



# upRising

INNOVATIVE IDEAS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

NEWS FROM THE MICHELLE R. CLAYMAN INSTITUTE  
for GENDER RESEARCH AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

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Lori Nishiura Mackenzie

## Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second issue of *upRising: Innovative Ideas for Gender Equality*.

Our first issue of *upRising* was met with positive reviews. Among the most meaningful comments were friends and family realizing what it is we do at the Clayman Institute: “So, *that’s* what gender research is,” they said.

Gender research, and perhaps all research from the academy, can seem out of touch with what happens in our everyday lives. Yet what I have learned from my years at the Institute, is that within these studies lie answers to many of the issues, questions, and confounding occurrences that act as hurdles in our day-to-day lives. What we continue to discover in research are solutions and fresh ideas for the new millennium.

One of the most important goals of our program at the Clayman Institute is to translate research. By making studies accessible and highlighting gender analysis, more people benefit from the thought-provoking insights produced at this institution. Within these pages we attempt to present ideas that can lead to a more equal society.

*upRising* offers the very best of those ideas. Reader feedback helped us identify the most intriguing articles of the year—those stories with the most comments, repostings or views online. We then identified common themes and conversations, which we’ve published in this magazine. We believe that these articles are the ones that matter most in our readers’ lives.

In this issue, we address the following questions:

1. Can workplaces be redesigned for the new frontiers of work?
2. Are women hardwired for math and science?
3. Where are the feminist activists?

The first question features work from scholars participating in the Institute’s national working group, Redesigning/Redefining Work. More on this project can be found on page two in the Q&A with Clayman Institute Director Shelley Correll. For the second question we turn to a conversation on women and math from the diverse perspectives of education, neuroscience, and psychology. The third question flows from our work to celebrate *Ms.* magazine’s 40th anniversary, in a campus-wide, winter quarter symposium, “*Ms.* at 40 and the Future of Feminism.” The keynote address by *Ms.* founder, Gloria Steinem, inspired us to explore and debunk myths about the missing feminist activists.

In many ways, the Clayman Institute is also addressing these three questions through our own approach to work. To truly practice what we preach, we have organized our office around completely flexible, almost entirely part-time staff who partner with student and volunteer contributors. As one example, more than 30 Stanford students and alumnae work on the editorial content of our Gender News service. One need look no farther than our offices in Serra House to find feminist activists at all levels.

To all of you, and all feminist pioneers, we thank you for making our work possible. Enjoy!

*Lori*

Lori Nishiura Mackenzie  
Executive editor, *upRising*  
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# MOVING BEYOND THE STALLED GENDER REVOLUTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHELLEY CORRELL, THE BARBARA D. FINBERG DIRECTOR  
OF THE MICHELLE R. CLAYMAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER RESEARCH

*In order to move beyond the stalled gender revolution, the Clayman Institute identified Redesigning/Redefining Work as one of the most important focus areas of the 21st century. Common sense says that workplaces can and should evolve. Yet, the schedule and structure of work has changed surprisingly little since the 1970s, when large numbers of women entered the paid workforce and men increasingly assumed more responsibilities at home. The Clayman Institute is boldly leading a generative conversation among academic and industry leaders to facilitate positive changes in workplaces. The goal of this two-year project is to identify new workable solutions, programs, and business cases for redesigning work. By doing so, the Redesigning/Redefining Work (RRW) initiative will help organizations move into new paradigms of work, benefitting workers and the bottom line.*



Shelley Correll

**Q:** Why does work need to be redesigned and why is research needed?

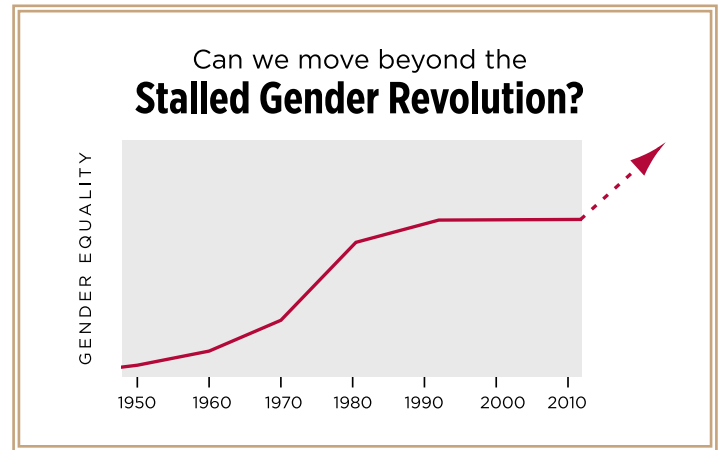
**A:** Research is urgently needed to support efforts to redesign or restructure workplaces so that they are more effectively aligned with the lives of today's workforce and better able to harness its talent. The large-scale entry of women into paid work and the increase in the number of people, both men and women, who are in dual-earner households, have fueled the need to redesign workplaces. The schedule of

work no longer maps on the schedule of worker's lives. Careers have also changed, with men and women working for more employers over the course of their working lives and working later into life. Our goal is to identify ways to redesign work to better fit the lives of today's workforce.

The changing nature of work itself, brought about by the movement from an industrial to an information-based economy, has further inspired the need to rethink our definition of what makes a good and productive worker. This project will explore how work can be redefined to represent work of the 21st century.

**Q:** How are you leading the research?

**A:** Together with Joan Williams, Director of Center for Work/Life Law at the University of California, Hastings College of Law, I convened a working group to tackle this important area of research. Twenty-five academic and industry leaders from across the country have been working on this project. Through these extended discussions, we are 1) vetting current research to uncover best practices that are currently in place, 2) mapping out areas where further research is needed, and 3)



developing and disseminating strategies for helping industry effectively implement new workplace structures and practices.

**Q:** When will we see this new work?

**A:** The project will culminate in a bicoastal summit in April 2013. However, there is no need to wait until then to learn about some of this work. Research by some of the members of the RRW working group appears in this issue of *upRising*.

**Q:** What makes the RRW Summit and research different or new?

**A:** Prior conferences and research projects have made substantial progress in explaining the need for more flexible workplace arrangements and illustrating how these needs vary across type of job and sector (business, government, the military). The Redesigning/Redefining Work project builds off of this progress and takes several crucial next steps.

First, RRW seeks to broaden the discussion beyond flexibility to include other ways of redesigning work and other ways of evaluating workplace performance.

Second, RRW will set a research agenda for evaluating what works. High quality, peer-reviewed research is needed to evaluate whether restructured workplaces actually make a difference in workers' lives.

RRW will vet current research and set an agenda for generating the next wave of research designed to answer these important questions. By including a mixture of academic researchers and industry representatives from firms who have been leaders in this area, the goal is to develop scientifically-sound research that is grounded in real-world work experiences.



# Q. CAN WORKPLACES BE REDESIGNED FOR THE NEW FRONTIERS OF WORK?

The very nature of work is changing. Technology enables global teams, instant communication, and new platforms for engaging employees, customers, partners, and even competitors in virtual, connected workplaces. The recession has shaken out some job sectors while creating a shortage of critical talent in others. There is a rise in non-traditional families and expectations of women and men are converging. Hierarchies have flattened. And the workforce is multicultural. This year, the Clayman Institute initiated a two-year project not only to redesign how work is done and organized, but also redefine what work is in this age of accelerating change. Three projects connected to this initiative address why change is so difficult and how companies are innovating to explore these new frontiers.



Leslie Perlow

## PREDICTABLE TIME OFF HELPS WORKERS KEEP PACE WITH 21ST CENTURY WORK

**Leslie Perlow**, Harvard Business School professor, asked consultants at Boston Consulting Group to do one thing: take one day off per week. Contrary to the myth that consultants must be constantly available to be stars in their company, she found that this simple exercise not only broke the choking demands of the “cycle of responsiveness,” but also made the consulting teams more productive. This successful redesign hinged on one important element: team communication.



Erin Kelly

## NEW WORK STRUCTURES MAXIMIZE WORKER EFFECTIVENESS AND REDUCE TURNOVER

**Erin Kelly**, associate professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota, explains how an organizational policy called ROWE (Results Only Work Environments) not only significantly reduces employee turnover, but also dramatically improves the sense of work-life balance among employees. Studying an unprecedented effort at Best Buy headquarters, Kelly found that ROWE gave workers control over their schedules and cut turnover nearly in half. Workers reported being happier and less stressed in the process.



