in particular those related to childbearing and rearing. Most readers will be aware of the choices women face in attempting to launch professorial careers while bearing and raising children. A number of women remarked that the difficulties involved in doing both had prevented them from having children at all, which many regretted. Conversely, a number of women felt that their being childless had helped their careers.

Survey results indicate wide variation in formal and informal maternity and childrearing policies across colleges and universities. Most have policies that provide for leave time or a reduced workload around the time of delivery or adoption, and/or stopping the clock to tenure for one year in recognition of the intense time commitment new mothers make to their infants. (Some universities grant new fathers the same benefits.)

However, a surprisingly large number of respondents reported that their institutions lacked formal maternity policies of any sort. This forced women to take time out under “disability” or “sick” leave, to use a sabbatical “research” semester or year, to time their pregnancies carefully to coincide with the summer months, or to return to the classroom a mere two weeks after giving birth. Some respondents from institutions with no formalized maternity policies were able to negotiate maternity leave with their chairs, with mixed results. This was an advantage for a few, as they were granted more generous leaves than those subsequently instituted at their institutions. For most, however, this presented problems; as one put it, “negotiating, as an untenured professor, felt awkward.” In addition, many of those who received a maternity benefit—either leave or a delayed tenure clock—felt this was later used as a bargaining chip to force them to take on extra departmental work, in the form of heavier courseloads or extra committee assignments. At the same time, many reported that they faced resentment from their colleagues, who felt they were being unfairly advantaged and favored. Others felt that taking time off for childbearing, even under standardized policies, subtly affected their bids for tenure. Women on the job market also faced potential discrimination when they tried to inquire about maternity leave policies.

Beyond the issue of formal or informal policies on maternity leave, many respondents mentioned subtle pressures to delay childbearing (or to not have a second child) until after achieving tenure, even at institutions with family-friendly policies. The woman who wrote,



“realistically, if you stop you fall behind,” spoke for many respondents. Others reported that those who take time to bear children are often assumed to be “less committed” to the department or to the profession. Manifestations of this subtle bias included departments later expecting extra work from those who took their “halted-clock” option, women noticing that those who have children are overall less likely to receive tenure, and faculty who haven’t been primary caregivers of young children voicing “resentment of women who have ‘more time’ to work on their books” due to their tenure delay. It is worth noting that concern about this issue is not limited to married and/or heterosexual women. A number of single women, as well as single and partnered lesbians, mentioned that they considered clearly articulated maternity policies (inclusive of adoption) important in both practical and symbolic terms.

### *Spousal/Partner Hiring*

Spousal hiring is near the top of the list of issues of concern to respondents, especially those who received their Ph.D.’s after 1985. Dual-career academic marriages and partnerships are now common, and this issue is likely to be increasingly important for younger faculty, both male and female, in the years to come. While a number of survey respondents noted that they, or their spouses or partners, had benefited from spousal hiring policies, a far greater number reported they were making uncomfortable sacrifices due to the lack of such policies. Respondents observed that women more often than men had to scale back their ambitions and take part-time and non-tenure-track jobs in order to keep families together. Many acknowledged the challenge of weighing fairness as well as departmental interests and independence in making such hires. Some observed that it was far more common for institutional resources to be expended in hiring the wife of a powerful man than the reverse, the husbands of accomplished women, and worried that such policies, if not monitored, could work to enhance entrenched male privilege. It is noteworthy that, in light of how many interests must be balanced in making spousal appointments, not a single respondent bemoaned jobs lost to the hiring of a faculty spouse over someone else.



*We recommend* that the suggestion of one respondent be widely implemented as standard policy: “It would be helpful if maternity leave policies were clearly stated up front to all job candidates in the material departments send to job interviewees. One shouldn’t have to ask, or be afraid to mention” them. Policies should be clear and transparent, and non-punitive in their execution. We also recommend that the AHA’s “Best Practices on Spousal/Partner Hiring”<sup>6</sup> be consulted for guidelines useful in negotiating such hires.

## *II: Formal Equality*

### *Salary: Equal Pay for Equal Work*

It is well documented that women in academe in general and the field of history in particular are paid less than men with similar or even fewer qualifications in books, articles, and years of service. In our survey, numerous respondents noted discrepancies between their compensation and that of male colleagues, or, notably, female colleagues. One woman, a single head of household, reported she was paid better than her married female counterparts. Some reported that institutional equal-pay initiatives had resulted in higher salaries, but noted that such raises affected only future earnings and did not make up for lost contributions into pension plans. Moreover, even with such initiatives, the benefits do not necessarily last and should continue to be monitored—at least one woman mentioned that her salary had been raised more than once as a result of such initiatives.

