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**Comparative Career-Path Growth of Campus Leaders by Gender**

**by**

**Madison Lynn Foster**

**Advisor: Professor Kim Petrone**

**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of  
Science in Business Administration in Finance.**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business  
University of Arkansas  
Fayetteville, Arkansas**

**May 13, 2023**

Promotions and growth in one's own field of work are highly sought after by those who wish to see greater achievement, wealth, and personal satisfaction in the workplace. Opinion is divided as to whether or not men and women are paid equally in the United States. One issue less spoken of is the differences in the time and rate of promotions women and men see in their careers. Many studies seek to prove women are receiving less promotions than men, and posit their own hypotheses.

This thesis is organized into five sections. Section I, Literature Review, Section II, Survey and Results, Section III, Correlation between Current Literature and Survey Results, Section IV, Conclusion.

### **Section I: Literature Review**

"Women are 13% less likely to be promoted compared to men. This baseline gender gap in promotions cannot be explained by differences in past performance: women receive higher performance ratings on average and are 7.4% more likely to earn the top performance rating than men." - "Potential" and the Gender Promotion Gap, Benson, et al.

Considerably few reports assert that women are receiving equal promotions as men, as many reputable sources including governmental surveys are clearly proving. A primary issue is the reasoning behind these statistics, and if women are somehow "allowing" this issue to occur. MIT Sloan associate professor Danielle Li:

"..found that men who were passed over for a promotion were 35% – 40% more likely to leave than female employees, and male employees with the highest performance ratings who weren't promoted were 40% –50% more likely to leave. Women with the highest performance ratings were only 10% more likely to leave after being passed over for a promotion." (Benson)

While it is not the woman's responsibility to promote herself, it is significant that women are more likely to be choosing to remain with an employer after a refusal of receiving a promotion than a man would. This type of statistic does bring an idea to consider when asking what women can do to help combat the issue within their own area of control.

In "Women in the Workplace," the "broken rung" works to explain a cause as to why women are being seen in less higher management positions as you go higher in the chain. The study notes for every 100 men that are promoted to a manager position, only 86 women were promoted. With this, it means that there are less women to promote to the next level, especially if the numbers continue to bottleneck. The continual decrease in women in management level positions as you continue up the chain is a problem that starts from the very base of the chain. Once women leaders receive higher management positions, they often see that they have greater burnout as opposed to their male counterparts. Women are more likely to take action to support teams by helping manage workloads, along with spending more time on DEI work. Many jobs are not including this type of work in their job descriptions. Managers are undervaluing this work in their own companies, which can lead to burnout, given they are doing their own work along with these above and beyond efforts. Oftentimes, managers see these unquantifiable soft skills as less valuable. For some women, this type of work is a part of the job to them, as they see the intrinsic value of the goals they see for others and the company. Women leaders are facing burnout, and in addition to this, they are also more likely to face certain microaggressions such

as being questioned on their expertise, interrupted and spoken over, and having comments made about their emotional state. (McKinsey & Company)

Klaile presents three hypotheses to try to explain the gap between men and women's acceleration in their career paths. First, is that there is no difference between men and women's hope for career advancement. That men tend to be more confident in their skills, strive towards high goals, and may have better qualifications than women. This hypothesis seems to present a different, possibly systemic difference, causing women to be further behind men before they enter the door. Second, is that middle managers may be holding women back by their traditional beliefs on women's roles and place in leadership. Lastly, women's goals to start a family tend to slow women's career advancements more than men. In this study there was statistical significance to the previous hypotheses in regard to middle management. While exploring these ideas, Klaile presents an additional theory in regard to women that are able to receive equal promotions as men, which is the sticky floor theory. While a woman may be promoted to higher positions, women have seen that they may receive slower wage growth in their promotions as opposed to men. (Klaile)

Morris explores the systemic issues that are causing women to see less money in promotions and new jobs. One prominent issue the author addresses is the lack of major changes due to many people in higher positions believing there is not an issue in their company's gender disparity. Many companies argue that pay disparity comes from the woman's lack of negotiation, rather than the difference of the offer by the person's gender. These companies argue it is more about the market reality, not discrimination. Laura Liswood, a senior adviser and former managing partner at Goldman Sachs and head of the Council of Women World Leaders at Harvard's Kennedy School, expressed that her research showed men, typically white, more often view the job field as "meritocratic," earning power and success fully through merit, and if there are any issues of gender disparity, they are minor. In the same organization, for the women and minorities' perspective, they believe the opposite to be true. (Morris) Ultimately, higher management must make changes to correct these injustices; but first, they must fully believe there is injustice before feeling pressure to look into these matters.

