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# Governing Boards and Their Relationship to Gender Issues in Higher Education

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Managing the postsecondary education sector necessitates overseeing a complex organization of administrators, faculty, staff, and students with far-reaching responsibilities, including academics and research, public relations, fundraising, athletics, and many others. Though there is considerable variation in how these roles and duties are allocated in higher education systems around the world, governing boards (frequently referred to as "trustee boards" or "boards of regents") serve as influential and unique stakeholders central to the operation of postsecondary education in the United States, Australia, and many European nations. These administrative bodies serve in a role akin to corporate boards and have traditionally provided oversight of leadership decisions (hiring, firing, and general support), long-term strategic planning, and financial solvency, but they remain removed from daily decision-making (Hughes 1944; Baldridge 1971; Kerr and Gade 1989; Ingram 1995). In recent years, research has noted that governing board members (or "trustees" or "regents") in the United States, in particular, have been called upon to serve in new ways, including as key spokespersons for the institution or system (Michael and Schwartz 1999; Kezar 2008) and as channels to the business and political worlds (Pusser et al. 2006; Mathies and Slaughter 2013; Slaughter et al. 2014), broadening their influence in many facets of higher education (Barringer and Riffe 2018). These additional functions have increased the visibility of governing boards and drawn considerable attention to the individuals serving on them.

Outside the United States, governing boards maintain similar responsibilities, but are often more closely associated with national governments. In Australia, they are tasked to review institutional performance, accept fiduciary responsibility, maintain legal authority, and guide the institution away from risky behavior (Rytmeister 2009). Across Europe, the compositions, roles, and responsibilities of governing boards vary by country, as universities are generally regulated by central governments (Kivisto 2008). Though this chapter does not permit an in-depth country-by-country discussion, it is important to note a few unique elements for context. For instance, some European countries, such as Croatia and Denmark, require all postsecondary institutions to have governing boards, while others, such as Latvia, Poland, the Netherlands, and Slovenia, deem them optional (De Boer and File 2009). European countries also have varying parameters for determining the composition of their governing boards.

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De Boer and File (2009) note some boards comprise all external stakeholders (e.g. Austria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) or a majority of external stakeholders (e.g. Ireland, Italy, and Sweden), while others "achieve parity or internal stakeholder dominance" (e.g. Portugal, Lithuania, and Norway) (p. 14). Ultimately, while the national context and the characteristics of the higher education sector influence governing board decision-making, the overarching responsibilities of these organizations remain similarly aligned globally.

Despite these critical responsibilities, research on board membership has emphasized a sobering demographic fact: across the globe, board members are "overwhelmingly white [and] male" (Fain 2010). In the United States, this finding has been reiterated by empirical work conducted by both researchers (Kerr and Gade 1989; Woodward 2009; Ehrenberg et al. 2012) and higher education organizations (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges 2010). Given the majority-female student population of today's American university and the similar growth of female faculty, administrators, and staff in the academy (Metcalfe and Slaughter 2008; King 2010), the underrepresentation of female board members is particularly noteworthy. Nevertheless, the impact of this issue is truly international in scope, as suggested by widespread emphasis on improving educational opportunities for women across the world.

This chapter begins with a review of the current understanding regarding female underrepresentation on governing boards and some potential factors contributing to it, focusing particularly on the United States. It then discusses in detail the association between female underrepresentation on governing boards and connections to corporate firms and industry.[1] It concludes by considering how the lack of gender diversity on governing boards contributes to broader gender issues in other areas of higher education and delineating areas of future research and implications for higher education constituents.

## Female Representation on U.S. Governing Boards: An Overview

Similar to female representation among administrators and students in the U.S. higher education sector, the current state of gender inequality in governing board membership can be traced to systemic barriers to women's entrée. Specifically, women were excluded from postsecondary governing boards for the first 240 years of higher education in the United States (Glazer-Raymo 2008; Metcalfe and Slaughter 2008). It took until the late nineteenth century for women to receive their first invitations to serve on university governing boards, as women's colleges and normal schools began to grow. For example, Barnard College, a women's college established in 1889 in response to Columbia University's admission of only men, was the first institution to create a trustee board with widespread female representation – 11 female and 11 male board members at its founding (Glazer-Raymo 2008). Despite the progressive representation of women on boards overseeing Barnard College and other women's colleges, the number of female trustees was decidedly slow to expand across the higher education sector, with only occasional alumnae from wealthy or elite families being invited to join a board representing a coeducational institution.