These disparities appear to grow larger up the academic ranks. One respondent noted that she was the lowest paid full professor at her university, pointing out that men were routinely paid \$40,000 to \$50,000 more than she. Her story is not unique. Several women were unaware of the full extent to which they were undercompensated until they assumed administrative positions that provided access to confidential salary data. Raises are most often calculated as a percentage of salary, but they also may reflect successful pursuit of outside offers, and perceived worth to the department and university. Our findings show that each of these factors is highly gendered. It is important to note that relatively small discrepancies at the time of initial hiring can grow quite large over the course of a career. Echoing the senior MIT faculty whose job satisfaction decreased with their years of service, one respondent ruefully noted that, “it is not, nor was it, hard to be a young woman in the profession. Being older and successful is a recipe for disaster.”

### *Time to Promotion*

Time to promotion, both to tenure and to full professor, also has a significant impact on salary. Women who take advantage of policies enabling them to stop the tenure clock for a year following childbirth or adoption fall behind their peers before tenure, and, as has become increasingly apparent, significant numbers of women find their careers stalled in their post-tenure years as well. With tenure comes increasing demands from both within and beyond departments—committee work, professional service—that those caring for children find difficult to balance

with the need to produce the scholarship that leads to a second promotion. As a result of these competing demands, some women (and some men) find it difficult to get a second monograph underway—the gold standard for promotion to full professor in many departments. The issue of getting stuck at the associate level came up repeatedly in survey responses, and is of particular concern to women holding Ph.D.'s from the early to mid-1980s. Several respondents observed that their departments were less supportive of associate professors in pursuit of their scholarly and career goals than they were of assistant professors.

A number of women reported chairs' reluctance—and even refusal—to bring women up for promotion to full professor, and, relatedly, their tendency to hold women to a higher standard of productivity than their male counterparts. Even women who had been promoted to full professor, recognized for their teaching and service within their universities, and received national recognition for their scholarship feel they have been hindered by gendered assumptions in their departments that they were not as committed to the job as their male colleagues.

Vigilant department chairs can help women progress through the post-tenure ranks. Many women noted that the laudable goal of staffing committees with both men and women insures that their service commitments will outweigh those of men, given their smaller numbers on campuses. Minority women are the hardest hit in this respect, as they are called upon to serve in proportions far outweighing their rather meager representation on faculties. Chairs can see to it that the burden of service is distributed equitably, and protect associate-level women against voracious institutional needs. They can offer such women positions on important committees, where their service will increase women's visibility without further impeding their career progress.

### *Minority Women in the Profession*

The low representation of minorities in the history profession has been a topic of concern for some time and in circles larger than ours, and clearly stems from factors more complex than job placement policies and job satisfaction alone.<sup>7</sup> As noted above, 32 survey responses—9 percent of the total—came from women who identified themselves as ethnic minorities, and over a third of those remarked on their experiences as minorities as well as their experiences as women. The consensus among those mentioning their minority status was that many problems facing women in academia—discrimination, chilly climate, lack of mentorship, heavy service loads—are compounded for minorities, and that less progress has been made on these fronts for minority women than for white women. One African American woman, upon earning her Ph.D. in 1995, wrote that she “entered an all-white, male-over-50 department that made it no secret that they greatly

resented my presence in the department. This treatment has ranged from the lack of support in salary negotiations" to being the target of blatantly racist comments. Other minority respondents report being subjected to all manner of slights. One noted she was told "by a white faculty member to 'show identification' when I tried to enter my own classroom." Another complained it took those in her department "about a year to figure out that I actually teach in the department and do not clean" it.

These and other similar comments testify to the intense pressure under which many minority women faculty labor. Charged with mentoring minority undergraduates, and pressed into overwhelming service commitments, a number of respondents report feeling lonely and isolated as well as overburdened by teaching and service with little time for scholarship. Women of color "are expected to serve on every 'diversity' committee" and "have more student problems to deal with," noted one. Another, with an exemplary record of teaching and service, was repeatedly passed over for recognitions that flowed easily to male colleagues. A chair "who was willing to impose his will" obtained a significant salary increase for one underpaid respondent, pointing to the importance of chairs in establishing race and gender equity as common practice in departments.

