



WHITE PAPER

Women in eLearning

Continuing the Conversation

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What's in This White Paper?

This white paper continues the Guild-sponsored conversation around the important topic of women in eLearning. Our goal is to provide our global members with valuable research insights and also to create momentum for upcoming Guild events, publications, and conversations on this topic in 2017 and beyond.

The conversation began with a panel discussion moderated by Julie Dirksen at *DevLearn 2014 Conference & Expo*. It continued into 2015 with a series of articles in *Learning Solutions Magazine*, as well as more live discussion at *Learning Solutions 2015 Conference & Expo*.

In Part 1 of this white paper, eLearning author, educator, and business writing coach Cecilia Munzenmaier gathers the most recent research on women in eLearning and provides a framework for launching additional Guild-sponsored conversations on this topic during 2017. In Part 2, Sharon Vipond provides a snapshot of 2017 salary survey data that helps us better understand what we know about women in the field. And in Part 3, Julie Dirksen, award-winning author and instructional strategist, contributes an updated assessment of “where we are now” in terms of women within the eLearning field.

In addition, we asked eight eLearning thought leaders to provide us with their practical, positive, and forward-looking insights. This was important because outreach and connection with thought leaders was one of the goals of this research effort. We not only wanted to hear from the best and brightest thinkers in our field, but also from those who have written on the subject of women in eLearning and have contributed substantial insights to this ongoing discussion.

In this white paper, you will learn:

- What current research tells us about gender bias in the larger workforce, as well as within the eLearning field
- Why gender bias is a specific concern for learning leaders and practitioners
- What we can do, as both individuals and organizations, to help eliminate gender bias in eLearning
- What snapshot data from the 2017 salary survey reveals about women in The eLearning Guild's global community, and what gender data comparisons can be made on the basis of education level, years of industry experience, job focus, job level, and tenure in current position
- Insights and advice that industry thought leaders provided in response to the following questions:
 - As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?
 - What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?
 - What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

Also included are extensive resources from the Guild as well as external sources that provide a solid base of reference on the topic of women in eLearning.

Introduction

“A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult.”

—Melinda Gates

The eLearning Guild has been a strong promoter of conversations around the important topic of women in eLearning. These conversations began with a panel discussion moderated by Julie Dirksen at *DevLearn 2014 Conference & Expo*, and they continued into 2015 with a series of articles¹ in *Learning Solutions Magazine*, as well as more live discussion at *Learning Solutions 2015 Conference & Expo*.

The eLearning Guild publishes an annual salary and compensation report that includes description and analysis of gender-based pay data. The Guild also follows closely the conversations around the gender pay gap in eLearning, as well as disparities in the larger workplace setting. As we [stated](#) in early 2016:

With publication of the [2016 US eLearning Salary & Compensation Report](#), the gender pay gap continues to be a highly controversial topic, as it was for last year’s report. When we did our 2015 survey, a large number of salary report readers said they wanted more commentary and research about gender pay differences in a future report, while others said gender was not an issue for them and they did not want more discussion of that topic. Our sense was that we should include more research and information about this important topic in this year’s report and other Guild publications.²

As [Julie Dirksen](#) has observed, eLearning professionals “need to initiate and promote more conversation” about this topic, and also “identify opportunities to redress disparities in positive ways.”³ The two goals of *conversation* and *opportunities* are central to this white paper. The third goal was to present our research and analysis in positive ways that pointed toward solutions.

¹All of these articles are included in the Resources chapter at the end of this paper.

²Vipond, “Research Spotlight: The Gender Pay Gap in eLearning.”

³Dirksen, “Women in the eLearning Field: Beginning a Conversation.”

We begin our conversation with an insightful quote from Aisha Taylor, one of our thought leaders whom you will meet later in this paper:

People are looking for a quick fix to gender issues. No one wants to talk about it because it's awkward and uncomfortable. You can't just make everything pink or create policies that include one woman in every third photo. Fixing these issues is something that will happen over time as we create environments and workspaces where people feel comfortable to raise the issues without retaliation or criticism.

Let's now look at what current research tells us about gender bias and gender stereotypes, and why these topics matter to eLearning practitioners.

Part 1: What Research Tells Us About Gender Bias

Conversations about gender equity can be difficult, but we can start from two areas of consensus established by a growing body of research. First, Americans are increasingly willing to believe women are competent and to accept them as leaders. Second, patterns of gender inequity do exist, but they persist because of our mental models, not because of a deliberate intent to hold women back.

Our mental models are so ingrained and so powerful that they are hard to resist. You can test this for yourself.

Think of a genius, any genius.

Did you think of Albert Einstein, Galileo, or Louis Pasteur? Or did your mind flash to Marie Curie, Maria Mayer, or Rita Levi-Montalcini?

If you're like most people, the geniuses who came to mind were male.⁴

You probably recognized Marie Curie, who became famous for her pioneering work with radium. But Maria Mayer and Rita Levi-Montalcini, both Nobel Prize winners, are less well known.⁵

Why is it that most people associate the word *genius* with men?

The answer lies in *schemas*, mental shortcuts that our brain uses to make rapid judgments. Schemas are efficient. When we meet a stranger, it takes only a tenth of a second to decide whether we trust them.⁶

Schemas allow us to recognize patterns without having taken time to process the details. If a ball rolls into a residential street, an experienced driver anticipates that a child may come chasing after it. The driver can prepare to brake before the child even comes into view. This schema allows the driver to react quickly to a possible emergency.

