

The Future of the Field: Psychology at Yale

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Psychology has become one of the most popular undergraduate majors in universities and at Yale. Funding for psychological research has expanded substantially in the past decade. This has required hiring more psychology teachers and researchers. However, most of the new positions created have been lecturer, postdoctoral, or research scientist positions. At Yale, the number of psychology faculty has remained roughly constant for the past 15 years (see figure 1).

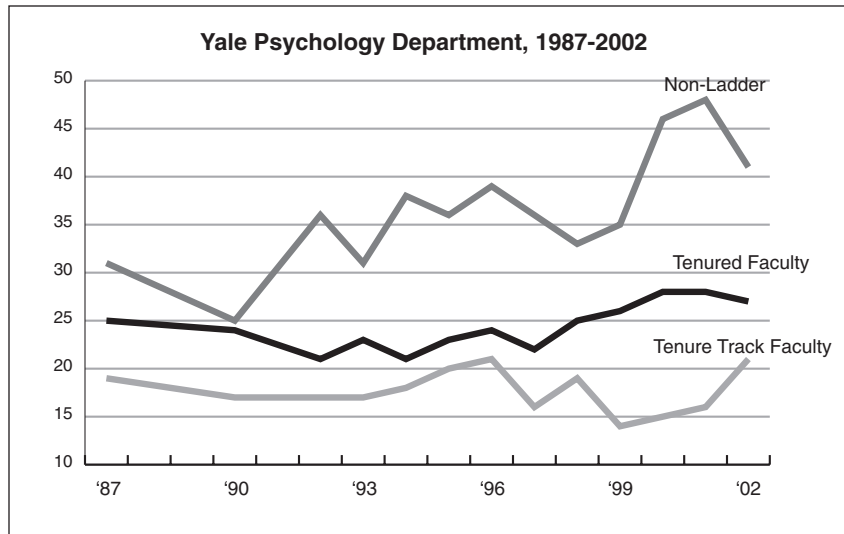


Figure 1: "Tenured Faculty" and "Tenure-track faculty" include all faculty with a primary or a joint affiliation with the Yale psychology department. "Non-ladder" includes only lecturers, postdocs, or research scientists whose primary affiliation is with the Yale psychology department.

Lecturers are appointed on an annual as-needed basis to teach required courses to Yale undergraduates or graduate students. The vast majority of Yale's research psychologists are funded by soft money in the form of research grants, whose reliability is becoming increasingly tenuous as granting agencies feel the financial crunch of our changing economy and as competition for funding continues to increase. At Yale, 46% of the PhD psychologists serve as lecturers, postdocs, or research scientists, and hence do not have a pathway that leads onto the tenure track ladder.

Women are disproportionately represented in these non-ladder positions, as seen in data from the Yale Psychology Department (Figure 2) and from psychology departments across the U.S. (Figure 3).