### *Underemployment*

In almost all cases women are still primarily responsible for the day-to-day work of child rearing, and are therefore more likely than men to have followed alternate paths within the profession, either by entering the tenure-track job market relatively late in life or by working as part-time or adjunct faculty. According to Robert Townsend's "Part-Time Faculty Surveys Highlight Disturbing Trends," in 1998–99, when women represented 31 percent of all history faculty, 41 percent of them were employed part time, while only 30 percent of male academic historians worked part time.<sup>8</sup> Cut differently, women made up 39 percent of part-time academic appointments, as compared to just 28 percent of full-time appointments. Whether these numbers are a result of women's choices or of barriers to women within the profession (or both), it is evident that the treatment of adjuncts is in many cases a question of the treatment of women. Our survey responses corroborate this position. One noted that, "while not all departments are guilty, many do treat their non-permanent, non-tenure employees as second class citizens—an underclass of underemployed professors." Adjuncts mentioned that they received no mentoring, no research funds or support, little recognition, and poor salaries. The AHA has published recent guidelines on the question of adjuncts, and this report should serve as a reminder that these are important initiatives to pursue, both in their own right and for the sake of women.<sup>9</sup>

*We recommend* that chairs carefully monitor equity in all its dimensions within their departments, with sustained attention to:

- ❖ Patterns of compensation, with special attention to gender biases, both overt and embedded in other factors, such as time to promotion.
- ❖ Promotion trends and patterns, in order to insure that women are not systematically being kept at rank for longer than warranted periods. The post-tenure careers of faculty, female and male, demand special attention to ensure that both the rewards and perks on the one hand and the increased workload of the post-tenure faculty member on the other are distributed as equitably as possible.
- ❖ Discrimination, both overt and subtle, on the basis of race and employment status, as well as on the basis of sexual preference. This was a concern for respondents even at institutions with formal anti-discrimination policies.

### *III: Departmental Climate*

#### *Unequal Distribution of Service Commitments*

The disparities of gender are starkly evident in the area of departmental and university service. A strong refrain in survey responses, especially from women with the most recent Ph.D.'s, relates to the degree of service-related work women perform. Respondents noted that this work is often in positions offering less prestige and power than that offered to male colleagues. Specifically, women are not routinely serving as department chairs, nor are they in many cases considered chair material. Despite this, our respondents were nearly unanimous in asserting that more service was expected of them than of their male counterparts. This is doubly so in the case of minority women, who are appointed to countless committees, asked by their institutions to give public lectures, and expected to mentor minority students, and who may then be told, at tenure time, that their research profiles are wanting.

Respondents report that the commendable focus on promoting women's concerns has led to the unfortunate result that they are overburdened by committee requests. When they are appointed to committees, their suggestions are less likely to be heard or implemented, and they are frequently asked to perform less desirable or more "secretarial" tasks (copying, minute-taking, data-gathering); our respondents observed that, in addition to shouldering an unequal committee load, they also provide more mentoring for undergraduates and graduate students than their male colleagues. These time-consuming tasks often throw the research-teaching-service triad off balance, in some cases resulting in weaker cases for tenure.

Departmental work, in the words of one survey respondent, has "taken on the coloration of 'domestic labor,'" with women socialized to pitch in when others either feign incompetence or strategically avoid service work, cognizant of the meager rewards it brings. One recently hired assistant professor wrote she was "shocked" to see the level of service women faculty are expected to perform, and many others noted the same thing. Respondents variously felt that men "have mastered the skill of learned incompetence," and that they avoid service when they can, "knowing how deleterious committee work can be to research agendas and career ambitions."

Further, women noted that the intradepartmental rewards of childrearing are unequally distributed. Men regularly garner prestige for displaying their involvement in childcare, while women are punished for the same. For example, as one respondent noted, women are not permitted "to excuse themselves from service obligations in the late afternoon or evening because of family needs. But a male colleague who spends time

with his children is considered exceptionally praiseworthy and is allowed to renege on service obligations on those grounds." More than a few noted that men who bring young children to the office in childcare emergencies are fêted, while women who do the same are censured for being unorganized and uncommitted to the job. These sentiments are but echoes of the stark findings of the Berkeley report: at tenure time, across the disciplines, men are rewarded for having babies, while women are penalized.