The problem is this: To be quick, schemas have to be unconscious. And that means that, no matter what we believe about gender equality, our behavior may be influenced as much by stereotypes as by our conscious values.

⁴Elmore and Luna-Lucero, "Light Bulbs or Seeds? How Metaphors for Ideas Influence Judgments About Genius."

⁵Mayer proposed the nuclear shell model of atomic structure. Levi-Montalcini co-discovered human nerve growth factor (NGF).

⁶Willis and Todorov, "First Impressions: Making Up Your Mind After a 100-Ms Exposure to a Face."

Your Bias Isn't Showing

Like most of us, [Kristen Pressner](#) assumed she could outsmart any unconscious bias. As an HR executive, she has gone through training to avoid discrimination in hiring. She has earned international recognition as a woman leader. Yet she caught herself responding differently to a male and female employee who each requested a salary review. She agreed to review the male employee's salary without a second thought, but assumed that the woman's compensation was probably adequate.

The experience led her to ask herself, "Might I be biased and not even know it?" Pressner realized that she had unconsciously assumed that men take charge and women take care, even though she herself is the primary earner for her family of six. "This is what we've been mostly exposed to throughout our lives, and our brains will do the rest, unconsciously redirecting us into those patterns" that they recognize, she said in a 2016 TEDx talk.⁷

Reflecting on her insight in a *Forbes* interview, Pressner recalled, "It was one of the most humbling moments of my life to realize that I could have a bias that was counter to everything that I stand for."⁸

Research confirms that she is not alone. Virtually everyone has a "bias blind spot."⁹ Sometimes the blind spot comes from our refusal to acknowledge the possibility of bias.¹⁰ But in the United States, gender bias is built into our culture in ways that are difficult to detect.

For example, men are generally taller than women. Predicting that a man is taller than a woman seems like a safe, and generally harmless, assumption. But researchers found that this schema distorted people's judgments. They showed their subjects photographs of men and women of equal height. The photographs included clues to help people judge the subjects' real height; for example, both men and women were shown standing in the same doorway. Despite the reference points, men were consistently judged to be taller than women. The researchers concluded that "objective judgments were consistently influenced by sex stereotypes."¹¹

⁷Pressner, *Are you biased? I am.*

⁸Caprino, "An International HR Leader Publicly and Bravely Admits Her Bias against Women Leaders."

⁹Rea, "Researchers Find Everyone Has a Bias Blind Spot."

¹⁰Urry, "Why bias holds women back."

¹¹Biernat, Manis, and Nelson, "Stereotypes and standards of judgment."

Mothers' judgments are not necessarily objective, but a study of mothers' estimates of their infants' crawling ability gives another example of how gender stereotypes can distort our observations. New York University researchers found that mothers underestimated their daughters' ability to crawl and overestimated their sons' motor coordination. In reality, the crawling ability of male and female infants in this experiment was the same.¹²

As we grow, gender stereotypes are subtly reinforced. For example, on family trips to a museum, parents tend to give more detailed answers to boys' questions about science.¹³ A study of Israeli students found that teachers graded anonymous math tests objectively, but when students' names were available, instructors gave girls less credit for partial answers and showing their work.¹⁴

By the time students reach adulthood, they have internalized these cultural biases. In a study, male college students consistently rated other male students' knowledge of biology higher than that of female classmates. For a female student to be rated as knowledgeable, "her performance would need to be over three-quarters of a GPA point higher than the male's," writes lead author Daniel Grunspan.¹⁵ Co-author Sarah Eddy comments in a separate article, "That's like believing a male with a B and a female with an A have the same ability."¹⁶

The tendency to underrate women's performance is so ingrained that Anne Boring's team of researchers concluded that academic personnel decisions should not be based on student evaluations because the ratings are so biased against female instructors. Although students learned more from female instructors, both male and female students consistently gave higher marks to their male instructors.¹⁷

The bias isn't confined to the classroom. A study of female musicians found that before 1970, most top symphony orchestras were over 90 percent male.¹⁸ "After the introduction of blind auditions (in which the judges can't see the gender of the musicians playing), women shot up to nearly 40 percent of orchestras," Adam Galinsky and Maurice Schweitzer write.¹⁹

¹²Mondschein, Adolph, and Tamis-LeMonda, "Gender Bias in Mothers' Expectations about Infant Crawling."

¹³Crowley, et al, "Parents Explain More Often to Boys Than to Girls During Shared Scientific Thinking."

¹⁴Crawford, "But I'm Not Sexist—Right?"

¹⁵Grunspan, et al, "Males Under-Estimate Academic Performance of Their Female Peers in Undergraduate Biology Classrooms."

¹⁶Bach, "Male biology students consistently underestimate female peers, study finds."

¹⁷Boring, Ottoboni, and Stark, "Student evaluations of teaching (mostly) do not measure teaching effectiveness."

¹⁸Goldin and Rouse, "Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of 'Blind' Auditions on Female Musicians."

¹⁹Galinsky and Schweitzer, "It's good to be the Queen ... but it's easier being the King."