Mary Blair-Loy



Joan Williams

## NEXT UP: MOVING BEYOND IDEAL WORKER MYTHS

**Mary Blair-Loy**, associate professor of sociology at UC San Diego, and **Joan Williams**, distinguished professor at the UC Hastings College of Law, argue that the visions of workers from decades past continue to color our understanding of work today. They point to two myths, the ideology of work devotion and stigmas around flexibility. These myths prevent us from fully embracing the new frontiers of work. Blair-Loy and Williams argue that companies best able to keep pace with the future of work will be those willing to experiment with entirely new structures and ways of thinking about work.

# A:

# A: REDEFINING WORK: WHY UNPLUGGING CAN LEAD TO HAPPIER, MORE PRODUCTIVE WORKERS

by Alison Wynn

Can teams work together to make it possible for their members to take one day off per week and still be a star team? This was the question Harvard Business School Professor Leslie Perlow asked the consultants at Boston Consulting Group (BCG). Perlow examined the validity of a common myth among the firm's employees: Constant availability is essential to the success of team projects, and ultimately, the company. Her six-year research project at BCG showed otherwise. In a recent talk at the Clayman Institute for Gender Research, Perlow demonstrated how this simple experiment can change company culture.

## THE CYCLE OF RESPONSIVENESS

Expectations of constant availability fuel what Perlow calls a "cycle of responsiveness." Due to external pressures of accessibility (usually from clients), consultants develop a culture of responsiveness, and they adapt their lives to accommodate this culture. They keep their phones on all night, check their emails first thing in the morning, and reply to emails on weekends. These accommodations then reinforce the expectations of constant availability. The cycle becomes an unbroken chain of behaviors that reaffirm the basic ideology shaping the workplace culture — to be a good consultant, you must always be "on."

Perlow did not start this project with an emphasis on gender, but her research conveys the gendered implications of the company's policies. Expectations of constant availability tend to disadvantage women, who are more likely than their men colleagues to have family responsibilities that make these work behaviors difficult. However, Perlow

emphasizes that changes to the workplace culture of responsiveness would benefit both women and men.

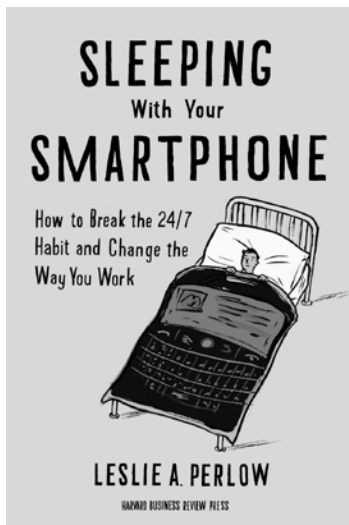
## CAN CHANGES BENEFIT WORKERS' LIVES AND COMPANY OUTCOMES?

While observing the consulting firm, Perlow found that the perceived unpredictability of where and when work was conducted caused dissatisfaction and high turnover among employees. Consequently, Perlow asked if the micro-dynamics of work could be changed to benefit both workers' lives and company outcomes. To answer this question, she conducted a series of experiments with teams of BCG employees,

The cycle [of responsiveness] becomes an unbroken chain of behaviors that reaffirm the basic ideology shaping the workplace culture—to be a good consultant, you must always be "on."

both men and women. In one experiment, each consultant on the team was required to take off one weekday each week. During this day off, the consultant could not use his or her phone, email, or any other piece of technology to connect to work. The team was also required to meet weekly to discuss its progress—meetings that required team members to engage in structured dialog about the timing and sequence of work tasks.

At first, the consultants worried this time off would hinder their productivity and advancement. However, in time they noticed unexpected benefits; in addition to increasing their productivity and satisfaction, consultants found that the planned absences increased communication among team members. The flexible work arrangements legitimated open conversations about work-life balance that enabled the team to determine the best way to get the work done. Teams engaged in conversations about the timeline for deliverables, the priorities of each team member, and collective goals. Rather than pitting personal lives



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against organizational goals, flexibility became a catalyst for positive change. If a company alienates personal needs, it risks high turnover and losses in satisfaction and productivity. Reconciling the needs of the workers and the larger organization improves outcomes for both individuals and companies.

#### REDEFINING WORK

As a result of this experiment, the BCG redefined for itself what it means to be a good worker. They identified a way to simultaneously improve both “work” and “life.” Clients reported increased satisfaction with the experimental teams, and consultants on these teams reported increased likelihood of staying with the company. Moving forward, Boston Consulting Group decided to create a global initiative where team members each take off one night per week where they don’t use work cell phones or check work emails. To date, more than 1,000 teams from 32 offices in 14 countries have participated.

Companies often fear that increased flexibility will cause a drop in productivity, but Perlow found just the opposite. Some open questions remain. For example, can these findings be generalized to other industries besides consulting? Future research can evaluate other ways of challenging constant availability norms in other contexts, such as part-time work or alternative travel schedules. Even so, Perlow’s study provides an encouraging and inspirational image of a new workplace—a workplace that recognizes employees’ personal lives and encourages open dialogue to structure work in conjunction with (rather than in opposition to) employees’ personal commitments.

**Dr. Leslie Perlow** is the Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership in the Organizational Behavior area at the Harvard Business School and a member of the Clayman Institute working group on Redesigning / Redefining Work.

# A: NEW WORK STRUCTURES MAXIMIZE WORKER EFFECTIVENESS AND REDUCE TURNOVER

*by Erin Cech*

**W**hat if there was an organizational policy that could not only significantly reduce employee turnover and boost businesses’ bottom lines, but also dramatically improve workers’ sense of work-life balance?

Sociologists Erin Kelly and Phyllis Moen might just have identified such a policy. Investigating an arrangement called ROWE (Results-Only Work Environments), Moen and Kelly found that ROWE reduced quitting rates by 46 percent. In other words, ROWE *nearly cut in half* the recruitment, hiring, and training costs associated with turnover. The researchers also found that employees under ROWE were more likely than their colleagues in traditional arrangements to intend to stay with the company.

How can a policy do that? This reduced turnover rate happened because employees under ROWE were happier with their work-life balance, felt less stressed about time management, and thus were more likely to stay.

The site of this success story is the corporate headquarters of the U.S. company Best Buy Co., Inc., which rolled out ROWE in stages to its more than 3,500 headquarters employees. According to the creators



Best Buy Corporate Headquarters. Photo by Chad Davis

## Kelly and Moen found that ROWE reduced turnover for everyone, regardless of age, gender, occupational level, or tenure.

of ROWE, the idea is simple: Employees can do “whatever they want, when they want, wherever they want, *as long as the work gets done.*” Employees are taught to identify—and then clarify with their manager—the outcomes (or “results”) for which they are responsible. As long as employees meet their expected outcomes, they can change when and where they work without asking permission from, or even notifying, their manager. Training sessions encourage employees to innovate new ways to promote the ROWE philosophy, such as cross-training with their team members so they can rotate off-site, or sending representatives to meetings in other departments rather than having everyone attend.

Best Buy’s incremental policy change provided a unique opportunity for Kelly and Moen to conduct a natural experiment. They surveyed more than 600 employees at the Best Buy headquarters right before ROWE was introduced to half the workers, and then again six months later. This is the first study of its kind to track the effects of policy changes unfolding over time, rather than studying them after the fact.

So what is the secret of ROWE’s success? Schedule control. Kelly explains that having control over the time and place of one’s work gives people the ability to more seamlessly manage their work and non-work responsibilities and to deal more efficiently with the ebb and flow of work deadlines, piano recitals, and doctor appointments. After just a few months, ROWEs felt less work-family conflict, had fewer “spillover” issues between their work and home lives, and had an improved sense of fit between their work and family lives, compared to their colleagues who continued under traditional work arrangements. Because employees had better work-family balance, they were more likely to stay at Best Buy.

## Moen and Kelly found that ROWE nearly cut in half the recruitment, hiring, and training costs associated with turnover.

To reap the full benefits of schedule control and see these effects on turnover, Best Buy also had to *redefine productivity*. Under ROWE, “long hours in the office and seeming to be busy are no longer regarded as signals of commitment or productivity.” Instead, managers and employees work together to define and then evaluate productivity in the language of results.