Subsequent studies of governing board membership reiterate a progressive, yet decidedly slow, growth of female representation throughout the twentieth century. A 1917 survey of 143 college boards revealed only 75 female trustees in total, representing just 3% of all trustees at responding schools. Thirty years later, a study of 30 institutions found only 3.4% female trustee board representation (Glazer-Raymo 2008). This growth was abetted by the reluctant shift to coeducation by formerly all-male colleges following World War II, with very gradual movement occurring at the margins through what Judith Glazer-Raymo (2008) describes as the "add women and stir method" (p. 189). The advancement of women's presence on governing boards was bolstered by the rapid expansion of postsecondary education in the 1960s and the advent of Title IX in 1972; however, representation still paled in comparison to that of male trustees (Glazer-Raymo 2008). Female representation continued to grow in the 1980s and 1990s, increasing from 15 to 30%, but this progress seems to have stagnated in recent years (Glazer-Raymo 2008).

More recent data suggest postsecondary board membership remains overwhelmingly male, with men outnumbering women by more than two to one, on average. In 2010, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) surveyed both private and public colleges and universities regarding their trustee board composition. Across the 195 public institutions that responded, board membership averaged 71.6% male to 28.4% female (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges 2010). Female representation across the 507 private non-profit schools responding was slightly higher, at 30.2% (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges 2010). At the time of the study, female representation on private college boards had increased by 1.8 percentage points since 2004 (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges 2010), but that on public boards had declined from a high of 30% in 1997 (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges 2010). Within the community college sector, female representation was even greater, at 38.0% in 2018, but still paled in comparison to the more than 50% of community college enrollees that were female (Association of Community College Trustees 2018).

Given that females represent a lower proportion of the faculty at elite institutions, Wright (2011) explored the gender makeup of trustees over time by examining the institutional board membership of the Association of American Universities (AAU) from 1997 to 2005. AAU membership, often considered to represent the most prestigious universities, is restricted to 60 colleges and universities in the United States and two in Canada. It is often regarded as an aspiration of many institutions, with member universities awarding nearly 50% of doctoral degrees and 55% of STEM degrees nationally (Association of American Universities 2018a). While Wright (2011) noted substantial growth in female board membership among this group of institutions over time, overall trustee membership by gender was similar to the AGB's earlier findings (2010a,b). At public AAU institutions, women represented 28% of board members in 2005, a slight increase from 27% in 1997. On the other hand, female board membership grew from 19% in 1997 to 24% in 2014 at private AAU institutions (Wright 2011). In attempting to account for these differences in gender representation by sector, Wright (2011) hypothesized that private college and university boards are more likely to be tied to corporate board membership, including norms and values such as a "masculine ethic," which "materially and discursively, privileges males and assumed male attributes" (p. 34). Similarly, within the corporate board sector, membership was overwhelmingly male; as Wright noted, "with the corporate private sector in general, females are less well represented at the private AAU schools than they are at public AAU schools" (p. 136).

## Factors Contributing to Female Underrepresentation on Governing Boards

Despite increasing numbers of females enrolling in both undergraduate and graduate educational programs in recent years – representing a majority of postsecondary enrollees – women continue to face significant obstacles in attaining positions of power in the academy (Glazer-Raymo 2008; American Council on Education 2017). Numerous reasons have been cited for the scarcity in female representation. Some researchers have suggested women in postsecondary education face a lack of mentorship in the field, lacking informal and formal support and networks requisite for advancement and finding a scarcity of predecessors in their roles, biased search processes, and frequent discouragement as they aspire to greater leadership (Glazer-Raymo 2008; Lapovsky 2014). Others argue the existence of a "pipeline" problem, with not enough qualified women prepared for leadership positions, implying that female underrepresentation is a supply rather than a systemic issue (Castleman and Allen 1998; Johnson 2017). A final group of explanations are more controversial, including a "tipping point" or saturation argument, where significant growth in female representation could diminish the status of the role as it becomes more feminized, causing men to leave or avoid board membership (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake 1987; Bellas 1994; Tolbert et al. 1995; Wright 2011). Though many of these purported barriers to equal female representation have been repeatedly debunked, there remains notable gender disparity throughout higher education administration and leadership.