Is the Problem Competence or Compensation?

The orchestra study is one of several suggesting the problem isn't that women are less competent than men. When Philip L. Roth and his associates analyzed objective job performance measures from field studies, they found that "females generally scored slightly higher than males."²⁰ However, men were consistently rated as having higher potential for promotion.

Even when women do move into higher positions, they often aren't compensated at the same level as men. The discrimination starts early, as shown in a 2012 study. Corinne Moss-Racusin and her team submitted applications for a laboratory manager position to science faculty. The applications were identical, except for the names: One applicant was female while the other was male. Reviewers consistently judged the female applicant to be less "hirable" than the male. If they did extend a job offer, the starting salary they offered the woman was typically 13 percent lower than their offer to the man. The female applicant also received fewer opportunities for mentoring to advance her career.²¹

After that unequal start, women continue to be at a disadvantage throughout their careers. Fewer women make it onto the first rung of the management ladder.²² *Women in the Workplace 2016*, a comprehensive study by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org, reports that men are promoted faster than women and their promotion rates are 30 percent higher.²³ In another meta-analysis, Aparna Joshi and her co-authors asked, "When can women close the gap?" They concluded: "A particularly striking pattern in our findings is that, in highly prestigious occupations, women did not perform at lower levels than men, and yet men were rewarded significantly higher than women."²⁴ People are increasingly recognizing women's competence as leaders, reports Olga Khazan, yet she quotes a researcher who says: "Future research needs to examine why women are seen as equally (or more) effective leaders than men, yet are not being rewarded in the same ways."²⁵

²⁰Roth, Purvis, and Bobko, "A Meta-Analysis of Gender Group Differences for Measures of Job Performance in Field Studies."

²¹Moss-Racusin, et al, "Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students."

²²Bono, et al, "Dropped on the Way to the Top: Gender and Management Derailment."

²³Yee, et al, *Women in the Workplace 2016*.

²⁴Joshi, Son, and Roh, "When Can Women Close the Gap? A Meta-Analytic Test of Sex Differences in Performance and Rewards."

²⁵Khazan, "Are People Becoming More Open to Female Leaders?"

One reason, according to a recent Catalyst report, is that women have fewer opportunities to work on “hot jobs”: projects with high visibility, profit-loss accountability, and international scope. Lead author Christine Silva and her co-authors found that both men and women had equal opportunities to lead projects. However, the projects led by men had bigger budgets and more than three times the number of team members. They also involved a higher level of risk to the company. The authors conclude that companies are not paying enough attention to providing high-potential women with equal access to jobs that could advance their careers.²⁶

Another explanation for the gender gap might be that women don’t ask for higher salaries. While it’s true that women often have less experience with negotiation than men, a recent study cast doubt on the “reluctant woman” theory. In Australia, which is the only country that systematically collects data on requests for raises, men who asked for raises received them 20 percent of the time. Women asked for raises as often as men, but only 16 percent of their requests succeeded. Co-author Andrew Oswald said, “Having seen these findings, I think we have to accept that there is some element of pure discrimination against women.”²⁷

In the United States, Hannah Bowles and co-authors found that “sometimes it does hurt to ask” for a higher salary. Women who attempted to negotiate a higher salary were considered less hireable, perhaps because they violated expectations that they would act like subordinates. “Men were significantly more inclined to work with nicer and less demanding women who accepted their compensation offers without comment than they were with those who attempted to negotiate for higher compensation,” the authors note, “even though they perceived women who spoke up to be just as competent as women who demurred.”²⁸ The study also found that some women were “disinclined” to work with anyone—male or female—who attempted to negotiate a higher salary.

Some do not accept the theory that women who violate cultural expectations about nice behavior face a backlash.²⁹ However, the study found that women who do not accept the first salary offered are less likely to be hired.³⁰

²⁶Silva, Carter, and Beninger, *Good Intentions, Imperfect Execution? Women Get Fewer of the “Hot Jobs” Needed to Advance.*

²⁷University of Warwick, “Women do ask for pay rises but don’t get them.”

²⁸Bowles, Babcock, and Lai, “Social incentives for gender differences in the propensity to initiate negotiations: Sometimes it does hurt to ask.”

²⁹Cooper, “For Women Leaders, Likability and Success Hardly Go Hand-in-Hand.”

³⁰Bowles, Babcock, and Lai.

This creates a double bind for women, according to Galinsky and Schweitzer. Women must act assertively to be competitive. But when they assert themselves by negotiating for a higher salary, they violate the prescriptive stereotype that they should be “warm, deferential, and undemanding” and are told they are “pushy” or “intimidating.”³¹ As a result, women are three times more likely than men to think their gender will make it harder to advance their careers, according to *Women in the Workplace 2016*.³²

Prescriptive stereotypes—expectations of what women *should* do—create an additional handicap when women internalize them. In an *Atlantic* article titled “The Confidence Gap,” authors Katty Kay and Claire Shipman quote professor Marilyn Davidson, who finds “massive differences” between what male and female students say they deserve to be earning in five years. The men, on average, think they will deserve \$80,000 a year, while the women think they will deserve \$64,000 per year. Women’s estimates are 20 percent lower than men’s.³³

Besides underestimating their worth, women tend to underestimate their performance. Brenda Major, a social psychologist, has repeated an experiment for years. She asks women and men to predict their performance on a series of tasks. Men tend to overestimate their abilities and their level of performance; women consistently underestimate both. In fact, men and women perform equally well.³⁴

The question of how gender stereotypes and confidence interact is difficult to research and complicated by factors like shifting attitudes toward women leaders. A recent study, *Girls Just Wanna Not Run*, shows how the interplay among parental encouragement, socialization to win, and self-perceived qualifications helps create a gender gap in the political ambitions of college students. When women run for political office, “they are just as likely as men to win,” according to study authors Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox. However, they are less likely to be encouraged to think about a career in politics, and “young women are less likely than young men to think they will be qualified to run for office, even once they are established in their careers.”