In the long run, ROWE-type policies may be particularly important for retaining women employees. The work-life conflict that leads to turnover haunts many U.S. white-collar workers, but it is particularly pernicious among women with small children. Working mothers face the burden of an increasingly stressful and time-consuming work life and often shoulder the lion’s share of family caretaking responsibilities. Among dual-earning families strapped for time, traditional solutions to the work-family balance conundrum often reinforces gender inequality. Women, far more than men, are the ones who leave their jobs or cut back on their hours. Thus, Kelly notes, ROWE can not only reduce turnover costs

associated with women being pushed out of the workforce by these family burdens, but could also be “especially useful in breaking down the gendered underpinnings of organizations that have systematically but subtly disadvantaged women and particularly mothers.”

Skeptics might see ROWE as a scheme to allow employees to do less work. After all, if employees aren’t in the office, are they really working? Managers under ROWE may feel like they are losing control over their workers. This is where new definitions of productivity and management come in—if employees are producing high-quality results, it matters less where they work. Other research has found that ROWE-type arrangements actually boost team productivity and effectiveness. Cisco Systems, Inc. even claimed increased productivity and savings of \$195 million resulting from rolling out a similar policy in 2003.

Can other organizations replicate Best Buy’s success? Kelly and colleagues suggest that white-collar organizations could implement similar practices to the same effect. ROWE policies might also be applied to low-wage workers, but would necessarily manifest differently. Kelly suggests that low-wage workers could get schedule control as well, in the form of more predictable weekly schedules, being allowed to swap their schedules more easily, and having the ability to refuse overtime. Implementing schedule control might be particularly profitable for companies who experience high turnover rates of their entry-level workers.

Kelly notes that schedule control “shouldn’t be understood as a privilege or an accommodation that is just available to a few people who have already proven themselves to their employers. Our research shows that restructuring workplaces so that flexibility is the norm and managers and employees focus more on the work than on the schedule benefits both employees and the employer.” ROWE is an important example of policy innovations that might truly be win-win.

**Dr. Erin Kelly** is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota. She and **Dr. Phyllis Moen**, McKnight Presidential Chair in sociology at the University of Minnesota, co-directed this research. She is also a member of the Clayman Institute working group on *Redesigning / Redefining Work*.





# A: MOVING BEYOND THE MYTHS OF WORKER PRODUCTIVITY

by Lauren Aquilar

According to the myth of the “ideal worker,” employees are supposed to maintain single-minded focus at work and are assumed to have full-time support at home. Current trends in labor statistics point to a much more diverse array of family working arrangements. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 48 percent of married couples are in dual-income households where both the man and the woman work. Also, there are more working mothers than there are working fathers in the U.S.

While our lives have changed, expectations of what we can do for work have not kept pace. The tension between work expectations and personal lives can put the interests of employers and employees at odds. Professors Joan Williams and Mary Blair-Loy spoke about their research as part of a multi-university working group organized by the Clayman Institute, highlighting two important myths that prevent workplaces from keeping pace with the new frontiers of work.

## AMERICAN WORK DEVOTION

Blair-Loy’s research examines the underpinning of extreme work expectations: our all-encompassing work devotion. In her book *Competing Devotions*, Blair-Loy defines work devotion as a cultural ideology that “defines the career as a calling or vocation that deserves single-minded allegiance and gives meaning and purpose to life.” This ideal is embedded in our culture, organizational practices and policies, such that most of us take it for granted without noticing its presence.

Work devotion is deeply ingrained in the psychology and ideals of the “American Dream.” The Protestant work ethic upholds that hard work is the duty and the measure of worth of individuals.

In interviews with corporate executives, Blair-Loy finds that work devotion defines our assumptions about work and instills moral and

emotional commitment. It gives the worker a sense of identity, competence, belonging and purpose. It is also seductive: There can be a pleasure to overworking and a collegiality between over-workers.

Blair-Loy illustrates that high-ranking workers, who often have backstage support at home, use work devotion to validate traditional work structures. One male CEO described his workers as “bleeding and dying” for plum jobs to explain why he would not offer-part time work. In Blair-Loy’s ongoing research, male executives felt little work-life conflict, since their wives took family responsibility. Work devotion can thus blind those at the top to the needs of their workforce.

## FLEXIBILITY STIGMA

Today’s workers feel the pressure to conform to ever-increasing work demands without the necessary support to manage the rest of their lives.

Best Buy’s novel approach produced strong work results and reduced turnover versus the “bleeding and dying” of extreme work, but few workplaces have implemented similar arrangements. Why?

Williams explains that flexibility is not widely used because workers who seek flexibility are devalued by “flexibility stigma.” This stigma can lead to social disgrace or even discrimination in the workplace. Like a scarlet letter, it demarcates anyone—men and women both—who draws attention to their caregiving responsibilities by requesting parental leave, reduced hours, or a flexible schedule.

In her book *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate*, Williams explains that flexibility policies are often “shelf paper” for good public relations, but workers’ fear of repercussions fuels low usage rates. One study showed that 33 percent of professors did not request needed parental leave because they feared career penalties. Flexibility seekers’ fears are well founded. Those who request flexible arrangements for family care are



Man in suit circa 1903 (Wikimedia Commons)

Work devotion not only defines our assumptions about work, but also instills moral and emotional commitment to it.



The flexibility stigma demarcates anyone—men and women both—who draws attention to their caregiving responsibilities by requesting parental leave, reduced hours, or a flexible schedule.

seen as poorer organizational citizens—less committed, competent and deserving of rewards. For example, part-time lawyers are perceived to be “time-deviants” because billable hours largely measure excellence and commitment.

#### WORKPLACES OF THE FUTURE

While American work devotion ideals generate extreme work standards, flexibility stigma threatens to punish those who violate those standards. Instead of looking to past practices, both Blair-Loy and Williams point to innovative companies willing to experiment with entirely new structures and ways of thinking about work. As with Best Buy, companies that experiment with new performance structures can benefit from reduced work-family conflict and turnover rates. The research conducted by Williams, Blair-Loy, and the group of academics and professionals organized by the Clayman Institute, may just deliver the smart frameworks needed for companies and workers alike to thrive.

**Dr. Mary Blair-Loy** is an Associate Professor and the Director of Graduate Studies and Founding Director at the Center for Research on Gender in the Professions at the University of California San Diego.

**Dr. Joan C. Williams** is Distinguished Professor of Law, UC Hastings Foundation Chair, Founding Director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. Blair-Loy and Williams are members of the Clayman Institute working group on Redesigning / Redefining Work.



AISPIX by Image Source/Shutterstock

Blair-Loy and Williams point to innovative companies willing to experiment with entirely new structures and ways of thinking about work.

# Q: ARE WOMEN HARDWIRED FOR MATH AND SCIENCE?

We have all heard that women are from Venus and men are from Mars, with brains from equally distant galaxies. Some claim that in comparison to men, women have smaller, inferior brains ruled by estrogen instead of testosterone, and that they are innately less mathematical. Many believe that these differences cause men to have fundamentally superior brains, leading to disparate careers, achievements, and successes. With women holding just 16 of the CEO spots at Fortune 500 companies, winning only 17 percent of the seats in Congress, and graduating with just 18 percent of all computer science degrees, innate brain differences have even been used to explain, or justify, these outcomes. But are these assumptions justified? Three articles break down these myths.

## WOMEN'S AND MEN'S BRAINS ARE EQUALLY EQUIPPED FOR MATH

**Josef Parvizi**, an assistant professor of neurology and neurological sciences at Stanford University Medical Center challenges three gender brain myths: that brain size matters, that women's and men's brains are different because of testosterone and estrogen, and that men are naturally better at math. Parvizi puts these myths in their proper place: The realm of popular but incorrect assumptions.



Josef Parvizi

## GENDER GAPS DISAPPEAR WHEN MATH CURRICULUM IS REDESIGNED

**Jo Boaler**, professor of math education in Stanford's School of Education, explains that asking "how can we fix girls to do better in math" is the wrong question. Instead, we should be asking, how do we fix math classrooms so girls and boys succeed at higher rates? Boaler's research finds that by re-configuring math classrooms to team-oriented learning and multi-dimensional, open-ended problem-solving, not only do gender gaps in math performance disappear, but girls' and boys' math scores improve.



Jo Boaler

## SMALL INTERVENTIONS MEAN BIG CHANGES IN PERFORMANCE

**Greg Walton**, assistant professor of psychology at Stanford, and his colleagues found that subtle cues of belonging can have important impacts on women engineering students' performance on math tests. Women, for example, performed worse on math exams when they experienced sexist cues from male engineering classmates. Promisingly, Walton and colleagues found that small interventions, in the form of affirmational essays, can actually facilitate this sense of belonging. As such, women who participated in interventions had significantly better grades than non-participants.