For instance, the American Council on Education's (ACE) American College Presidency Study (2017) found that only 30% of college presidencies were held by women, a mere four-percentage-point increase since 2011. What's more, of those women who had reached college presidencies, 32% reported altering their careers to care for others, compared to 16% of male presidents (American Council on Education 2017). Therefore, a major contributing factor to these continued gender disparities may center on traditional gender role expectations, which influence individuals' decision-making processes as they pursue their careers.

Innate gender bias underlies many of these barriers to gender equality across higher education, and similarly influences the female underrepresentation among governing board membership. Akin to other higher education leadership positions, the historical lack of women represented on boards places greater onus on the institution and on females seeking the position to proactively seek out these individuals and these roles. In addition to these more common barriers to female access to higher education leadership, barriers specific to governing board membership remain.

### The Governing Board Member Appointment Process

A key factor or mechanism impeding female representation on governing boards stems from the process by which board members are selected. In the United States, this process differs greatly based on institutional sector. That is, trustee boards of private colleges and universities are typically self-perpetuating, whereby the current or outgoing board members have a significant role in selecting future or replacement members (Gale 1993; Glazer-Raymo 2008). On the other hand, governing boards overseeing public institutions and state systems are most often appointed by the state's governor and confirmed by the legislature, directly selected by the state's legislature,

or elected publicly (Longanecker 2006; Glazer-Raymo 2008; Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges 2010).

These various appointment mechanisms tend to result in a variety of individuals serving on boards. As Longanecker (2006) explains, "Some members are selected simply because of who they are personally … Others are selected because of their association with a specific constituency" (pp. 103–104). Citing Pusser and Ordorika's (2001) case study of the University of California and the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Longanecker (2006) notes that political appointees to governing boards have typically contributed to a political campaign or have a specific affiliation with the institution, such as being a major donor or a well-known alumnus. Other studies have suggested that among public institutions in the United States, female representation on boards is greater if the state governor is a Democrat or if there is a relatively large percentage of female legislators in the state (Martin 2010), further highlighting the influence of politics in equal gender representation.

In other countries, the role and influence of politics and governmental decision-making are more directly related to how governing board membership is decided. For example, Australian higher education is coordinated, controlled, and funded by the Commonwealth Government (Vidovich and Currie 2011). In the late 1980s, the Australian government began to emphasize a more corporate style of university governance, and over the next decade, councils became smaller and the staff and student membership on governing boards was diminished (Baird 2006). The Higher Education Support Act of 2003 enacted 11 protocols for higher education institutions in Australia, one of which required governing councils to be restricted to 22 members, at least two of whom possessed financial expertise and one commercial expertise. Failure to comply with these protocols would result in financial sanctions for the university (Vidovich and Currie 2011). Therefore, the Australian national government has had a pronounced and direct role in university governance and oversight of governing board membership, further restricting the opportunity for female representation to be immediately improved.

## Board Member Connectivity

College and university trustees are often nominated and appointed due to their personal and professional ties – whether political, charitable, or corporate. Research examining board member connections is often framed by theories of resource dependence and academic capitalism. Such theories suggest higher education institutions are using these ties as a mechanism to secure revenue streams in light of decreasing support from traditional funding sources, which in the United States includes state and federal government funding (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Pusser et al. 2006; Woodward 2009; Slaughter and Cantwell 2012; Mathies and Slaughter 2013; Barringer and Slaughter 2016). These studies investigate how the associations and connections of board members influence and potentially benefit the institution the individual is overseeing, resulting in further disparities in gender representation in industry and other sectors directly impacting higher education.

For example, Pusser et al. (2006) suggest trustees serve as sources of information and legitimacy for decision-making by offering "information about business practices and market activity related to higher education" (p. 766), underscoring the role of board members as connectors between higher education and industry. Moreover,

Mathies and Slaughter (2013) find the number of trustees connected to science-based corporations is positively related to the amount of research and development funding a given higher education institution receives. They also suggest that as trustees are increasingly connected to science corporations, there is a growing convergence between the subject areas researched by an institution and the industries to which trustees are connected.