³¹Galinsky and Schweitzer, “It’s good to be the Queen ... but it’s easier being the King.”

³²Yee, et al, *Women in the Workplace 2016*.

³³Kay and Shipman, “The Confidence Gap.”

³⁴Ibid.

Self-doubt affects women more than men; men who thought they were not qualified or “might” be qualified were still more willing to consider running than women who felt the same. Among female college students, only 11 percent thought they would later be qualified to seek office, compared to 23 percent of the male students.³⁵ As a result, women are more reluctant than men to run for office, even though the Pew Research Center found that about three-quarters of Americans surveyed in 2015 believe men and women are equally qualified to hold political office.³⁶

Why Do Gender Stereotypes Matter?

Once we understand the power of schemas, we can accept researchers’ findings that gender gaps—whether in politics, in wages, or in positions of power—are not due to sustained malice against women. As neuroscientist Janet L. Crawford explains, “The most damaging source of inequality involves no conscious intent to hinder female success. All of us, male and female, are unconsciously gender biased. And these biases lead well-meaning men and women to act in ways that preserve the status quo without knowing they are doing so.”³⁷

This preservation of the status quo becomes part of the problem. A 2013 McKinsey survey found a wide discrepancy between the way men and women perceive the status quo. An overwhelming number of women—93 percent—agreed with this statement: “Even with equal skills and qualifications, women have much more difficulty reaching top-management positions.” Only 58 percent of men agreed, suggesting that the barriers to women’s advancement often go unrecognized.

This lack of male engagement and support is a significant factor in the continuing underrepresentation of women at the top, McKinsey researchers concluded.³⁸ The underrepresentation of women in science, Congress, and the C-suites—the status quo—is seen as normal. This perception then becomes the standard that shapes our unconscious assumptions about gender, performance, and power.

³⁵Lawless and Fox, *Girls Just Wanna Not Run: The Gender Gap in Young Americans’ Political Ambition*.

³⁶Parker, et al, *Women and Leadership: Public Says Women are Equally Qualified, but Barriers Persist*.

³⁷Crawford, “But I’m Not Sexist—Right?”

³⁸Devillard, Sancier-Sultan, and Werner, “Why gender diversity at the top remains a challenge.”

Where Are the Women Leaders?

According to the Center for American Progress:³⁹

- Women hold 52 percent of professional-level jobs in the United States
- They make up only 14.6 percent of executive officers
- They hold just under 17 percent of Fortune 500 board seats
- In law firms, over 45 percent of associates, but only 15 percent of equity partners, are women
- In advertising, only 3 percent of creative directors are women
- Among our 50 states, only five states—or 10 percent—have women governors⁴⁰
- At the state and federal level, women typically make up no more than 20 percent of legislators

A growing body of evidence documents that unequal opportunities and rewards make it difficult for women to advance their careers. Still, in the absence of any deliberate attempt to hold women back, is that really a problem for business?

Although people are increasingly familiar with statistics about the gender pay gap, some dispute or discount any discrepancy in wages.⁴¹ Even those who accept that a woman typically earns less than a man for the same work tend to estimate the impact primarily in terms of the effects on the individual woman or her family. Yet women's earnings affect everything from a woman's retirement security to her company's performance to her nation's development.

In the United States, for every dollar earned by a man, a woman typically earns 79 cents, according to the Joint Economic Committee of the US Congress. Over a lifetime, that could reduce a woman's earnings by more than \$500,000.⁴² This is one reason a higher percentage of women than men end up living in poverty after age 65. Many families depend on women's earnings for quality child care, housing, and health care.

³⁹Warner, "Fact Sheet: The Women's Leadership Gap."

⁴⁰This statistic was reported in 2014 and continues to hold true in early 2017.

⁴¹Vipond, "Research Spotlight: The Gender Pay Gap in eLearning."

⁴²Joint Economic Committee, *Gender Pay Inequality: Consequences for Women, Families and the Economy*.

Yet, over the past 30 years, the US economy grew by \$2 trillion thanks to women in the workforce.⁴³ Companies with at least three women board members see improved return on equity, return on sales, and return on invested capital, according to a Catalyst report.⁴⁴

“Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians,” McKinsey researchers write.⁴⁵

Increasing women’s and girls’ education contributes to higher economic growth. “Increased educational attainment accounts for about 50 percent of the economic growth in OECD⁴⁶ countries over the past 50 years,” according to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.⁴⁷

Harvard Business Review’s Avivah Wittenberg-Cox suggests companies that haven’t committed to gender balance are missing a massive economic opportunity. She exhorts: “Stop asking ‘What’s wrong with women that they’re not making it to the top?’ Start asking ‘What’s wrong with companies if they can’t retain and promote the majority of educated Americans, and can’t adequately satisfy the majority of US consumers?’”⁴⁸

What Makes Gender Bias a Concern for eLearning Practitioners?