Greg Walton

# A:

# A: WOMEN'S BRAINS ARE NO DIFFERENTLY EQUIPPED FOR MATH THAN MEN'S BRAINS

by Susan Fisk

Popular understanding depicts women's brains as innately less mathematical than men's brains. Some even believe that these differences cause men to have fundamentally superior brains, which give men an edge in career achievement and success. Josef Parvizi, Clayman Institute fellow and assistant professor of Neurology and Neurological Sciences at Stanford University Medical Center, spoke at the Clayman Institute and argued that such beliefs are unsubstantiated by neuroscience, or even by basic logic. Parvizi challenges three gender brain myths.

## MYTH #1: BRAIN SIZE MATTERS

The first myth is that women have smaller brains than men and thus are innately less intelligent. While men have larger brains on an absolute level, there are no sex differences in brain size once body mass is controlled. The male brain is not proportionately larger than that of the female brain; men are just physically larger, on average. Furthermore, if absolute brain size were all that mattered, whales and elephants, both of which have much larger brains than men and women, would outwit humans.

## MYTH #2: WOMEN AND MEN HAVE DIFFERENT BRAINS DUE TO ESTROGEN AND TESTOSTERONE

Many believe that "male" and "female" hormones differentially shape the brain, leading some to conclude that these hormonal differences cause men to be better leaders and thinkers. Although it is true that males

generally have more testosterone, while females have more estrogen, men and women possess both hormones. These hormones perform other functions besides those related to reproduction. For instance, the male brain needs estrogen for normal brain development and function. And testosterone is also important to women, for example, in the development and maintenance of libido.

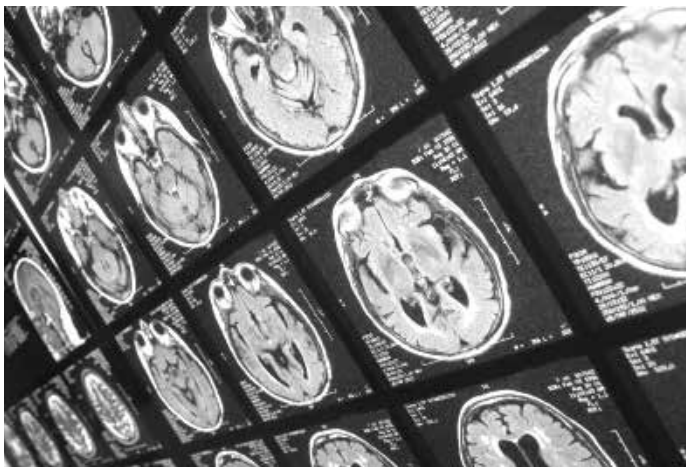
Although the popular press often touts the importance of testosterone to the behavior of men, this claim is overstated. A 1996 study showed that even unnaturally large doses of testosterone did not alter the mood or behavior of normal men (although it did exaggerate aggression for men who were already aggressive.)

Lastly, Parvizi states that even if estrogen and testosterone did shape the brain in different ways, it is an unsubstantiated, illogical leap to conclude that such differences cause "men to occupy top academic positions in the sciences and engineering or top positions of political or social power, while women are hopelessly ill-equipped for such offices."

## MYTH #3: MEN ARE NATURALLY BETTER AT MATH

Perhaps the most damning myth is that men are innately better at math and women are naturally better at verbal tasks. Gendered differences in math and verbal scores on standardized tests are assumed to result from intrinsic, biological differences in the brains of women and men. According to Parvizi, this logic is flawed: "Differences seen in cognitive tests do not necessarily provide direct evidence that those differences are in fact innate."

Even if estrogen and testosterone did shape the brain in different ways, it is an unsubstantiated, illogical leap to conclude that such differences cause "men to occupy top academic positions in the sciences and engineering..."





If not inherent ability, then what can explain gender differences in test scores? Evidence shows that test scores are not immune to social factors. Extensive empirical research on stereotype threat has demonstrated that if a person is exposed to a negative stereotype about a group to which they belong (e.g. women, Asians, African-Americans), they will perform worse on tasks related to the stereotype. A striking example comes from a study on Asian-American women. When reminded of being Asian (which invoked stereotypes of high math ability) they scored higher than the control group (which was not reminded of their race or gender) on a math test. However, when Asian-American women were reminded of being female (which invoked stereotypes of poor math performance), they scored lower on the math test than the control group.

Social factors can thus greatly influence test performance. “Consequently, we are not in a position to draw any conclusions regarding sex differences in the brain and their relationship to differential cognitive abilities,” concluded Parvizi. “We have yet to establish beyond a reasonable doubt that there are indeed real differences in ability.”

#### NEUROSCIENCE TO THE RESCUE: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING AND BECOMING

So if women and men do not have such innately dissimilar brains, why do they seem so different? Parvizi explains that “the brain is molded by experience.” The brain exhibits significant neuroplasticity, as it able to make structural and functional changes in response to environmental inputs. As the brain replicates the same signals over time, the networks through which they are sent become progressively stronger, as repetition reinforces both the networks and brain synapses. Building off what we know about the neural basis of learning, one can argue that the map of associations in the brain is sculpted by our experience throughout our life, according to Parvizi. “Even if the hard wiring of the brain remains unchanged, the function of the hardware is constantly altered by experience.”

Thus, “if we are to entertain the idea that humans ‘experience’ life differently, and that different experiences mold the brain function differently, then we must also seriously consider that gender (along with class, ethnicity, age, and many other factors) would also contribute to... molding of the brain.” For instance, the visually impaired often develop superior hearing, in order to compensate for the lack of visual stimuli. Due to the brain’s ability to adapt, this difference becomes a part of the brain structure of visually-impaired individuals (especially for those who are born blind.) Neuroimaging has found that many blind individuals use parts of their visual cortex to process sound.

So if women and men have systematically different life experiences and face dissimilar expectations from birth, then we would expect that their brains become different (even if they are not innately dissimilar), through these different life experiences. For instance, if girls are expected to be more adept at language, and are placed in more situations that require communication with others, it follows that the networks of the brain associated with language could become more efficient in women.



Photo by George Joch / courtesy Argonne National Laboratory

We are not in a position to draw any conclusions regarding sex differences in the brain and their relationship to differential cognitive abilities . . .

Conversely, if boys receive more toy trucks and Lego toys, are given greater encouragement in math and engineering classes, and eventually take more STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) courses, it follows that the sections of the brain associated with mathematics could become more efficient in men. Even if neuroscientists see differences in the brains of grown men and women, these differences are not necessarily innate and unchangeable.

As Parvizi notes, “The tricky part is that we do not make the mistake of taking account of these differences as evidence for biological determinism.”

**Josef Parvizi** is an Assistant Professor of Neurology and Neurological Sciences at Stanford University Medical Center and a 2010-II Clayman Institute Faculty Research Fellow.

# A: GENDER GAPS DISAPPEAR WHEN MATH CURRICULA ARE REDESIGNED

by Erin Cech

Although girls achieve at equal levels to boys in middle and high school, many girls stop taking math as soon as they can, and are much less likely than boys to enter math-intensive college majors and, later, careers. Gender researchers have shown that the root of this girl problem is not differences in innate math skills, but rather the contexts in which students learn math—contexts that give girls less encouragement and less confidence in their math abilities. Eager to address this girl problem, educators and policymakers usually respond: Okay, so how do we fix the girls? But, according to Jo Boaler, it's the math classrooms, not the girls that really need fixing.

Boaler, a Professor of Math Education in Stanford's School of Education, explained in a talk co-sponsored by the Clayman Institute for Gender Research, the Stanford University School of Education, and the Education and Society Theme House why traditional ways of teaching math through rote memorization just aren't cutting it. Her research shows that by simply changing the way math is taught, gender differences in math achievement and math confidence can disappear.