### *Gendered Expectations*

A majority of respondents mentioned the difficulty of battling gendered expectations about their place within their departments, in their colleges and universities, and in the profession at large. This can take the manifestly trivial form of different modes of address—more than a few reported that both colleagues and students referred to them as "Mrs. So-and-So" while addressing men as Dr. or Professor. The issues around gendered expectations are anything but trivial, however. The practice of addressing women by their marital instead of professional status is symptomatic of larger problems of gender in the workplace.

Let us start with appearance, or lack thereof. Several younger respondents reported that faculty members in their departments had not bothered to learn their names long after they had been hired, and could not distinguish them from other young women hires. Others reported that they were stereotyped as "too young" based on their appearance. One respondent overheard a search committee denigrate her too-youthful appearance and presumed lack of experience. She held that being judged on the basis of her appearance was "grossly unfair," and suspected that, if she had been "a 6-foot-tall man with a beard this would be less of a concern." Another wrote, "I have found that senior male faculty are unabashed about evaluating me and other female faculty members on our appearance, youth, and maternal responsibilities or lack thereof.... Young, cute, and childless is preferable." Yet another cited recent "complaints from an older faculty member that the young female hires were not wearing skirts."

The close connection between these gendered assumptions about women's age, appearance, and place in the profession also extend to women entering the profession later in life. One respondent remarked that in her experience, "there are a number of us who are pursuing Ph.D.'s in history as a second career. We are in our 40s and 50s. We are all women." Women mentioning this phenomenon often described the choice to "re-invent life in middle-age" as very rewarding, but lamented that many "are returning to employment only to find themselves stigmatized as 'over the hill.'"<sup>10</sup>

Women also complained that while men could sport casual clothing and still garner the respect of students and colleagues, they as women had to be careful to always appear professional and well-dressed. Yet the issue of gendered expectations transcends that of dress and appearance. Women are expected, by both colleagues and students alike, constantly to perform femininity. They are expected to be restrained and endlessly supportive in dealings with colleagues. Respondents said this expectation arose in concrete ways, such as expecting them to perform secretarial duties for the department—"mail this, book this lunch reservation, etc." It also appeared in expectations that female faculty should be "softer," more sympathetic, and more available to students than their male counterparts.

Women at all stages of their careers commented that the same outspoken, aggressive, and confrontational behaviors that are celebrated in men as indicative of competence or even brilliance are condemned in women as pushy and unfeminine. Confidence is too often coded male, and linked, in one woman's words, "to personal styles which are gendered male." This has the effect that senior men can more readily see younger male colleagues "as carriers of new theories." Assertive women report having been told to "filter" or tone down their personalities, to "soften" their presentations. Yet they also report being ignored in meetings, of having their voices silenced, and of having what they say not be taken seriously. Even otherwise enlightened colleagues engage in such behaviors; as one respondent wrote, "they seem completely unaware of the fact that they do this, even as they adopt the rhetoric of gender and sexual equality. I think it's entirely unconscious." One respondent, identifying herself as lesbian, noted that she is constantly put in the "confusing and energy-draining bind" of choosing between expressing her true feelings about issues and being labeled "a strident feminist or unfriendly woman," or censoring herself at the cost of imperiling her ability to convince colleagues she is an intellectual presence to be reckoned with.

All these conflicting messages add up to a classic double bind in the classroom. Students can expect women to be less rigorous and more nurturing, yet in being so a woman risks being labeled unprofessional. Student perceptions have the potential to translate into lower teaching evaluations, and women may face job consequences as a result. Even if supported by colleagues, women may find their authority challenged by students.

Issues of personality style extend to evaluations of research, where women are expected to be more tentative than men. Some felt they were clearly held to higher standards than their male colleagues. One woman, after facing a series of gender-related challenges in her part-time position, was told by one of her evaluators that they "just wanted to see



if she could jump through hoops.” Meanwhile, a male hire from her same graduate program had a much easier entry into the department. Similarly, a Latina wrote, “my achievements have been underplayed and my faults exaggerated greatly in comparison to my male colleagues.” Even more common than such blatant double standards, however, are subtle indications that men are assumed to be competent unless proven otherwise, while women have to prove their competence before they are fully accepted. Finally, it is harder for women to signal the commitment to the institution that is so important a criterion for tenure. One woman, single and childless, is “frequently asked if [her] ‘lack of commitment’ to family is a reflection of [her] overall reluctance to make any commitment (i.e., to an institution).” On the other hand, taking maternity leave in many cases is read as a sign of lesser commitment; one woman described an “institutional climate which, in subtle ways, thinks that women who have children aren’t quite ‘serious’ enough.” Again, we come face-to-face with the double bind of gender.