The concern about companies’ inability to retain women has particular application to the eLearning industry. Women in technical professions are more likely to feel that they are isolated and don’t fit in, according to a Stanford University report, *Climbing the Technical Ladder*.⁴⁹ Though most women in technology report loving their jobs, this sense of isolation is one reason women leave careers in IT, engineering, and scientific research at much higher levels than men. Another source of attrition is midcareer women’s sense that they have fewer opportunities to advance than their male colleagues have. This loss of talent will make it difficult for technology-oriented companies to maintain their current rates of growth and remain competitive, according to Catherine Ashcraft and Sarah Blithe.⁵⁰

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Carter, et al, *The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women’s Representation on Boards*.

⁴⁵Hunt, Layton, and Prince, “Why diversity matters.”

⁴⁶OECD refers to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an intergovernmental organization with 35 member countries including the United States.

⁴⁷UN Commission on the Status of Women, “Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment.”

⁴⁸Wittenberg-Cox, “Why Focusing on the Gender Pay Gap Misses the Point.”

⁴⁹Simard, et al, *Climbing the Technical Ladder: Obstacles and Solutions for Mid-Level Women in Technology*.

⁵⁰Ashcraft and Blithe, *Women in IT: The Facts*.

In addition, eLearning professionals are in a unique position to either reinforce or debunk gender stereotypes. “Learning professionals are often viewed as the ‘teachers’ of the organization,” notes [Koreen Pagano](#).⁵¹

We can teach without knowing it through the gender roles we portray in the scenarios we write, says [Judy Katz](#).⁵² The images we choose can have tremendous power to model reality, writes [Trina Rimmer](#) in an article describing the difficulty of finding authentic images for a training module on human trafficking. “It’s up to us to use our design powers for the greater good—to shine light on all aspects of the human experience, particularly the darkest corners where learning can lead to real, positive change,” she says.⁵³

As Katz and Rimmer both suggest, relatively small changes can have a disproportionately large effect on the status quo. What can eLearning practitioners do to promote gender equity within our industry?

What Can We Do as Individuals?

- **Admit you may be biased.** Those who acknowledge they might be biased are less influenced by bias.⁵⁴ Those who resist evidence of gender bias are more likely to make biased decisions, according to Ian Handley and co-authors.⁵⁵
- **Reverse roles.** “If you dislike the behavior of a female employee,” suggest Galinsky and Schweitzer, “ask yourself if you would have reacted the same way if you had seen that behavior in a man.”⁵⁶
- **Do a “flip test.”** Pressner tests images or remarks for gender bias by switching genders. It may sound natural for a female police officer to say she enjoys her job because it gives her a chance to work with children; does the statement have the same impact when it’s attributed to a male officer?⁵⁷
- **Model diversity.** Crawford reports that G-rated films made from 2006 to 2009 were four times more likely to cast men than women in the roles of working professionals.⁵⁸ In reality, slightly over half of professional jobs in the US are held by women. Ask yourself: How well do the images and scenarios in my eLearning reflect gender diversity?

⁵¹Pagano, “The Gender Riddle in Learning and Development.”

⁵²Katz, “Gender Representation in eLearning.”

⁵³Rimmer, “The Lack of Diversity in Stock Images Hurts Your eLearning—and What to Do About It.”

⁵⁴Moss-Racusin, et al, “Can Evidence Impact Attitudes? Public Reactions to Evidence of Gender Bias in STEM Fields.”

⁵⁵Handley, et al, “Quality of evidence revealing subtle gender biases in science is in the eye of the beholder.”

⁵⁶Galinsky and Schweitzer, “It’s good to be the Queen ... but it’s easier being the King.”

⁵⁷Pressner, *Are you biased? I am.*

⁵⁸Crawford, “But I’m Not Sexist—Right?”

- **Test yourself.** Several [implicit-bias tests](#) are available at Harvard University's Project Implicit site.⁵⁹
- **Control "maninterrupters."** Women in the Obama White House used the technique of amplification to handle men who interrupted them during meetings. When a woman made a key point, another woman would repeat it and acknowledge the woman who made the contribution.⁶⁰
- **Call out bias.** [David Kelly gives an example](#) of how to challenge biased language respectfully in "Women in eLearning: Language, Gender Equality, and Leadership."

What Can We Do as Organizations?

- **Set clear performance standards.** This encourages equity in promotion decisions.⁶¹ It also discourages women's tendency to devalue their worth. "If your work is rejected for an obviously bad reason, such as 'it's because you're a woman,' you can simply dismiss the one who rejected you as biased and therefore not worth taking seriously. But if someone tells you that you are less competent, it's easy to accept as true," notes Ilana Yurkiewicz.⁶²
- **Mentor, then monitor.** Catalyst found that leadership programs don't increase the number of women leaders unless companies ensure that women have equal opportunities to fill "hot jobs."⁶³
- **Diversify your board.** Companies with stronger-than-average performance typically have three or more women on their boards, reports Catalyst.⁶⁴ On a related note, McKinsey calculated that racial diversity also benefits the bottom line: "In the United States, there is a linear relationship between racial and ethnic diversity and better financial performance: For every 10 percent increase in racial and ethnic diversity on the senior-executive team, earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) rise 0.8 percent."⁶⁵

⁵⁹As explained on the [project website](#), "Project Implicit is a nonprofit organization and international collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition—thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control. The goal of the organization is to educate the public about hidden biases and to provide a 'virtual laboratory' for collecting data on the Internet."