## ARE GIRLS REALLY WORSE AT MATH?

Boaler is often asked whether the "girl problem" is just a "gene problem." In contrast to Parvizi's research discussed previously, Americans tend to understand gender differences in math achievement as unchanging—unchangeable—differences in the way that boys and girls think. Girls

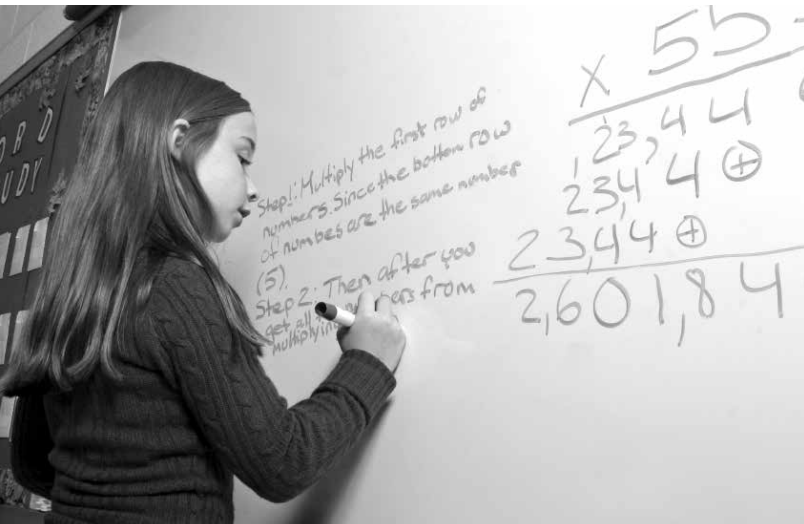
just aren't "hard wired" for math, some say. Boaler provides further arguments for why these explanations are faulty. For one, gender gaps in math achievement have rapidly declined over the last century—far outpacing any possible shifts in human genetics. Additionally, gender differences are country-specific. In some European nations, boys' and girls' math performance is equal. In places like Iceland, girls outperform boys. If gender differences vary by culture, then can these differences really be genetic? Perhaps most compelling, researchers examining more than 250 separate studies of gender differences in math and found no appreciable differences in ability once the number of math courses boys and girls took was held constant.

Many educational decision-makers now understand that girls' preferences are not a result of genetics but rather the different ways boys and girls are treated by peers, teachers and parents vis-à-vis math. To address this issue, schools abound with math camps, extracurricular activities, and special (often pink) toys meant to develop girls' confidence and interest in math. But, Boaler asks, if the learning contexts are the problem, why are most policies aimed at addressing gender differences in math still trying to fix girls?

## FIX THE CLASSROOMS, NOT THE GIRLS

Educational environments in which girls *and* boys learn math need changing, says Boaler. The majority of math classrooms in the U.S. take a traditional approach to learning, where teachers introduce students to progressively more difficult mathematical procedures. Students are expected to memorize these procedures and then execute them on homework and tests. Math problems are usually the closed-ended type where a single answer can be circled at the end, and math procedures

Boaler suggests identifying the learning environments that produced the most equitable and successful results and then using those environments as templates.



Elementary school student. Source: istock Photos/John Archer



U.S. Navy photo by Greg Vojtko

Students learned math by working together with classmates to solve multi-dimensional, open-ended problems. In this environment, boy and girls performed equally well in math, and both girls and boys scored higher than students in more traditional classrooms.

are usually taught by extracting them from real-world situations where a person might actually need to use those procedures. For most people, learning math meant scribbling down, memorizing, and recapitulating the long strings of equations our teachers wrote on the board.

Just because this is the way most were taught math does not mean it's the *only* way, the *best* way, or the most *gender equitable* way. Boaler asks: "What if we identified the learning environments that produced the most equitable and successful results and then used those learning environments as templates for the way math should be taught?"

Boaler's research actually identified such a learning environment. She studied approaches to math education at two otherwise nearly-identical high schools in England: Amber Hill and Phoenix Park. Amber Hill approached math the traditional way—students copied down formulas from the board, completed worksheets, and were split up into one of eight ability groups. At this school, boys did better in math than girls.

Things were different at Phoenix Park. Instead of a traditional environment, students learned math through collaboration, working together with their classmates to solve complex, multi-dimensional, open-ended problems. At Phoenix Park, boys and girls performed equally well in math and both boys and girls scored at higher levels than the students who had learned math traditionally.

### BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BOYS?

Skeptics might argue that this erasure of gender differences was achieved because boys' math performance slipped in the Phoenix Park context. But, that's simply not the case—Boaler found that, although the improvement was smaller in magnitude, boys at Phoenix Park

also scored slightly better than boys at Amber Hill. If a learning environment produces a more equitable learning experience for one group of students without negatively affecting the other group's math achievement, why *wouldn't* we adopt this new approach?

Boaler explains that there is a surprisingly high level of resistance among parents, teachers, and principals to this new way of teaching math. Part of this resistance may be due to the belief that math is a rite of passage of sorts, which builds character and perseverance in young people. "I struggled through my math courses," some say, "and so should today's students." But the fact is, Boaler explains, "compared to other academic subjects—English, science, etc—the way we teach math to children is very different from the way math education researchers have identified as the most effective way to teach math." By realigning math education to be more like the gender-equitable learning environments at Phoenix Park, we can move the dialog—and the blame—from what's wrong with girls to how we can make math education better for everyone.

Of course, not all parents have the ability to place their children in gender-equitable math learning environments. For those parents, Boaler has an important piece of advice: Parents should emphasize to their children that being good at math is an *achievement*, not a *gift*. Once students—especially girls—understand that being good at math is something that one can earn, they are likely to be more confident in their math abilities, and less willing to give up on math.

**Dr. Jo Boaler** is a Professor of Mathematics Education in the Stanford School of Education and a 2012-13 Clayman Institute Faculty Research Fellow.



# A: SMALL INTERVENTIONS IN COLLEGE CAUSE BIG PERFORMANCE CHANGES

by Susan Fisk

A smile, sigh, or glare would never influence anything important, like a woman's math scores or her decision to become an engineer, right? Wrong. According to new research by Stanford psychologist and Clayman Institute Fellow Gregory Walton, such cues can greatly impact women's math performance and persistence in male-dominated fields like engineering. This is because they affect an individual's sense of belonging, which Walton has shown to be critically important for groups who are marginalized.

Through a series of experiments conducted with Christine Logel, Steve Spencer and others at the University of Waterloo, Walton and his collaborators found that affecting a woman's sense of belonging in male-dominated settings significantly influences her math scores. In one such study, pairs of engineers composed of one woman and one man, discussed a news article about engineering. After the discussion, the engineers took a math test. Walton

Walton and his collaborators found that women who had interacted with men who exhibited higher levels of sexism performed worse than the women who interacted with non-sexist men.

and his collaborators found that women who had interacted with men who exhibited higher levels of sexism performed worse than the women who interacted with non-sexist men.

But perhaps this had nothing to do with belonging. Perhaps women simply do not like to interact with sexist men. To investigate further, the researchers conducted another experiment in which they had women engineers discuss an article with an actor who they believed to be a fellow student. The actor was trained to behave either like a sexist man (by looking at the woman's body more, sitting closer, and having a more open posture) or like a non-sexist man. After the discussion, the women took either a math or English test. Again, the women performed worse on the math test after interacting with a sexist man.

However, this was not because the women disliked the sexist men. The women reported actually liking them more than the non-sexist men. And the effect was domain specific: Their performance on the English test was actually better after interacting with the sexist actor. Walton concluded that interactions with a sexist man provided subtle cues to the women that they did not belong in engineering, that they were an outsider as opposed to a peer. This feeling depressed the women's math performance.

Conversely, Walton has found that increasing a woman's sense of belonging improves her math scores. In a series of experiments conducted with Priyanka Carr and Lauren Aguilar at Stanford, mathematically-inclined students took math tests in which they received a supposedly accurate "tip" or suggestion. In some conditions, the students believed that the tip came from a fellow participant whom they had already met, while in other conditions, the students believed that they had received an anonymous tip from a tip bank. In actuality, all of the students received the same useless tip, which was created by the researchers. The source of the tip made no difference to the men; they performed the same whether they believed that the tip came from a fellow participant or the anonymous tip bank. However, women's math performance improved when they believed that they had received a tip from a fellow participant. This effect was significant. When the women participants received an

## The Effect of Sexism on Women's Math Test Scores



Logel, C., Walton, G. M., Spencer, S. J., Iserman, E. C., von Hippel, W. & Bell, A. (2009). Interacting with sexist men triggers social identity threat among female engineers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(6), 1089-1103.



"Women Scientists at Work" photograph, sponsored by the Marilyn Yalom Fund, Clayman Institute. Photo by Nicolo Sertorio

anonymous tip, they had worse math scores than the men. But when they received a tip from a fellow participant, their scores were better than the men. Walton believes that women who received a tip from a fellow participant interpreted it as a cue of belonging, which increased their performance.