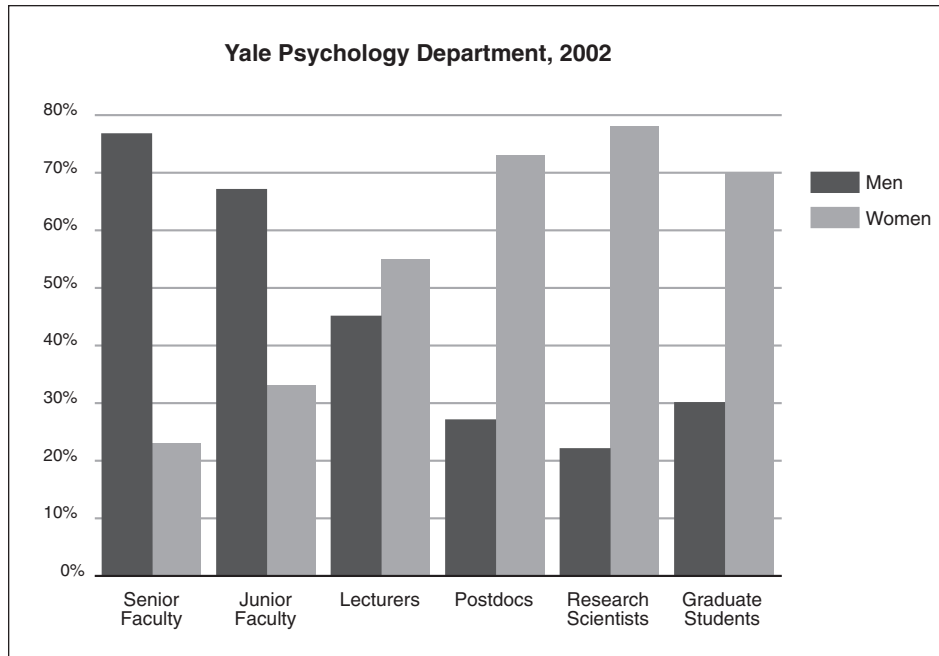


Figure 2: Includes only faculty whose primary affiliation is in the psychology department.

At Yale, only 23% of the senior faculty and 33% of the junior faculty are women. In contrast, 73% of postdocs and 78% of research scientists are women.

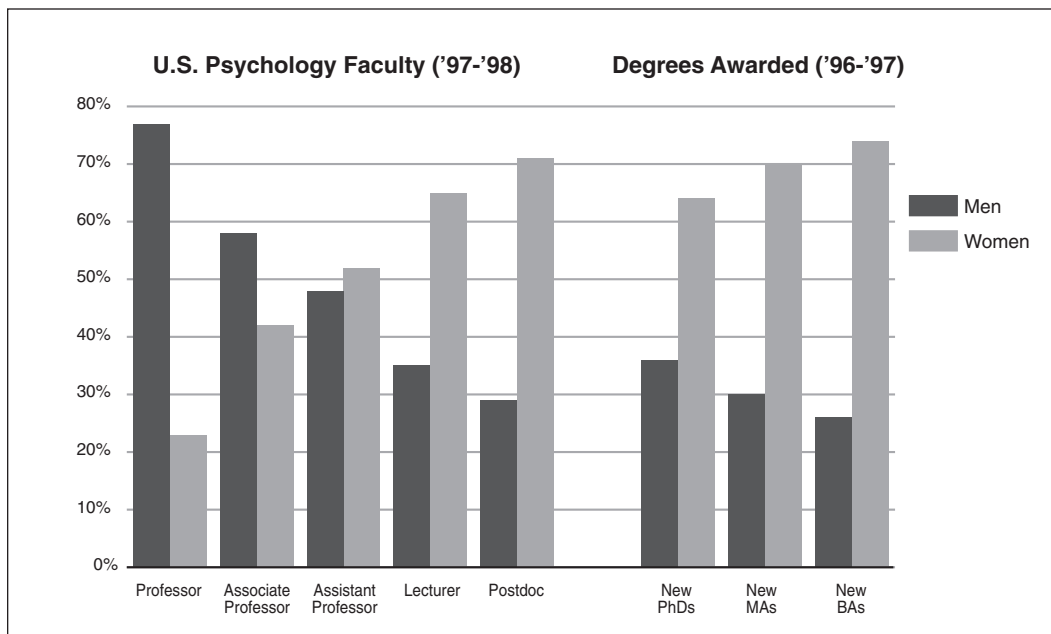


Figure 3

Nationwide, the gender gap is equally pronounced: 77% of tenured faculty are men, but 71% of postdocs are women. Overall, in U.S. psychology departments, the pattern holds that the more prestigious the position, the less women are represented in that position.

Examining the students of psychology in Figure 3, we see that the overwhelming majority of recent degree recipients in psychology were women: fully 64% of recent PhDs.

