

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Women leading in the Environmental and Exercise Physiology Section of the American Physiological Society: better late than never

 **Nina S. Stachenfeld**

John B. Pierce Laboratory; Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, Yale School of Medicine, New Haven, Connecticut

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TO THE EDITOR: When women reach critical mass in organizational leadership positions, things change. Women are more likely to notice and challenge sexism than male leaders (1). Indeed, research indicates that when an organization consists of greater than 30–35% women in leadership roles, they are able to change organizational culture (4). As a *Harvard Business Review* article noted, “Male-dominated management teams have been found to tolerate, sanction, or even expect sexualized treatment of workers,” and organizations with a high number of women in leadership positions tend to be organizations in which sexual harassment is less likely to occur (2). Further, a 2018 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) “Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine” documents systemic harassment of women in Academia, with particular problems in medicine (4). Conversely, productivity in the workplace increases with gender diversity. Companies with more women on their boards outperform those with few or no women. A 2016 McKinsey & Company report found that gender-diverse organizations in Canada, Latin America, the United Kingdom, and the United States outperform those with less gender diversity, and companies with ethnic and racial diversity are even more successful (3).

It is therefore particularly exciting to see this year’s line of women leaders in the Environmental and Exercise Physiology (EEP) Section of the American Physiological Society (APS). Dr. Wendy Kohrt is distinguished to be the first woman to receive APS’s highest award, The Honor Award. In addition, the Edward F. Adolph Distinguished Lectureship was awarded to a woman for the third time, to Dr. Sue Bodine, who also serves as the first woman Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Applied Physiology*. The EEP section will be led for the next three years by Dr. Lacy Alexander, the first woman to serve as our Chair. Also exciting was that eight of the sixteen Distinguished Lectureships were given by women at the 2019 Experimental Biology meeting.

While these are exciting achievements for our section, and for APS as a whole, there are still shockingly few women and underrepresented minorities in leadership positions at APS and in most research institutions in the United

States, and very few women and minorities receive our highest honors. The accomplishments of men are recognized and honored in the halls of our buildings, in our parks, buildings, and other public spaces. If we are serious about promoting underrepresented groups we should start by honoring women and minorities equally by recognizing them as we name visible symbols such as lectureships, awards, portraiture, monuments, and public spaces. Men can invite women and minorities to join panels to avoid exclusively male Symposia and Featured Topics, and challenge organizers to increase diversity on panels. Recognizing accomplishment and contribution equally is a step to addressing the gender vulnerability being unmasked today. It is exciting to see outstanding women leading our *Journal*, receiving The Honor Award, and chairing the EEP Section. However, it is astounding that they are the first women ever to receive these honors and places of respect—in 2019. Women and minority leaders remain outliers, and our institutions still hesitate to honor us. The real excitement will be when it is no longer worthy of comment when women are leading us and are taking the stage.

DISCLOSURES

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

N.S.S. drafted and approved final version of manuscript.

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Address for reprint requests and other correspondence: N. S. Stachenfeld, John B. Pierce Laboratory, 290 Congress Ave., New Haven, CT 06510 (e-mail: nina.stachenfeld@yale.edu).