In follow-up experiments, Walton and his collaborators determined that the gender of the writer of the tip was extremely important to women. Tips from women improved their math scores much less than tips from men. This is likely due to cues about belonging. Since math is a male-dominated field, a tip from a man gives greater assurance about acceptance.

From these experiments, it is clear that subtle cues are important. In all social areas, people are attuned to small cues as they convey respect, belonging and acceptance or disrespect and non-belonging. Walton argues that such cues may matter more in new and uncertain situations and to individuals within groups marginalized by stigma or negative stereotype. The uncertainty of belonging sensitizes people to the meaning of subtle social events, as they are actively seeking out evidence about whether they fit in. Positive cues may allay worries about belonging, while negative cues may reinforce stereotypical beliefs that they do not generally belong in the setting.

Walton contends that the interpretation of subtle cues can greatly impact feelings of belonging, but the same cue may have varying effects on different groups of people. For instance, say that a male student gives another student a glare. If the other student is a woman, she might interpret this as evidence that he does not like her, and that she does not generally belong in the engineering course. However, an otherwise similar man on the receiving end of the glare might just assume that his fellow student is a jerk, and make no association between this cue and his belonging to the group.

Walton argues that by changing the way that numerically underrepresented groups interpret these subtle cues, they can have a greater sense of belonging in uncertain situations, thereby increasing their performance and persistence. To determine if this hypothesis

A year after writing either form of the [intervention] essay, women in male-dominated engineering majors had better grades in engineering compared to otherwise similar women who had not been randomly assigned to the intervention.

was correct, Walton and his collaborators Christine Logel, Jennifer Peach, Steve Spencer, and Mark Zanna at the University of Waterloo performed a randomized intervention for women engineers randomly assigned to either an intervention condition or a control condition. In the intervention, Walton had men and women in their first year of a university engineering class read essays about other students' university experiences. They then wrote their own essays, which they believed the next year's incoming engineers would read to aid their transition. The students in the intervention condition were assigned to write one of two types of essays. In the social belonging intervention essay, students read and wrote about how everyone has belonging concerns from time to time but that, over time, students come to feel they belong. In the affirmation training intervention essay, the students read and wrote about how they managed stress by thinking about and doing things that reflect their personal values.

The results were astounding. A year after writing either form of the essay, women in male-dominated engineering majors had better grades in engineering compared to otherwise similar women who had not been randomly assigned to the intervention. They also had a more positive assessment of current experience in engineering and were more optimistic about their potential in engineering.

The research of Walton and his collaborators suggests that social-psychological processes play an important role in gender inequality in Science Technology Engineering and Math, or STEM. In other words, social relationships and feelings of belonging matter. But the good news is that through the work of psychologists like Walton, we are learning how to intervene to counteract these processes and positively affect critical life outcomes.

**Dr. Gregory Walton** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Stanford University and a 2011-12 Clayman Institute Faculty Research Fellow.

# Q: WHERE ARE THE FEMINIST ACTIVISTS?

From the Susan G. Komen–Planned Parenthood uproar to Senator Gabby Giffords, gender equity issues are earning front-page news coverage. These same gender themes have lit up blogs and social media. But why hasn't this increased exposure boosted feminist activism? Events sponsored by the Clayman Institute—including the winter symposium, “*Ms. at 40 and the Future of Feminism*”—explored what happened to feminist activism and what can be done to revive it.



Shelby Knox

## ACTIVISM'S BURDEN AND PRIVILEGE VEIL, BUT DON'T LIMIT, FEMINIST ACTION

**Shelby Knox**, a feminist activist, writer, and blogger who spoke as part of the *Ms. at 40* events, discussed how some people who might be inspired to activism are reluctant to do so because of the personal costs of activism. She argues that activism is really a privilege for those who are able to engage in it—a privilege that comes with the responsibility to include the voices of those who cannot publicly participate.



Carla Peterson

## FEMINIST ACTIVISTS ARE SOMETIMES HIDDEN IN THE ARCHIVES

**Carla Peterson**, literary critic and professor of English at the University of Maryland, explained that historical archives can sometimes tell incomplete stories of feminist activism. Disquieting the “silence of the archives” around black women’s activism in the era before the Civil War, Peterson finds that black women were actually very present in the activism of the era. Peterson’s solution to the silence: Create an archive where one doesn’t exist.



Gloria Steinem

## FEMINIST ACTIVISM CAN BE UNCOVERED IN UNUSUAL, UNEXPECTED PLACES

**Activism In-Briefs** illustrate the diverse ways that feminist activism manifests in the past and present. From natural disasters, art studios, university auditoriums, and prison cells, feminist activists are catalysts for change. Although different from the quintessential protests of the 1960s, in many eras, in many nations, and in many life circumstances, feminist activism is alive and well.

# A:



# A: THE PRIVILEGE—AND COSTS—OF ACTIVISM: SHELBY KNOX ON ACTIVISM'S PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

by Erin Cech

As in decades past, current feminist activism can serve as the catalyst for social change. Shelby Knox is one of those activists, and she visited Stanford in January to discuss the 2005 documentary film that put her in the public eye. Knox's hometown of Lubbock, Texas has some of the highest teen pregnancy and STD rates in the nation. "The Education of Shelby Knox," directed by Mario Lipschutz and Rose Rosenblatt, chronicles Knox's work as a teenager to replace her district's abstinence-only policy with comprehensive sex education. While the school board rejected the proposed measure, Knox succeeded in provoking conversations.

Knox's story—one of public action, disappointment, and eventual success—is common to many heroic feminist activists across the nation engaged in important consciousness-raising and grass-roots community organizing. But the part of the story not as often heard—and one artfully told in the Knox documentary—is of the personal consequences of activism.

When asked what is most difficult about social activism, Knox replied, "that activism has consequences." Knox referred to activism as a *privilege*—one that carries the responsibility of including the voices of others. Like social movements of the past, those who have the privilege to be feminist activists must make sure not to silence or ignore the voices of those without that privilege.

## THE PERSONAL CONSEQUENCES OF KNOX'S ACTIVISM

Knox's pull toward feminist activism came with such costs. Her activism challenged her own commitments to her faith and her family's beliefs. Concerned about the negative impact on the lives of her fellow youth, Knox was inspired to action. She felt that sex education could reduce teen pregnancy and STD infection.



Katherine Spillar, Miriam Perez, and Shelby Knox. Photo by Paige Parsons

Like social movements of the past, those who have the privilege to be feminist activists must make sure not to silence or ignore the voices of those without that privilege.

The very existence of personal consequences is the reason activism is a privilege: Not everyone has the ability to engage in activism without putting their jobs, families, or personal safety at risk.

Trying to reconcile her Christian beliefs with her activism, Knox consulted her pastor. Her pastor mused that Knox was promoting tolerance among people who were part of “the most intolerant religion of all.” This tolerance inspired her work on behalf of those whose life choices were different than her own. For taking this stance on sex education, some people in her community, told her she was “going to hell.”

As Knox’s role in the promotion of comprehensive sex education became more intense and more public, she worried that her activism might reflect poorly on her father and possibly hurt his business. Her parents, for their part, worried that Knox’s activism might adversely affect her academically and socially. Their fears were not unwarranted. As a junior in high school, Knox learned that the superintendent had been told to “stay away from her” because she was “dangerous.”

Knox’s activism, in other words, not only had public consequences, it affected her relationships with her family and her faith. But Knox was fortunate that she maintained the support of her family throughout. As Knox leaned further into activism and later protested for her classmates’ right to organize a Gay-Straight Alliance, her mother even joined in the protests. The costs of activism are not so easily shouldered by everyone. The very existence of personal consequences is the reason activism is a privilege: Not everyone has the ability to engage in activism without putting their jobs, families, or personal safety at serious risk.

#### WITH CONSEQUENCES COME RESPONSIBILITIES

As with the Civil Rights and Women’s Rights movements of decades past, the privileges and consequences of activism today are not equally spread throughout the population. Poor women, women of color, and single mothers are more likely than white women to face prohibitively

serious consequences for engaging in activism. Barriers result from women’s proportionally higher poverty rates, low job security, and work autonomy, and limited financial safety nets. Yet, these are precisely the groups most often in need of feminist activism and representation.