Kroska and Cason make a note of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018 study that claims women make up 52% of the workforce. However, as of 2015, only 39% of the managerial positions are filled by women in American businesses. The study greatly looks into the social psychological aspect on why these two numbers do not match. The study goes into the differences between the common words attributed to women and men. The study finds that some people perceive women that have more masculine than feminine characteristics as having less social skills. However, when a woman is described as having more feminine characteristics, managers view her as less hireable in comparison to male applicants. While there is some evidence of similar biases against men having more feminine attributes, male executives have more latitude with regard to the type of behavior they can portray without violating typical gender norms. The second set of analysis for this study was that women executives are unable to avoid gender deviance in the circumstance of changing the subject in uncomfortable situations.

## **Section II: Survey and Results**

The parameters of this study include Walton College of Business alumni who graduated between the years of 2013 and 2017. More specifically, the alumni had to be leaders in a business-related academic Registered Student Organization. A leader is defined as a labeled position, including members of specific committees. This parameter is used to find students who

took extra initiative in their organizations related to their field. The parameter for graduation dates from 2013 to 2017 is to represent alumni that have graduated between 5-10 years ago at the time of the study. Five years is given to ensure that a person has had the time to progress in their field. Ten years is set as the maximum in order to show a greater representation to the younger generation in the current workforce. All respondents are full-time workers at their respective companies.

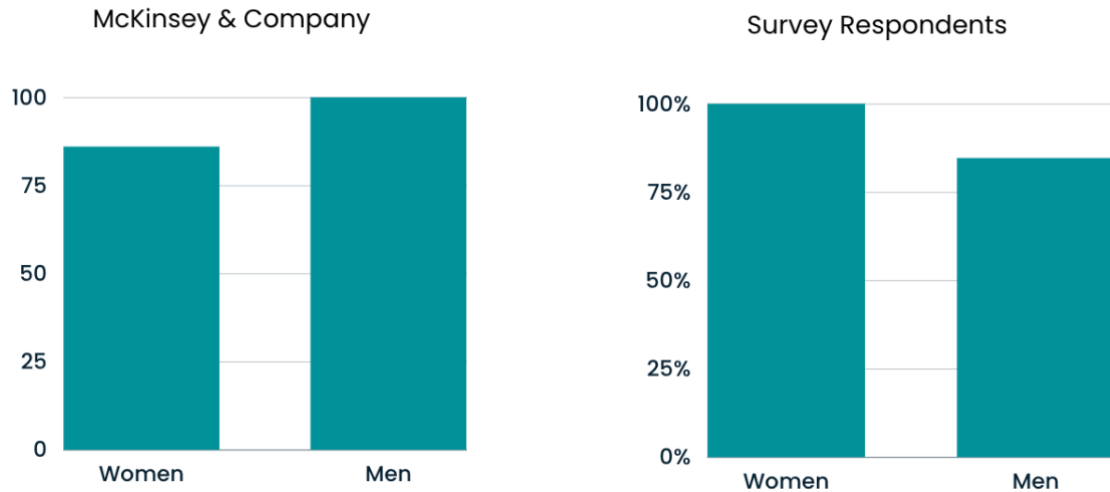
Twenty viable responses are represented in the study. The means for reaching out to the respondents of the survey was through LinkedIn. For each person who met the discussed criteria, their connections would be screened to find more potential respondents that would qualify for the survey. Before contacting, each LinkedIn profile was vetted by checking graduation dates and involvement information they had provided. Once confirmed that the candidate fit the qualifications for the survey, a request to connect and a message was sent to inquire if there was interest in filling out the survey through Qualtrics. The survey consists of twelve questions, taking approximately five minutes to complete.

An additional significant finding was the loss of connection between Arkansas RSOs and their alumni. In HogSync, in which all Registered Student Organizations must register, it did not contain the information of previous leaders of the active organizations on the UofA campus. Every Walton-related RSO that was contacted did not have any line of contacts or names of people from previous years that were involved within the club. According to the correspondence, this issue is either because of the changing of hands of the staff overseeing each organization, or no records of that type were ever chosen to be recorded. There is a great amount of value for maintaining a line of contact to alumni of specific interest groups. This change could help further the line of knowledge within a group, and create a greater pool of professional connections as students are looking for what they are interested in a career and beginning to enter the workforce out of college.

