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GUEST EDITORIAL

Lessons in Notoriety—what dentistry can learn from RBG

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg faced discrimination on the basis of sex at every stage of her career, but that did not stop her or her fight for gender equality. Justice Ginsburg, once 1 of 9 women in a class of 500 at Harvard Law School, was the first woman to be tenured at Columbia Law School[1] and became the second female justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.[2] Through the trajectory of her career she gave women of all colors, ethnicities, and national origins the power to become the firsts and seconds in their careers to hold positions that were previously dominated by men. When asked when there would be enough women on the Supreme Court, the late Justice famously responded, "When there are 9. There'd been 9 men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that.[3]" Though Justice Ginsberg was directly responding to a question about the Supreme Court, her response may have indirectly referred to the multitude of other industries with male-dominated leadership, the least of which is certainly not dentistry. With her recent passing it's important, now more than ever, that we continue her legacy and push for more female representation in organized dental leadership and higher academic ranks.

1 | FEMALES ARE STILL UNDERREPRESENTED IN DENTAL EDUCATION

Today, there are 68 accredited dental schools in the United States[4] and of those 68, only 14 have women holding the Dean of School position. The statistics are no better in other dental organizations. In 1991, Dr. Geraldine Morrow became the first female to serve as president of the American Dental Association (ADA). Since its founding in 1859, there have been 157 presidents of the ADA and only 4 of them have been women.[5] In 2013, in its 114-year history of the association, Dr. Gayle Glenn became the first female president of the American Association of Orthodontics.[6] Up until 2018, no woman served as president of the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, until Dr. Stephanie Drew became the 26th president,[7] and no woman has yet served as the first female president of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Interestingly, a little more than half of practicing pediatric dentists are women—in 2016, 51.8%[8] of pediatric dentists were female; 52% in 2017, and in the 2018-19 academic year, 67% of pediatric dental residents were female.[9] While jarring, this statistic is not surprising, and it causes the words of the late Justice to resonate stronger than ever. "Nobody's ever raised a question" about the fact that women have been virtually excluded from leadership positions in American dental organizations. It is time to acknowledge and address the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and shift the narrative.

With that said, there has been progress in some areas–and dental school seems to be at the forefront of this progress. Dentistry, like many institutions in the United States, began as a gendered profession that was dominated by men. Women represented 2% of entering classes in dental school.[10] Today, 29% of working dentists are female[11] and more women are graduating than ever: In 1978, 11.2% of dental school graduates were female; 27.6% in 1988; 38.4% in 1998; 44.3% in 2008; and in 2018, 49.7% of dentistry schools' graduating classes were female.[4] This is promising, but it is not enough. While more women are graduating now than ever, the trend is much slower for women in leadership positions. In 2018, women in the US held nearly half (49.7%) of all tenure-track positions, and just 39.3% of tenured positions.[12] According to the American Association of University Professors, in 2008–09 20.7% of women nationally held the title of professor, while in 2018–19 it was 22.4%.[13] The representation of women in higher ranks in dentistry is quite frankly disappointing compared to the amount of women graduating dental school.

2 | WOMEN STILL FACE CHALLENGES

In 1975, Dr. Jeanne C. Sinkford, who held both a DDS and a PhD, became the first female dean of a dental school.[14] In an *Ebony* article, Dr. Sinkford stated "It takes a lot for a woman to be in a top position, particularly in a male profession. You have to be better to be accepted as equal."[15] While there has been progress since 1975, it has not been nearly enough.

It is essential that we address the barriers they face. In fact, with each step towards the tenure-track and academic leadership hierarchy, female representation decreases,

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even in fields that have had a large proportion of women doctorates for 30 years.[16] It's not a lack of education that is preventing their access to and advancement in leadership. In our systematic search of dental school websites, we evaluated dental school deans based on gender and degree; Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Masters degree (MS), and others (JD, DMS, FACP, D.H.Ed, FACD, DMedSc, DrPH, BDS, Cert. Prosthodontics, DrMEdDent, EdD, MRCD(C)). We found, among US dental school deans, 28.57% of women held a PhD; 64.28% held an MS; and 14.28% had other degrees. Among their male counterparts, 22.22% held PhD's; 37% held MS; and 27.7% held other degrees. It is interesting that a larger proportion of women pursued an MS before PhD compared to men. In addition to our findings, existing research shows that despite the Equal Pay Act, the gender pay gap looms large over female leadership positions—when they are afforded.[17]