A recent local incident makes this clear: Two women employed at the Santa Clara Hyatt, just down the road from Stanford, were fired for promoting equality for themselves and their co-workers. Sisters Lorena and Martha Reyes, who were then employed as housekeepers at the Hyatt, arrived at work a few months ago to find pictures posted on the walls depicting their faces superimposed onto the bodies of swimsuit models. Lorena and Martha ripped down the degrading photos in protest. And, after 30 years of combined service to the hotel, they were suddenly let go.



Lorena and Martha Reyes. Photo by Paige Parsons

The Reyes sisters, acting to subvert sexual harassment in their workplace, did so at enormous personal cost. There are undoubtedly others who face similar inequities at work, but cannot—or dare not—participate in similar activism for fear of such consequences.

There is, therefore, a responsibility that accompanies the privilege of feminist activism. Knox argued that those who have the financial and social stability to bear the personal consequences of public activism have a responsibility to those who cannot. The responsibility is to those for whom such consequences are too great a burden to overcome—those for whom activism may cost them their jobs or their families.

**Shelby Knox** lives in New York City, where she works as a consultant for the Girls Leadership Institute, Plan B and others. She is also writing a book about the next generation of feminist activism. More information on the Reyes sisters can be found at [www.hotelworkersrising.org](http://www.hotelworkersrising.org).

# A: LISTENING TO THE ARCHIVE: UNCOVERING THE STORY OF BLACK FEMINISTS

by Alexis Charles

American history textbooks highlight the activism of the antebellum era, like the work of prominent black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, and abolitionist and women's right leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Yet, the voices of black women activists are often missing from the history of pre-Civil War era America.

Dr. Carla Peterson, literary critic and professor of English at the University of Maryland, set out to disrupt this silence. Searching through the historical records of the antebellum North, she found significant absences—yet, at the same time, hidden presence—of black women among these records.

Peterson identifies two types of historical “silences” that could account for the lack of black women in historical archives. First, a “silence of sources,” or an absence resulting from black women being kept out of public recognition and voice during a time when they were, in fact, active. She also noticed a “silence of the archives,” suggesting that the activism of black women was simply not recorded, despite their active participation in the social sphere. As Peterson noted, “these silences are really important” because they impact “what kinds of historical narratives are written and what versions of history we learn.”



Poet and activist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (source: Wikimedia)

Silences of the archives impact “what kinds of historical narratives are written and what versions of history we learn.”

## SILENCING BLACK WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN THE ANTEBELLUM ERA

While searching through historical archives, Peterson discovered that black women were often deliberately excluded from public activism and barred from leadership roles, primarily in male-governed organizations such as the church, the press, and Freemasonry. She found records of events where black men and women share a podium but, “it’s the men who speak,” and whose words were recorded.

In her book *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830–1880)*, Peterson identified several black women who worked to challenge these restrictions. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a free-born poet, women’s rights activist and abolitionist, was known to have preached, lectured and written on social issues. Harper’s uncle and cousin were well-known activists of the time and Harper’s cousin worked with Frederick Douglass. Yet as Peterson said, “I never found [these male activists’ names] coupled with Frances Harper. They all did their activism, [y]et I never found a moment when they worked together.”

## UNCOVERING HIDDEN ARCHIVES OF BLACK WOMEN ACTIVISTS

Where are the records of these black women activists? The racially integrated female



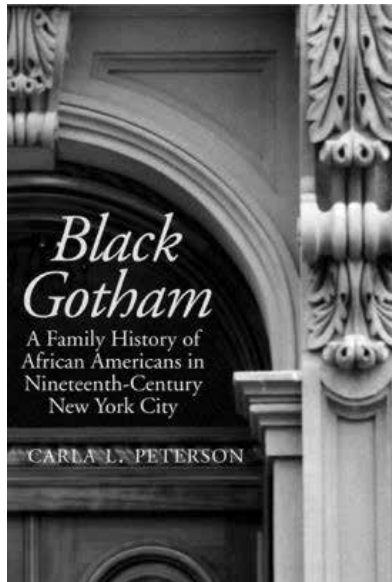
abolition groups in Philadelphia and Boston were established venues for black women's activism. The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, for example, was known for its progressive attitude and brought black and white women together. Other groups were integrated at the urging of well-known white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. These integrated abolition groups became a forum for black women to move beyond anti-slavery work to focus on issues of their own choosing in their communities.

For example, in Philadelphia, black women started the Colored Female Produce Society of Pennsylvania and were integral organizers for the Free Produce Movement that advocated a consumer boycott of slave-labor grown produce. This established history of public activism allowed black women's organizations such as the Produce Society to document work that could be preserved and then archived. "Interracial antislavery work and black community work really went hand-in-hand during that period," Peterson argued. "There's a real interdependence which allowed black women to do work and allowed for creation of an archive."

Compared to Philadelphia, the activist climate in antebellum New York City was markedly different: Female abolition groups were not racially integrated. As Peterson began the research for her most recent book *Black Gotham: African American Elite Life in Nineteenth-Century New York City*, she found little information about black women activists in New York. To access this information, Peterson employed a different research tactic: "going through the back door." She scoured white records and white newspapers for mentions of African American persons or organizations to further explore. She discovered evidence of, for example, black schoolteachers and fundraising fairs led by black women for the Colored Orphan Asylum. Through this back door tactic, Peterson was able to piece together a black women activists' archive where there wasn't one before.

#### POST CIVIL WAR ARCHIVES ILLUMINATE BLACK WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

In the postwar period when more information on black and white women's activism was recorded and preserved, Peterson's "back door"



Peterson's research finds that silence of the archive does not prove absence of activism.

tactic illuminated a new archive that sheds light on the history of women's activism. In the late 19th century, women often organized clubs for social reform, self-development, and women's rights. The history of this "women's club movement" is commonly marked with tales of racism from white women leaders and protests by black women. In reaction to racist acts and exclusion from white women's clubs, black women created their own clubs.

For example, Peterson discovered a circle of white women and a circle of black women who joined forces to work for The African American Zion Home for the Aged in Brooklyn, which even had an integrated board of managers. This new instance of interracial activism counters the better-known narrative of white racism and reactionary black clubs, offering a novel way of looking at the club movement.

Ultimately Peterson's research finds that silence of the archive does not prove absence of activism. "That is the whole point," Peterson said, "because we tend to assume that if we do all this archival work, and we don't see [black women's activism], we tend to say 'well, okay, [black women] weren't there.'" By looking deeper Peterson reveals that black women were indeed active in the antebellum period as important public actors.

**Carla L. Peterson** is professor of English at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her talk was organized by American Studies as part of the winter symposium, *Ms. at 40 and the Future of Feminism*.

# A: FEMINIST ACTIVISM CROPS UP IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

## STEINEM AWAKENS YOUNG AND OLD, ENCOURAGING 'OUTRAGEOUS ACTS'

Gloria Steinem concluded her “Ms. at 40 and the Future of Feminism” keynote address by calling on the audience to do at least one outrageous thing for the cause of social justice. “Only you know what it should be.” Steinem guaranteed these “outrageous acts” would do two things: The world would be a better place, and they would be so fun we’d want to do them everyday. Steinem outlined various myths about feminism, the history of organizing around women’s issues, global violence against women, the dangers of limiting women’s reproductive rights, and the economic value of caregiving. Pointing out that countries with the least democracy in public life are also those where men and women are most unequal in domestic life, she argued



Gloria Steinem

that we “cannot have a democracy without democratic families.” She ended by encouraging links between the LGBTQ, the environmental, feminist and civil rights movements. “Once we see that linkage,” she said, “we become much more effective.” ARTICLE BY LILY BIXLER

## WOMEN PRISONERS: GENDER MATTERS

Hamdiya Cooks spent 20 years incarcerated in federal prison. All the while, she never lost her activist will: She recalled sitting in front of the warden’s office to protest toilet paper and sanitary napkins rationing. Cooks joined activists Susan Burton and Robin Levi on a panel discussion, moderated by Stanford Law Professor Joan Petersilia, on the growing number of incarcerated women in the United States prison system. The women worked from behind bars — and on the outside — to develop programs for re-entry and in-prison care. While Petersilia uses the academy to probe the prison system, Levi leverages the legal system to capture the stories of incarcerated women. At Justice Now, a legal services organization for jailed women, Levi went up against the prison system to tell the stories of women inside prisons across 14 states. Levi said the organization “wanted to give women a voice to share their whole lives.” ARTICLE BY LILY BIXLER



Hamdiya Cooks

## WORKING-CLASS WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AFTER THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE

Amidst the devastation of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, an unlikely activist emerged in Mary Kelly, a working-class refugee. Fed up with long lines and inadequate food supplies, she led disgruntled refugee women to relief headquarters to demand food for their families. The women left with 50 bags of food. Emboldened by her success, Kelly took to the city’s relief headquarters to demand—and ultimately receive—shoes and clothing. Kelly’s coup d’état came when she unlawfully occupied a one-room earthquake-relief cottage after



her earlier application was rejected. She used the home as the launch-point for a month-long protest of the city’s earthquake relief policy. Stanford historian Andrea Rees Davies turns to Kelly’s story in her new book on the 1906 quake, *Saving San Francisco*, to show the paradox of working-class women’s activism during the disaster. “In 1906 San Francisco,” she writes, “these post-disaster material conditions forced many women to exceed their prescribed gender roles in order to obtain the materials necessary to resume these very roles.” This change in gender roles was temporary for some women, ending as they rebuilt their lives. But for others, the earthquake marked a radical change in their political consciousness and in their beliefs about the proper role for women. ARTICLE BY BRENDA D. FRINK

## EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RELIGION AND ART

Feminist poet and critic Alicia Ostriker finds comfort in the ancient rabbinic affirmation, “there is always another interpretation.” In other words, religion does not have to be an agent of oppression: There’s always another interpretation of religious texts and there’s always another interpretation of how gender should be defined in society. For Ostriker, interpretation takes the form of biblical commentary, or midrash. In her creative writing Ostriker advocates for the redemptive potential of religious text. She contends midrash has the power to introduce feminist interpretations of the Bible and increase the number of women interpreting religious texts. Further, she says that the act of women writing midrash is itself an act of feminism. New and creative interpretations can be a source of empowerment. ARTICLE BY HEIDI THORSEN



Alicia Ostriker

## LIBERATING FEMINIST ARCHIVE

Pushed aside by Chicano civil rights and second-wave feminist movements, Chicana feminism has long been neglected and forgotten as a movement. University of Michigan professor Maria Cotera plans to fill in the historical gaps by building an online archive she’s calling *Chicana por mi Raza* — or “Chicana, for my people.” By collecting materials scattered in attics, basements, and home offices, the archive aims to reconstitute a network of Chicana feminism that was once vibrant. The free digital archive will contain interactive tools allowing users to organize information, responding to their own interests and contributing their own stories and analysis of the information. Cotera views the archive as a political tool. She hopes the site will, “bring the history of Chicana feminism to a whole new audience, from public school educators to college students to established scholars.” ARTICLE BY KATHERINE MARINO



# In Brief

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS PUBLISHED THIS YEAR BY THE CLAYMAN INSTITUTE. THE COMPLETE ARTICLES CAN BE FOUND IN THE NEWS SECTION OF THE CLAYMAN WEBSITE: [HTTP://GENDER.STANFORD.EDU/NEWS](http://gender.stanford.edu/news)

## SEARCHING FOR A NEW SOUL IN HARLEM

Amid the Harlem Renaissance — an era of resistance to Jim Crow laws, blackface and minstrelsy — grew an outcropping of art and literature grappling with people of mixed-race heritage passing as white. For Stanford historian Allyson Hobbs, such passing literature critiqued the racism of the era and drew attention to the absurdity of the American racial condition. For instance, while Harlem Renaissance literary luminary Nella Larsen wrote she was “strangled by an inflexible and unforgiving racial and gendered regime,” she attempted to situate herself as a mixed-race author. Traumatized by the effects of racial demarcation in her upbringing, Larsen’s female characters struggled without success against gender norms. Hobbs argues that Larsen ultimately incorporated racial categories in her writing because “race had over-determined her life circumstances.” Hobbs contends there’s a better approach: looking for the diversity of mixed-race experiences and self-identities, something largely obscured or forgotten in literature on passing. **ARTICLE BY ANNEISE HEINZ**



Nella Larsen

## MEDIEVAL WOMEN OF THE LIVING DEAD

In the Middle Ages, religious texts dismissed women as an afterthought of creation, but recent research by Stanford medieval historian Dyan Elliott uncovers women of religious renown in the role of holy zombies. Elliott argues that many medieval Christians believed that men gravitated to more intellectually-based techniques of mysticism, while women experienced God through physical means. Combing through the biographies of medieval saints, Elliott contends male saints engaged in meditation, almsgiving, or voluntary poverty, while holy women demonstrated piety through bodily miracles and physical contact with Christ. Female saints and mystics accessed spirituality by “(providing) a permanent bridge between the living and the dead.” Paradoxically, through this means, female spirituality flourished against a backdrop of male superiority. In later centuries the Church would come to doubt the validity of women’s bodily miracles, but for a brief period, medieval women enjoyed religious renown because of their gender. Elliott spoke at Stanford as part of the Religion and Gender series. **ARTICLE BY KATHRYN DICKASON**



The weighing of souls, detail from a Last Judgment tympanum at Autun Cathedral (Burgundy, France), c. 1130.



## CIGARETTE ADS TARGET WOMEN AND GIRLS

For nearly 100 years, cigarette companies have worked hard to attract female customers and, in general terms, they have been quite effective. Research by Stanford scholars Robert Jackler and Laurie Jackler shows how tobacco companies have tailored their marketing campaigns to appeal to young women by suggesting smoking will make

them thinner and more self-confident, independent, fashionable, sophisticated and cool. Jackler and Jackler collected and analyzed nearly 15,000 cigarette ads to reveal connections between tobacco, women, and the women’s rights movements. For example, Phillip Morris Company adopted a feminist-sounding slogan “You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby” as an advertising campaign in the 1970s to attract women to Virginia Slims cigarettes during second wave feminism. Despite today’s heavier regulation and a decline in overall domestic tobacco ad spending, Jackler and Jackler argue how these and similar tactics help the industry bounce back from regulatory defeats. **ARTICLE BY NATALIE MARINE-STREET**

## CHALLENGING MEDIA MISREPRESENTATION

How does the popular media’s focus on female beauty and sexuality limit women and girls? Jennifer Siebel Newsom’s film *Miss Representation* uses provocative interviews with high-ranking women and media clips from popular franchises to show that media propagates and reinforces the message that a woman’s value lies in her appearance and sexual appeal. Newsom forges partnerships with leaders around the country to promote what she feels is the first step to solving the problem: dialog about how women are represented in the media. *Miss Representation* has catalyzed a grass-roots effort of interested parents, educators, and youth who urge women and girls to voice concern about women’s representation in the media to politicians, business leaders and others in positions of power. The Clayman Institute for Gender Research hosted the screening and accompanying essay contest and panel discussion. **ARTICLE BY ANAIS BERLAND**



Missrepresentation.org

## JAPANESE STENOGRAPHERS

Stenography is often seen as an objective, impersonal transcription of proceedings. Yet social anthropologist Miyako Inoue’s research suggests that the actual act of stenography was colored by gendered norms of interaction. Inoue’s investigation into late 19th century Japanese stenography sheds light on the gendered nature of the technical skills and institutional practices that under-



The First Japanese Diet Hall (1890-91)  
(Source: Wikimedia [www.sangiin.go.jp](http://www.sangiin.go.jp))

lie the modernization processes of stenography. Japanese stenographers work in two spheres: parliament stenography, mostly associated with masculinity, and courtroom stenography, linked primarily with femininity. Inoue shows how forms of intimacy culturally associated with men

and women affected the way professional ethics and techniques of stenography were defined in Japan. Parliament stenography, for example, symbolizes the male bonding assumed necessary to ensure fidelity in the written transcript. Courtroom stenography, on the other hand, where historically verbatim recording was never required, emerged as the space of the steno type symbolically associated with femaleness. **ARTICLE BY ELIF BABUL**



This second issue of *upRising* is dedicated to three women who changed the face of Stanford. In the early 1970s, three young women banded together to ask where female voices were at Stanford University and in academia as a whole. To find the answers, they proposed to school administrators an institute to promote gender equality on campus. Their tenacity inspired Professor Myra Strober to take the lead as founding director of what they would call the Center for Research on Women (now the Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research.) Today, these three leaders, Beth Garfield, Susan Heck, and Cynthia Russell, continue to serve the Institute as members of our Advisory Council.

For daring to dream big, and for making your dream come true, we honor each of you, the three founding students. Hats off to you!

*To all of you trailblazers who have made our work possible, we give our greatest thanks. We hope you will continue to join us in upRising for gender equality.*

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