As higher education boards seek these well-connected members, norms undergirding corporate America continue to impact board membership. As historically male-dominated and otherwise homogenous structures, corporate boards have remained even less diverse than college and university boards over time, particularly at influential Fortune 500 and 1000 companies. A 1977 Catalyst survey of the top 1300 companies identified only 46 women serving on their boards. By 1984, this had grown to 367 women, or just 2.3% of all corporate board members in the United States (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2006). More recent data (Catalyst 2016) have identified a growing number of women in the corporate boardroom, filling 19.9% of board seats and 26.9% of new board directorships at S&P 500 companies in 2015. The same survey found that 14.2% of S&P 500 boards included at least 30% female members; however, 24.6% of corporate boards had only one female and 2.8% had none at all (Catalyst 2016).

Some suggest that corporate America remains a traditionally male-dominated field, where critical decisions are made in informal settings, such as on the golf course or in smaller groups, particularly the more powerful executive and budget committees (Konrad et al. 2008). Several have cited corporate norms resembling a "critical mass," where 25–30% of a field – or three female board members – begins to impact board performance and change the dynamics of the group (Konrad et al. 2008; Wright 2011). On the other hand, just two women serving on a board may be conceived as a "conspiracy phase" or as "plotting a coup" when they sit together (Konrad et al. 2008, p. 153), while one woman alone is often rendered invisible. Despite the many potential benefits of board diversity, corporate America remains slow to embrace the role of women in these critical roles. As a whole, the small proportion of females serving on corporate boards tends to consist of a few "super-connectors" active on several at once (Chu and Davis 2011).

## Analyzing the Higher Education Governing Board-to-Corporate Board Connection

Given board members' connections with the private sector and related industries are increasingly driving institutional interest in determining higher education governing boards, we investigated how corporate board member connectivity might highlight gender disparities on trustee boards in the United States. Our evaluation considered the U.S. members of the AAU. AAU institutions annually receive about 60% of total federal research expenditure dollars in the country and represent a significant portion of graduate student enrollment, suggesting a central role in the development of knowledge and education standards in the nation (Association of American Universities 2018b). The 60 U.S. institutions considered are represented by 54 different governing boards, as identified in Table 5.1. In 2010, total membership across these boards included 417 females out of 1863 trustees, or 25.3% of the population. Further analysis

**Table 5.1** Governing boards representing U.S. AAU members, 2010.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Arizona Board of Regents | Kansas Board of Regents | Texas A&M Univ. | Univ. of Pennsylvania |
| Brandeis Univ. | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | Tulane Univ. | Univ. of Pittsburgh |
| Brown Univ. | Michigan State Univ. | Univ. of Chicago | Univ. of Rochester |
| California Institute of Technology | New York Univ. | Univ. of California Board of Regents[a] | Univ. of Southern California |
| Carnegie Mellon Univ. | Northwestern Univ. | Univ. of Colorado | Univ. of Texas Board of Regents |
| Case Western Reserve Univ. | Ohio State Univ. | Univ. of Florida | Univ. of Virginia |
| Columbia Univ. | Penn State Univ. | Univ. of Illinois | Univ. of Washington |
| Cornell Univ. | Princeton Univ. | Univ. of Michigan | Univ. of Wisconsin |
| Duke Univ. | Purdue Univ. | Univ. of Minnesota | Univ. System of Georgia Board of Regents |
| Emory Univ. | Rice Univ. | Univ. of Missouri | Univ. System of Maryland Board of Regents |
| Harvard Univ. | Rutgers Univ. | Univ. of Nebraska | Vanderbilt Univ. |
| Indiana Univ. | Stanford Univ. | Univ. of North Carolina | Washington Univ. in St. Louis |
| Iowa Board of Regents[b] | State Univ. of New York[c] | Univ. of Oregon | Yale Univ. |
| Johns Hopkins Univ. | Syracuse Univ. | | |

[a] Oversees University of California Berkeley, University of California Davis, University of California Los Angeles, University of California San Diego, and University of California Santa Barbara.
[b] Oversees Iowa State University and the University of Iowa.
[c] Oversees the State University of New York at Buffalo and the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

of our data reveals differences in board size by sector, with private boards being three times larger, on average, than public ones. However, gender representation remains approximately one-quarter female per board in both sectors. A more complete gender breakdown of AAU board representation in 2010 can be found in Table 5.2.