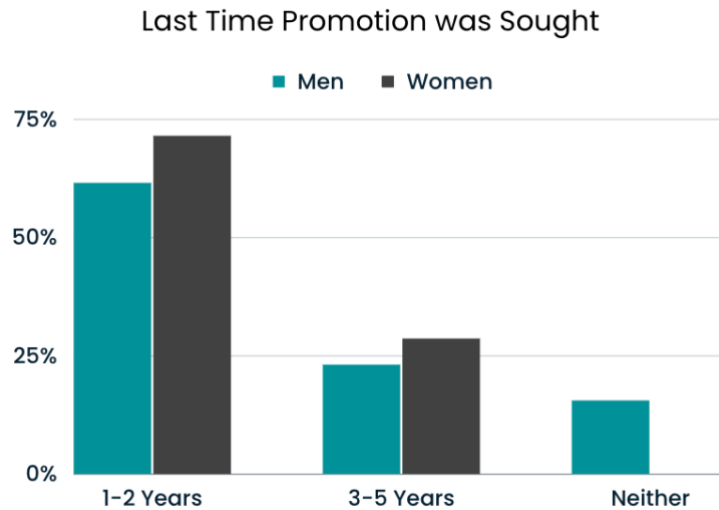
The first respondents of the survey were referred by a Walton Honors academic advisor based on their personal knowledge. From there, their mutual connections on LinkedIn were searched to find more potential participants. Seventy-four invitations were sent on LinkedIn to candidates falling within the survey's parameters. Thirty invitations were sent to men, forty-four were sent to women. Of this number, twenty women responded to the initial message, and of that twenty, seven made it to the completion of the survey. Eighteen men responded to the initial message, with ten of those doing the survey to completion.

Of the respondents, five of the seven females were involved in more than one student organization. For the male respondents, twelve of the thirteen were involved in more than one student organization. Presidents, Treasurers, committee members and leaders, Vice Presidents, Historians, Directors, and Chairpersons are represented in the group of respondents.

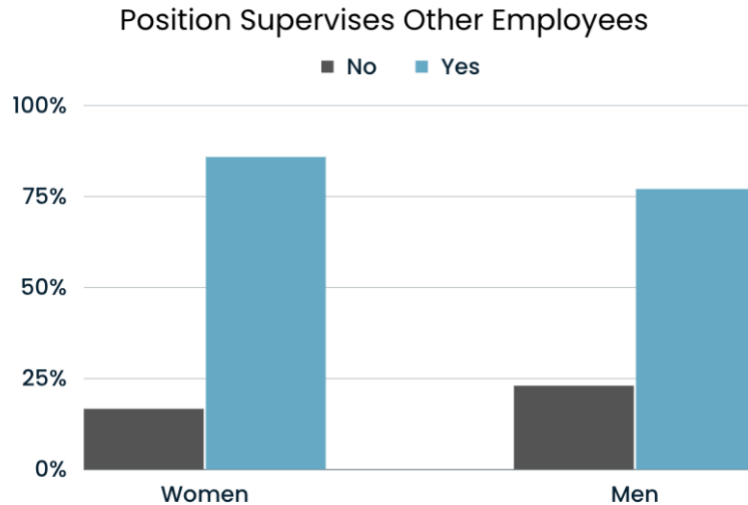
Given the imbalance of the number of respondents from each gender, the following graphs are all using percentages of the individual gender's population to help increase comparability. Below, all percentages are stated as legitimate numbers of people from the survey responses given.



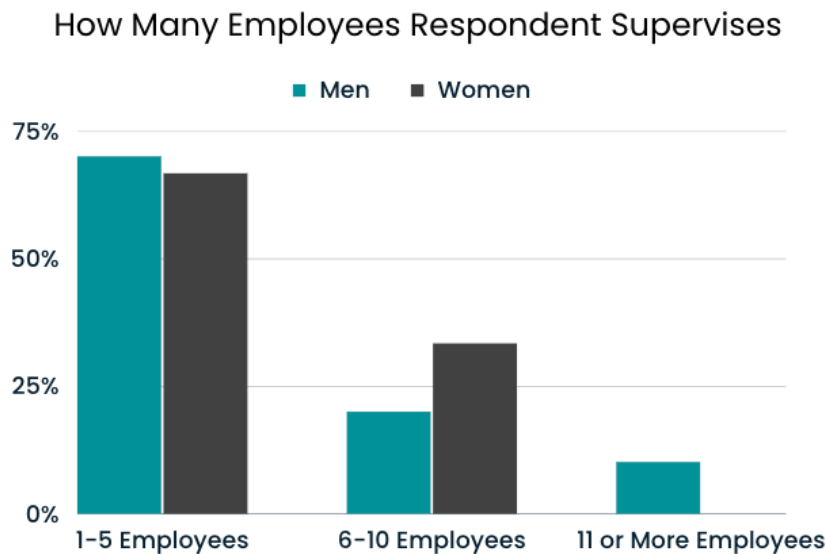
According to McKinsey & Company, for every one hundred men promoted, eighty-six women are promoted. According to the survey responses received for this study, all seven women respondents have received at least one promotion since graduating from the University of Arkansas. For the male respondents, eleven of the thirteen respondents have received a promotion post-graduation. It is to be noted that the two that have not received promotion have not applied for a promotion, and have been working for their respective companies for one year or less.