*We recommend* that chairs carefully monitor the distribution of service commitments; that they recognize that many female—as well as male—faculty are shouldering the double burden of work and family. Chairs should make allowances for this, where possible, in scheduling teaching, meetings, and other activities. They should establish departmental cultures in which women and men are held to similar standards of conduct, performance, and style. We recognize that the issues discussed above are recalcitrant and not easily remedied, yet bringing them to faculties’ attention can constitute a first step toward resolving them.

## *Conclusion: What Is to Be Done?*

### *The Department Chair*

In many institutions, chairs have a good deal of power when it comes to establishing and maintaining departmental cultures, and responses to our survey make it quite clear that department chairs are critical in terms of women's job satisfaction. As one respondent noted, college or university good intentions notwithstanding, "it is at the department level that the nonsense takes place." In too many instances, a lack of accountability and a dearth of clearly articulated policies breed discrimination and distrust. Much is at stake—chairs preside over the distribution of workloads, teaching times, and committee assignments, and they control to varying extents highly prized goods and information, such as salaries, funds for research and travel, internal prizes and awards, and the constitution of tenure and promotion committees.

Chairs can attempt to protect women from disrespectful and punitive undergraduates by discounting negative teaching evaluations; they can see to it that vigorous efforts are made to retain women who have outside offers instead of allowing them to leave, "with the men blaming it on spousal concerns." The cherished informality of some departments can accommodate a good deal of unthinking discrimination and exclusion—one woman noted that in her department, policy was made by a "group of men who all eat lunch together." The common practice of the chair consulting "an inner circle of senior men" before bringing issues to the department excludes those who are not already deemed powerful. Even in nominally equitable departments, notes another woman, a male oligarchy can occasionally close ranks. Administrative flexibility and discretion is in many respects useful and necessary, but it can also protect men's historical hold on power. Clearly stated policies, and transparency of administration in the execution of them, can go far toward addressing the bias—and the perceptions thereof—that is so corrosive within departments.

Women with a taste for administration should be encouraged to assume positions of power and influence. One former chair wrote: "I would strongly encourage any woman with the talent to serve as department chair; it developed leadership skills I didn't know I had, ones many women don't know they have." The issue, wrote another, is how to move women into the true senior ranks of the profession, "rather than to nominally senior status."

## *Mentoring Faculty*

Our survey raised the question of mentoring and, not surprisingly, many respondents commented on it and its importance. Many women who lamented the lack of mentoring in their own professional careers wrote that they were committed to providing advice and, when needed, guidance for younger women scholars, displaying a remarkable generosity. A number mentioned that even in contexts characterized by neglect or discrimination, individual men had been critical in supporting them and their ambitions. “Tenure is a game for which one is supposed to ‘intuit’ the rules,” one observed; many others argued along similar lines that simple information was often in short supply, information that men shared informally among themselves and from which they were themselves excluded. The support of key male colleagues can be even more critical; one respondent noted that “the only way a woman can get tenure at my school is if she is strongly supported by a man who will ‘go to bat’ for her at the time of tenure.” Individual women were often named as similarly critical in providing information, support, and advice, but many respondents acknowledged how time consuming mentoring can be, and were loath to ask too much of already overburdened senior women.

Women married or partnered to male academics were among the most satisfied of all respondents to our survey. Many wrote that they had benefited enormously not only from the support their partners provided, but also from the informal access to information their alliances afforded them. Several also noted that their partners, having witnessed first hand the gender discrimination and difficulties they had endured, had taken the lessons to heart and were in consequence better colleagues and, some of them, department chairs. The flow of information can go both ways, and be of benefit to all, underscoring the importance of transparency and access to information in achieving gender equity.

We have suggested a number of concrete steps and procedures that might be discussed and implemented in the interest of addressing gender inequities in departments and in the profession. Some are straightforward, others—especially those clustered around issues of gendered expectations and departmental climate—are more tricky, and require enlightened leadership and a measure of shared good will for their success. As any number of respondents point out, however, the issues broached here are not going to go away, and addressing them will redound to the benefit of both women and men, making the university and the profession a better work environment for all.