⁶⁰Gillis, "The Politics of Women in Leadership."

⁶¹Beninger, *High Potentials in Tech-Intensive Industries: The Gender Divide in Business Roles*; see also: Galinsky and Schweitzer, "It's good to be the Queen ... but it's easier being the King."

⁶²Yurkiewicz, "Study shows gender bias in science is real. Here's why it matters."

⁶³Silva, Carter, and Beninger, *Good Intentions, Imperfect Execution? Women Get Fewer of the "Hot Jobs" Needed to Advance*.

⁶⁴Parker, et al, *The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards*.

⁶⁵Hunt, Layton, and Prince, "Why diversity matters."

- **Create an inclusive culture.** “Inclusion is a choice. It is about making small shifts every day in our behaviors to help employees feel more included at work,” says Catalyst CEO Deborah Gillis.⁶⁶ Some of those choices are small but powerful: declining to laugh at a sexist joke, or ensuring your professional network is gender-diverse.⁶⁷ Others, like advocating for family leave policies and supporting the men and women who use them, have implications for employee satisfaction, turnover, and even a company’s stock price.⁶⁸
- **Make gender equity a priority.** McKinsey made little progress in recruiting female consultants until it set explicit, top-down gender goals in 2014. Within a year, the firm grew its percentage of female consultants by 5 percent.⁶⁹
- **Take advantage of critical mass.** In *Broad Influence*, Jay Newton-Small notes that when women make up between 20 and 30 percent of organizations, change begins to happen. “If numbers of women were lower than 20 percent, women’s voices weren’t heard: either they didn’t speak or men didn’t listen,” she writes.⁷⁰ In fields where women have achieved critical mass, she notes, they make things happen. On corporate boards, women have engaged the tough questions and mitigated risks. In the courts, they’ve developed “rocket dockets” to expedite child support cases and so reduced the rate of domestic abuse. In Congress, they’ve collaborated on high-effort, consensus-building strategies to end deadlocks over budget deals and emissions standards. To sum up the benefits of critical mass, Newton-Small quotes the founder of the National Women’s History Museum, Karen Staser: “A better world awaits the generation that absorbs what women and men have to share about life from a joint perspective. Together, all things are possible.”⁷¹

To achieve that better world, we need to continue the conversation about gender equity at all levels. “This is a problem we can’t procedure our way out of because it happens in our brains, and this is the society we grew up in,” says Joyce Bono, lead author of a study on managerial derailment. “We have to keep talking about it so we catch ourselves and our colleagues’ biases, and work together to reduce their negative effects on the mentorship and advancement of women.”⁷²

⁶⁶Catalyst, “Employee Experiences Matter: New Catalyst Report Explores Daily Workplace Realities of Inclusion and Exclusion.”

⁶⁷Catalyst, “Actions Men Can Take to Create an Inclusive Workplace.”

⁶⁸Kelly, et al, “Getting There from Here: Research on the Effects of Work-Family Initiatives on Work-Family Conflict and Business Outcomes.”

⁶⁹Barton, Devillard, and Hazelwood, “Gender equality: Taking stock of where we are.”

⁷⁰Newton-Small, *Broad Influence: How Women Are Changing the Way America Works*.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Quoted in: Martinovich, “How Subtle Biases Can Derail a Woman’s Career.” For study, see: Bono, et al, “Dropped on the Way to the Top: Gender and Management Derailment.”

Let's turn our attention to empirical data and learn more about the women who work in the eLearning profession, as revealed by a snapshot of results from the Guild's forthcoming 2017 salary and compensation report.

Part 2: What We Know About Women in eLearning

For more than a decade, The eLearning Guild's salary and compensation reports have been recognized as the industry's most trusted source of data on eLearning professionals' salary and compensation. In our [2015 salary report](#), we introduced new tools and resources for getting started on salary research and implementing a salary strategy that works for each individual. In our [2016 salary report](#), we focused on the gender pay gap and provided new and revised compensation planning scenarios.

This year, we introduced a new and more comprehensive salary and compensation survey and expanded our worldwide target audience for data collection. As in previous years, our goal was to help eLearning professionals and Guild members worldwide better understand and navigate the increasingly complex 2017 global salary and compensation landscape.

The data presented in this section represent an early snapshot of results from this year's compensation survey. As such, these data give us a current and detailed picture of women in eLearning—as compiled from the 2,623 survey responses submitted by Guild members and other interested individuals worldwide from September 2016 to December 2016. The entire body of results will be reported in our 2017 salary report, as well as in other topic-specific reports, to be published in early 2017.