Considering the different means by which individuals are appointed to boards between sectors, the similar ratio of male to female members at private and public institutions suggests this mechanism may not be the sole factor impacting gender representation on boards, though some institutional-specific findings are notable. For example, across our dataset, female representation is *at least* equal to males at only two universities – the University of Michigan (62.5% female) and Michigan State University (50.0%) – both of which uniquely select their governing board membership through statewide elections. Also included in the top five highest proportions of female trustees are Harvard University (45.9%), Princeton University (43.6%), and the University of Texas Board of Regents (representing the University of Texas at Austin, 40.0%). At the other extreme, the lowest female representation is at the University of Nebraska (no female trustees) and the boards representing Texas A&M University, Purdue University, the University System of Georgia (representing the Georgia Institute of Technology), and the University of Colorado, all tied at 11.1%.

**Table 5.2** Governing board members across U.S. AAU members by institution type, 2010.

| | Private | Public | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of governing boards | 26 | 28 | 54 |
| Total trustees | | | |
| *Total number* | 1420 | 443 | 1863 |
| *Average number per board* | 54.6 | 15.8 | 34.5 |
| Female trustees | | | |
| *Total number* | 364 | 107 | 471 |
| *Percentage of total trustees* | 25.6% | 24.2% | 25.3% |
| *Average number per board* | 14.0 | 3.8 | 8.7 |
| *Average percentage per board* | 26.8% | 24.7% | 25.7% |
| Male trustees | | | |
| *Total number* | 1056 | 336 | 1392 |
| *Percentage of total trustees* | 74.4% | 75.8% | 74.7% |
| *Average number per board* | 40.6 | 12.0 | 25.8 |
| *Average percentage per board* | 73.2% | 75.3% | 74.2 |

In addition to emphasizing the underrepresentation of women on governing boards, our analysis provides insight into the extent to which individuals selected to sit on American higher education governing boards also serve on the boards of publicly traded and privately held corporate firms. For instance, female trustees have significantly fewer total ties to firms than male trustees (207 versus 1356 in 2010), which is attributable to their underrepresentation within the overall sample of AAU institutions. At the individual level, male trustees average twice as many ties to unique firms (0.97) as female trustees (0.44). From the perspective of the corporate firm, there are more connections to male AAU trustees (1.05 ties), on average, than to female trustees (0.16 ties). Given that some firms in our dataset have only one individual serving as an AAU trustee, yet firms still average at least one male tie, our findings underscore the greater representation of males on corporate boards and signal their central role in an institution's association with a corporation. Table 5.3 provides a breakdown of trustee-to-firm ties.

The broader potential implications of this dataset and our analysis are threefold. First, our findings suggest a gender imbalance across the governing boards of both private and public AAU institutions that is lower than prior estimates (AGB 2010a,b), which were closer to 30%. Though the lack of longitudinal data prevents a definitive conclusion, these elite institutions may have reached a "tipping point" on their governing boards. They may be exercising caution, fearful that increasing female representation on their board further might feminize the position and alienate current and future male board members. Put differently, institutions may consider maintaining about 25% female representation on their board as being "enough" gender diversity to convince external stakeholders they are mindful of these dynamics, without disenfranchising potential future (and well-connected) trustees. Thus, it is possible that women are increasingly penalized for their lack of connections to corporations, industry, and

**Table 5.3** U.S. AAU governing board member ties to firms by gender, 2010.

| | Female board members | Male board members | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total number of firm ties | 207 | 1356 | 1563 |
| Average number of ties per trustee | 0.44 | 0.97 | 0.84 |
| Average number of ties per firm | 0.16 | 1.05 | 1.21 |
| Maximum number of ties per firm | 3 | 6 | 7 |
| Minimum number of ties per firm | 0 | 0 | 1 |

technology at universities emphasizing business and STEM fields, which are currently prioritized in U.S. higher education (Wright 2011).

Second, the lack of female board members at influential corporations, as well as the prevalence of male "super connector" board trustees (connected to multiple corporations or universities), suggests that equality at the postsecondary board table is unlikely to occur soon. Given the strong connections between trustee board membership at AAU institutions and S&P corporations (Mathies and Slaughter 2013; Slaughter et al. 2014), there may be a systemic lack of women whom universities see as qualified to join their boards. As such, influential females on corporate boards are likely stretched very thinly across multiple responsibilities, and those reaching college and university board membership may lack predecessors and mentors to guide them through their tenure. Within university boards, most decisions are made at the committee level, with the few women on these boards clustering in less influential committees (Twale and Burley 2003; Glazer-Raymo 2008; Wright 2011). Previous research has found that women are less likely to serve on the powerful executive/audit (21% female membership, on average), budget and finance (21%), and compensation committees (23%), and are more likely to serve on academic or student affairs and education policy committees (31%) (Wright 2011). Others suggest the most critical decisions are not being negotiated around the boardroom table, but rather on golf courses and in country club dining rooms where women are not present – termed the "BOGSAT" phenomenon, representing "a bunch of guys sitting around a table" (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2006; Wright 2011). The exclusion of women in these channels of informal networking remains a critical aspect of corporate culture, likely preventing them from truly joining the ranks of corporate and university leadership.