# *Appendix A:*

## *Gender Equity in the Historical Profession: Survey of Women Faculty*

### *Questions*

#### **I. Demographic Information**

*Note: Except for “Year of receipt of terminal degree,” respondents selected from a list of choices for these questions. The survey responses could be sorted by any Demographic Information category.*

Year of receipt of terminal degree:

Type of principle employment:

Employment category:

Academic rank (if any):

Race/Ethnic origin:

#### **II. Survey Questions**

*These questions were free response.*

1. Has gender been a significant factor in the course of your career as a historian?

If “Yes,” in what ways, if any, has gender been a factor in the course of your career as a historian?

2. What factors have facilitated or hindered your career development and advancement in the profession? Among other factors, you may want to consider the impact/role of chairs and departmental policies; institutional policies and practices such as maternity leave, teaching loads, access to resources, research funding, institutional climate, etc.
3. Has mentoring others or being mentored played an important role in your career development and advancement in the profession? Has the absence of mentoring (formal and informal) played an important role in your career development and advancement in the profession? Mentoring may include advice about standards for promotion; appropriate balancing of research, teaching and service; information about and access to resources at your institution and beyond; etc. Please elaborate.
4. What else would you like us to know about your experiences in the profession?
5. Are there other important issues you would like the CWH to consider?



## Notes

1. Robert B. Townsend, "The Status of Women and Minorities in the History Profession," *Perspectives* (April 2002). See also, Robert B. Townsend, "Number of History Ph.D.'s Inches Upward," *Perspectives* (January 2004).

2. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics began gathering profession-wide information about postsecondary faculty with a comprehensive survey in 1988, and followed with similar surveys in 1993 and 1999. The most recent set of data and a description of trends are reported in the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Gender and Racial/Ethnic Differences in Salary and Other Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty: Fall 1998* (NCES 2002-170), by Ellen M. Bradburn and Anna C. Sikora, project officer Linda J. Zimble, available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/2002170/gender.asp>. Summarizing their findings for the postsecondary professorate as a whole, the report's authors noted that "overall, men's salaries were about 28 percent higher than women's salaries: full-time male faculty averaged about \$61,700 in base salary from the institution in 1998, compared with \$48,400 for full-time female faculty." And this discrepancy was not purely a matter of different job conditions between men and women: "After controlling for race, type of institution, teaching field, level of instruction, tenure status, rank, highest degree, years since highest degree, age, time spent teaching, number of classes taught, time spent engaged in research, and number of total publications or other permanent creative works in the previous 2 years, full-time female faculty members earned an average of \$53,600 compared with \$58,700 for men."

The NCES data leads to two important conclusions about women in academia. First, women professors of equal quality, position, and responsibilities still experience a salary discrepancy compared to men, and this discrepancy remained constant during the 1990s. Second, women across the post secondary teaching profession are more likely to be found in low-ranking and low-paying positions than in positions of higher rank or pay. Thus women are disproportionately represented at the adjunct and assistant professor level, as well as in the lower-paying institutions (private liberal arts colleges pay the least, followed by public 2-year institutions, and then public and private not-for-profit doctoral institutions).

3. As striking is the fact that in the academic year 1979-80, 25.3 percent of assistant professors of history were women; twenty years, absent attrition, one might expect to see women constituting 25 percent of full professors: Townsend, "Status of Women."

4. Mary Ann Mason and Marc Goulden, "Marriage and Baby Blues: Redefining Gender Equity in the Academy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 596 (2004): 86–103.
5. "A Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT," *MIT Faculty Newsletter* XI:4 (March 1999) available online at <http://web.mit.edu/fnl/women/women.html>.
6. Available online at <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/eib/spouse.cfm>.
7. The Committee on Minority Historians is currently collecting responses to a "best practices" statement on the matter, see "CMH Calls for Feedback on MLA Committee's Statement," *Perspectives* (March 2003).
8. Article available on the AHA web site; an abbreviated version appeared in the October 2000 *Perspectives*. Four-year colleges and universities had the best response rate for this survey, so the percentages offered here reflect the realities primarily at these institutions.
9. "Guidelines for the Employment of Part-Time and Temporary Faculty in History," *Perspectives* (November 1998): 12, available online at <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1998/9811/9811AHA.CFM>.
10. The AHA's "Advisory Opinion on Age Discrimination" notes that despite having "received the same training as their younger colleagues and . . . benefited from more extensive life experience . . . search committees sometimes tend to be biased against those whose lives do not fit traditional patterns." The AHA strongly denounces any such discrimination as illegal and unprofessional.









American Historical Association

400 A Street, SE

Washington, DC 20003

<http://www.historians.org>