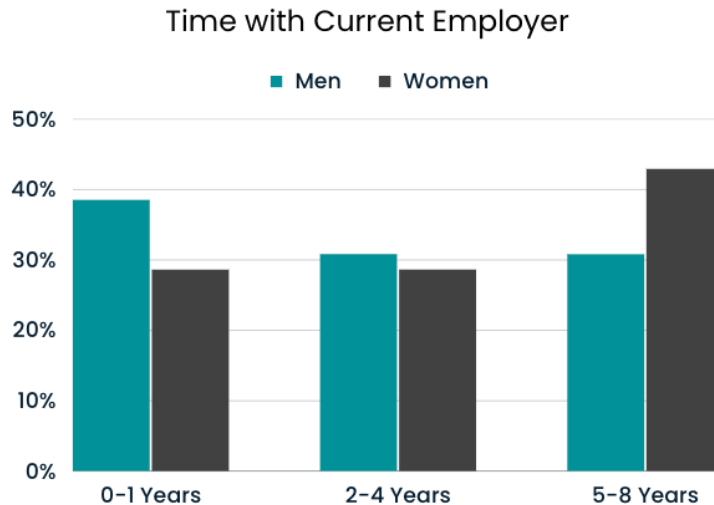
Of the seven female respondents, five reported seeking a promotion in the past 1-2 years. Two responded they had applied for a promotion in the past 3-5 years. All seven have received at least one promotion in the past five years. Of the male respondents, eight reported applying for a promotion in the past 1-2 years, three in the past 3-5 years, and two have not sought a promotion in the past five years. For the ten males that have sought a promotion, they have all received at least one promotion in the past five years.



According to the female survey respondents, six of the seven female’s positions require supervising at least one other employee. One female respondent indicated that she does not supervise another employee. Of the thirteen male respondents, three responded stating they do not supervise any employees. Ten of the thirteen men reported that they supervise at least one employee.



Counting the respondents who indicated that they supervise employees, of the female respondents, four of the six indicated that they supervise 1-5 employees, and two of the six supervise 6-10 employees. No female respondents indicated supervising more than eleven employees. Of the male respondents, seven of the ten indicated they supervise 1-5 employees, two of the ten supervise 6-10 employees, and one of the ten supervises more than 11 employees.



From the female respondents, two of the seven have worked for their employer for 0-1 years, two have worked for 2-4 years, and three have worked for 5-8 years. Of the male respondents, five of the thirteen have worked for 0-1 years at their current employer, four have worked for 2-4 years, and four have worked for 5-8 years. Of the males and females that have worked for their current company for 5-8 years, six of the seven have sought a promotion in the past 1-2 years, and the other respondent (male) has sought a promotion in the past 3-5 years. Promotions and time commonly have correlation, as this fact is the reason for the question's inclusion in the study.

### **Section III: Correlation between Current Literature and Survey Results**

My study does not actively agree with the disparity between men and women seeing promotions in their place of work, but it does not necessarily disagree. Holistically, it is shown in my study that these ambitious former Walton College students are finding ways to grow within the environment they are in. While these alumni are succeeding, it does not necessarily mean this data represents the United States, or all Walton College students. One of the essential goals of the study was to see how highly motivated Walton alumni were compared to the national average rate of promotions between men and women. While it is a considerably smaller group of participants, the wide range of unique participants does help give a glimpse into the current workspace these alumni are working in today. There is a prominent argument of whether or not women are fighting for their right to promotions. The women surveyed who served in RSO leadership while earning the undergraduate degrees are receiving promotions as they have been seeking them. High ambition according to studies does have some correlation related to success rate of receiving promotions, as is shown in this study as well. The greatest difference between my study and the studies discussed in the literature review section is the parameter of the type of employees that are being surveyed. There is a great opportunity for a larger scale research study to be done to see how much personality, personal ambition, and former leadership positions play a role in future success and confidence in seeking promotions in the workplace.

### **Section IV: Conclusion**

Nationally, a considerable amount of research points toward the disparity between men and women successfully receiving promotions. My research shows that there may be a connection between having prior leadership roles in college and receiving leadership roles later



in a person's career. According to the data received, it can be assumed that ambition is playing a role in the women alumni receiving the promotions they have received. However, according to statistics, at a national level there is still work to be done. Managers need to see the problem, then be able to learn to judge purely based on merit, rather than factor's out of a person's control, like their gender.

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