When Justice Ginsburg began her legal career, women were, by law, not afforded the same rights as men. She spent more than a decade fighting on behalf of clients to achieve equality under the law. With the legal barriers for women's equal access to rights broken down by the late Justice and other trailblazers, the threat is no longer one that can be eliminated through legislative action or a sweeping Supreme Court opinion. It is invisible, like a glass ceiling. Multiple studies have shown that women feel less welcome and supported in their work environments than do men.[18,19] One study states that significantly more women (28.7%) than men (6.6%) reported that they had experienced gender bias in professional advancement.[20] Unfortunately, the solution to this is not hiring more women. There needs to be an evaluation of the environment and individual biases within institutions and work environments.

If we are to succeed in increasing the number of women in leadership positions, then it is important to acknowledge and embrace the idea that men and women tend to have different leadership styles. Because dentistry began as a male-dominated profession, leadership in our profession may have been defined using male behavior, and that standard was set as the standard for effective leadership. Men see leadership as leading and have a linear thought process, while women see it as facilitating and have a multivariate and multidimensional thought process.[21] Additionally, women embrace relationships, sharing, and process, but men focus on completing tasks, achieving goals, hoarding of information, and winning.[22] Both styles can be successful, depending on the leading individual's abilities. Lastly, if a woman does conform to the style of male leadership that is the standard, she is seen as not feminine enough.[23] If a woman is assertive, she is seen as too tough and not likable or not feminine, while if she is too compassionate, she is seen as soft and not a leader.[23] Regardless of a woman's capacity as a leader, it is difficult to separate it from her image as a leader.

If we continue to measure female leadership capabilities to that of men, we will continue to move at a snail's pace. Nobody has ever lost from embracing a well-rounded leadership team. Per Boatman et al.,[24] "Having a better balance of women in top leadership positions can mean a more diverse team of leaders with different perspectives and a greater ability to contribute new ideas." Justice Ginsberg's leadership style shows the value of scholarly preparation and perseverance.

3 | BIOLOGY CAN BE UNFORGIVING

The challenge becomes even more significant when women become mothers. In Mason et al.'s "Do Babies Matter?" article, women who have a child within 5 years of being awarded a PhD were shown to be far less likely to achieve a tenured faculty position than men with a child in the same time frame.[25] In a 2009 study, they revealed that 3.1% of dental schools did not offer paid maternity or paternity leave, 13.3% did not offer automatically delayed "tenure clock" with childbirth or adoption, and 21.9% did not offer dual career appointments.[26] In 2002, Hewlett found that 43% of women faculty have the highest rate of childlessness of any profession.[27] Another study in 2012 found that female faculty are less likely to be married or have a partner (69.3% women v. 90% men) or to have children (57% v. 87.9%) and are more likely to have fewer children (1.14 v. 2.1 children).[28] Women should not have to choose between having children and being successful in their career, men do not. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Labor found that 89% of men in senior positions are currently married while only 63% of women presidents are married.[29] While some women choose not to have children or get married for various reasons, it was their choice and not one that they were forced to make because of the penalties of an unforgiving institution.

Furthermore, as stated by Carnes et al., women bear the primary responsibility for child care and housework and deal with competing time pressures of professional productivity and family care, both of which negatively affect women.[30] It makes your job a whole lot easier when you get to be the kind of employee that gets to work without interruption and your job is the only thing you have to worry about—because you have a partner who is taking care of everything outside of that job.[31,32]

Justice Ginsburg often recounted her own experience with this disproportionate pressure on mothers. When her son was in grade school, she received frequent demands from school administrators to meet and discuss his alleged misbehavior. One such day, she recalls, "I had stayed up

all night the night before, and I said to the principal, "This child has 2 parents. Please alternate calls."“ Not surprisingly, the calls dwindled after that. Apparently, very few of their son's misdeeds were serious enough to contact a busy father over.[33]

4 | CONCLUSION

Justice Ginsburg spent the better part of her life fighting for a better future for American women and other less represented groups. The fight for more female representation needs to align with a fight for all groups that have been historically discriminated against. We owe it to her to continue her legacy and ensure that the future for female dentists is not just more equitable, but equitable even at the cost of notoriety. This means using the power of dissent confidently. Finally, more female representation unquestionably implies gains socially, economically, and in health care.[34] Society benefits from having women in leadership positions, as Justice Ginsberg's legacy has shown.

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