Let's look at what these new data tell us about women in eLearning and explore gender comparisons for each of the following points:

- Highest education level attained, or highest earned degree
- Years of experience in the eLearning field (this also included the related fields of learning and development and human resources)
- Principal job focus within the eLearning, L&D, or HR field (e.g., instructional design, executive management, project management)
- Job level (e.g., individual contributor, manager/supervisor, professor, student/intern)
- Tenure in current position

In this section, we present female-specific data on these points and also provide a gender comparison of female and male data for each point.

Education Level

Education level attained—highest earned degree—has a substantial impact on average base salary, regardless of gender.

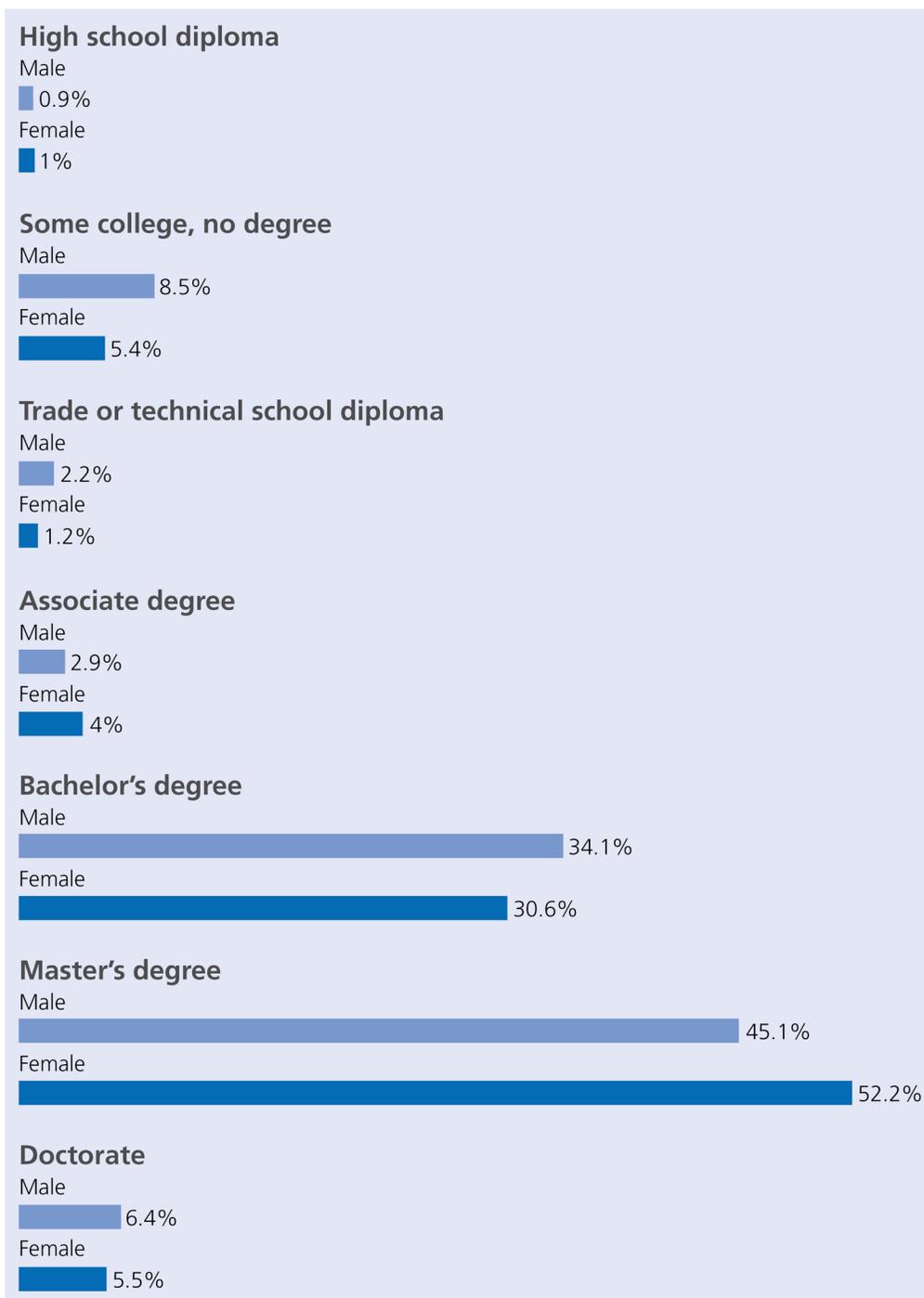
In 2015, we found that those holding a doctorate were paid an annual salary that averaged 23.7% higher than the (then) US national average of \$81,079, regardless of industry or public/private sector. In contrast, other graduate and undergraduate degree holders in 2015 had average salaries that ranged from 2.5% to 0.5% lower than the (then) national average. Somewhat surprisingly, holders of associate degrees earned *less* than those without a degree who had less than two years of higher education (at 8.6% and 4.1% below the 2015 US average, respectively).⁷³

In 2016, those holding doctorates were again paid a higher annual salary, but that salary was only 13.1% higher than the 2016 US national average of \$80,359. Already paid a lower annual salary than holders of a doctorate, those with master's degrees averaged only 0.85% more than the national average.⁷⁴

We will address the correlations between 2017 salary data and education level in our forthcoming salary report. In this report, however, we are primarily interested in gender comparison for level of degree attained. As shown in Figure 1, survey responses indicated that more than 30% of current practitioners have earned a bachelor's degree, and an even larger percentage also hold advanced degrees, including master's degrees and doctorates.