Finally, longstanding customs, communication standards, and norms of both corporate and university boards continue to undermine the growth of female representation in these arenas. Women elevated to corporate board membership are typically expected to assimilate into White male culture, demonstrating that they are "one of the boys" (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2006, p. 53) while also simultaneously remaining feminine. As Glazer-Raymo (2008) writes:

> For women seeking leadership positions, the strategy has long been playing by the rules of the game (whether or not they have had a voice in making those rules) and learning how to maneuver around the barriers that often deter their advancement. (p. 206)

However, many remain excluded from the informal yet critical social networks to which influential men belong (e.g. clubs and golf courses), where one participates in

off-record conversations that influence board business and drive leadership decisions (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2006).

## Moving Forward

While our dataset specifically focused on members of the AAU, these institutions often represent the institutional ideal to which many others strive, suggesting broader implications for university decision-making and leadership. Because boards play a central role in the development of strategic plans and selection and evaluation of college presidents, underrepresentation of women can have notable trickle-down effects at other key areas within an institution. For instance, research has suggested that institutions with females in key leadership positions have greater success at increasing female representation in the faculty and in upper-level administrative positions (Michael et al. 2001; Glazer-Raymo 2008; Ehrenberg et al. 2012). Thus, the prevalence of female board members may have a critical impact on institutional environment and culture, whether by offering female students greater opportunities to access successful female mentors, providing more diverse academic perspectives in the classroom, or combating stereotypical views of women. Given the changing demographics of students pursuing postsecondary education, this may be particularly critical for the future of American higher education.

In addition to shaping the student experience and personnel on campus, gender representation on governing boards also influences diverse perspectives, impacting long-term decision-making and planning. Drawing on research on corporate boards, studies have noted that gender diversity allows organizations to more effectively "represent all shareholders" (Biggins 1999) and improve critical thinking and innovation (Mattis 2000; van der Walt and Ingley 2003). A recent study even suggested corporations with more balanced gender diversity adopt more "green" policies and are less likely to be sued for environmental law violations (Liu 2018). Though the context in these studies differs from the higher education sector, findings suggest potential benefits of having diverse perspectives guiding decision-making.

While this chapter focused on improving cisgender representation on governing boards, higher education must also be cognizant of and consider the inclusion of non-cisgender individuals on overseeing agencies. As higher education serves as an arena for the personal growth of students, it is critical that representation extends beyond outdated conceptualizations of gender and attempts to become as inclusionary as possible. In fact, considering the growing literature underscoring the marginalization of this population (Pryor 2015; Nicolazzo 2017), representation of non-cisgender board members may be even more critical given the growing (albeit slow) improvement of female representation. As previously discussed, however, representation goes beyond tokenism and necessitates cultural shifts that suggest a diversity of perspectives is both welcomed and considered; this is especially critical for the non-cisgender population, which has historically been marginalized.

Ultimately, there remains a limited understanding of how gender representation on governing boards influences other areas of higher education. Could an increase in the number of female governing board members alter policy decisions across academic departments? Does a more gender-balanced board increase the likelihood of better funding for Title IX resources? How are non-cisgender perspectives considered on non-gender-diverse boards, if at all? These questions, and many more, merit further

analysis and require a broader understanding of the influence of governing boards on institutional behaviors, which is currently lacking. Given the connections between corporate board membership, university governing boards, and the changing demographics of today's U.S. university, it seems particularly critical that postsecondary researchers, policymakers, and institutional leaders remain attuned to the appointment, mentorship, and continued cultivation of governing board members. Absent this as an institutional priority, Wright's (2011) words will continue to remain true: "Higher Education remains a male-dominated endeavor even while it is becoming a female-dominated structure" (p. 135).

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## Note

1 Due to data limitations, we focus on cisgender representation on governing boards for our analysis and discussion in this chapter. We discuss non-cisgender board representation in the Conclusion, though data on this topic are notably limited, and empirical work even more so.

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