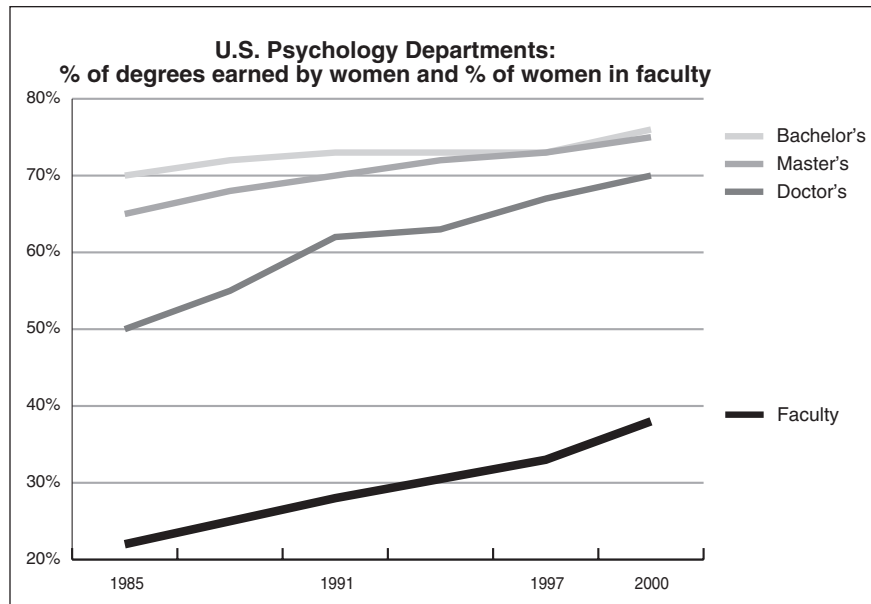


Figure 4

Conventional wisdom says that time will solve these problems, but the recent creation of non-ladder positions can siphon off many of the most recent women graduates, allowing men to continue dominating the ranks of the faculty. Figure 4 shows indeed that, although women have made up more than a majority of PhD graduates in psychology since 1985, women still made up only 38% of full-time faculty in 2000.

So where are the women with PhDs in psychology? Many are taking the most recently created academic positions: postdocs, research scientists, and lecturers. The trend to hire more teachers and researchers off the tenure track is a national phenomenon that exists not just in psychology, but in all academic fields. Unfortunately, new PhDs (in psychology, the majority of whom are women) are disproportionately affected by this trend toward less job security, less independence, and less prestige.

There are three possible responses to these trends:

- Wait to see if the problems correct themselves, and focus on your own career.
- Work individually to improve local hiring and retention issues.
- Work collectively to change the economic forces that shape today's Academy.

Increasingly, university teachers and researchers are deciding to unionize, both to fix specific issues and to earn themselves an effective institutional voice:

- Issues

Unionized academics have won contracts which have brought sweeping changes in wages, health care coverage, English language training for international teachers and researchers, teacher training, limits on class sizes, transparent grievance procedures, support for child care, intellectual property protections, and even job security for part-time faculty.

- An institutional voice

A union allows graduate teachers and researchers to negotiate with the university collectively, rather than only individually. This forces the university to pay attention to our priorities, ensuring the highest quality teaching and research, as well as protecting our own academic futures.

As more students enroll in psychology programs and grant funding becomes more critical to psychological research, the need for the university to listen to its teachers and researchers is likewise magnified. Universities become better when the people doing the teaching and research have a say in the future of the institution. Working together with faculty and administrators, we can make Yale University and Yale's psychology department the best in the nation.

References

Figure 1. Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Bulletin of Yale University, select years.
Yale Psychology Department Records.

Figure 2. Yale Psychology Department Records.

Figure 3. U.S. Department of Education. *Digest of Education Statistics, 1999*, NCES 2000-031, by Thomas D. Snyder, et al. Washington, D.C.: 2000, p. 319. American Psychological Association Faculty Salary Survey, 1999-2000. APA Research Office, 1999 Doctorate Employment Survey.

Figure 4. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey. APA Faculty Salary Surveys, select years