⁷³Vipond and Clarey, *2015 Global eLearning Salary & Compensation Report*.

⁷⁴Vipond and Smolen, *2016 US eLearning Salary & Compensation Report*.



Source: Guild Research, 2017

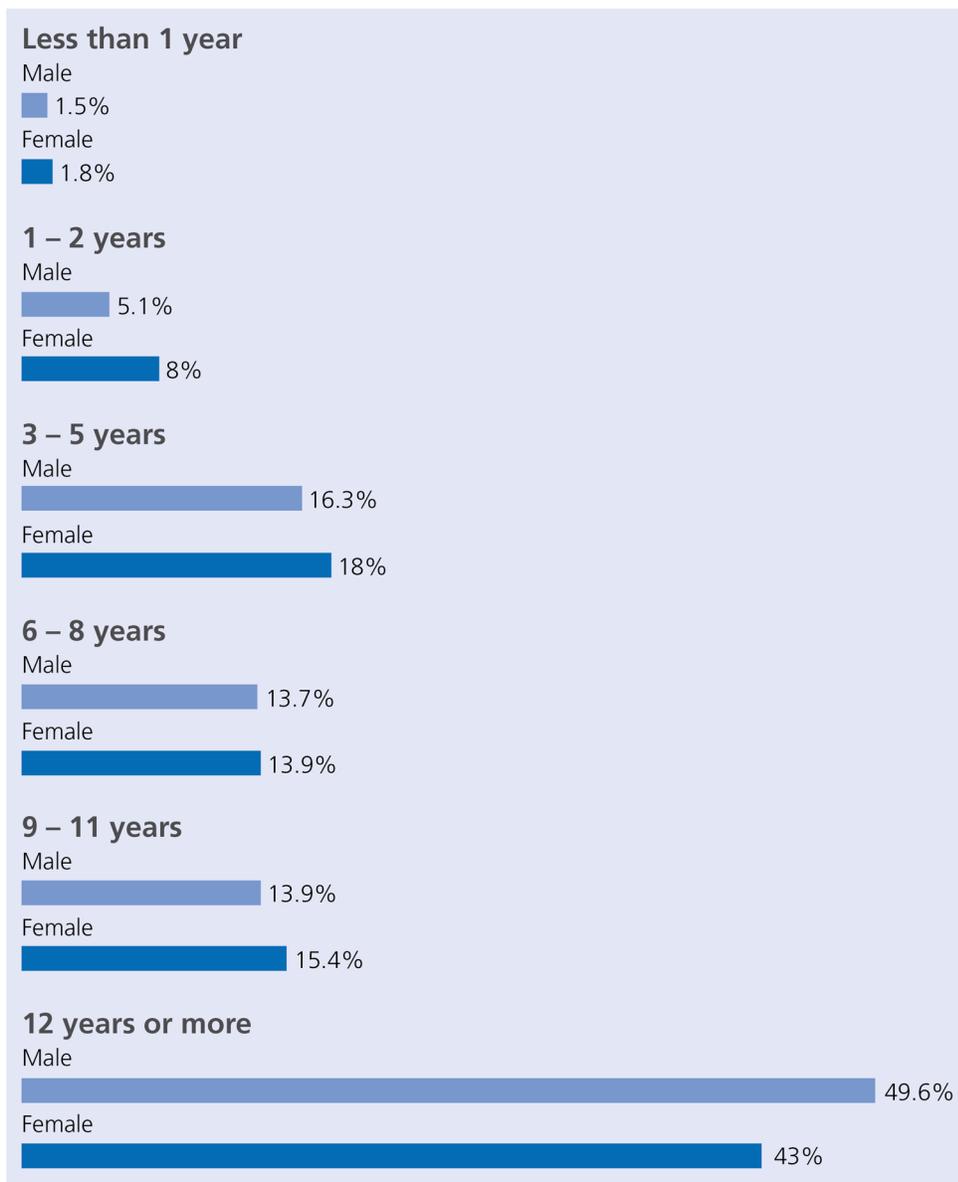
Figure 1: Gender comparison for highest level of education completed

More specifically, a significant percentage of female respondents hold master's degrees (52.2%), and this number exceeds the percentage of males holding the same type of degree (45.1%). The percentage of men holding doctorates (6.4%) is similar to that of women holding doctorates (5.5%).

Years of Experience

We had not asked about years of experience in the eLearning field (including L&D and HR) since our 2015 salary report. In 2016, we replaced that item with a different question about tenure in current position or "time in position" (see discussion of that item below).

In gathering data for the 2017 survey, we asked both questions in an effort to gain better insight into total years of eLearning experience in the field, as compared to tenure in a specific position (see Figure 6).



Source: Guild Research, 2017

Figure 2: Gender comparison of years of experience in the field

Survey results (Figure 2) indicate that we have a mature and experienced set of eLearning practitioners as our respondents. In all categories except “12 years or more,” female eLearning practitioners reported slightly more experience than their male counterparts, with the largest difference (2.9%) being in the category for one to two years of experience.

However, when we looked at those with 12 years or more of eLearning experience, we found that a higher percentage of male practitioners than their female counterparts fall into this category: 49.6% as compared to 43%.

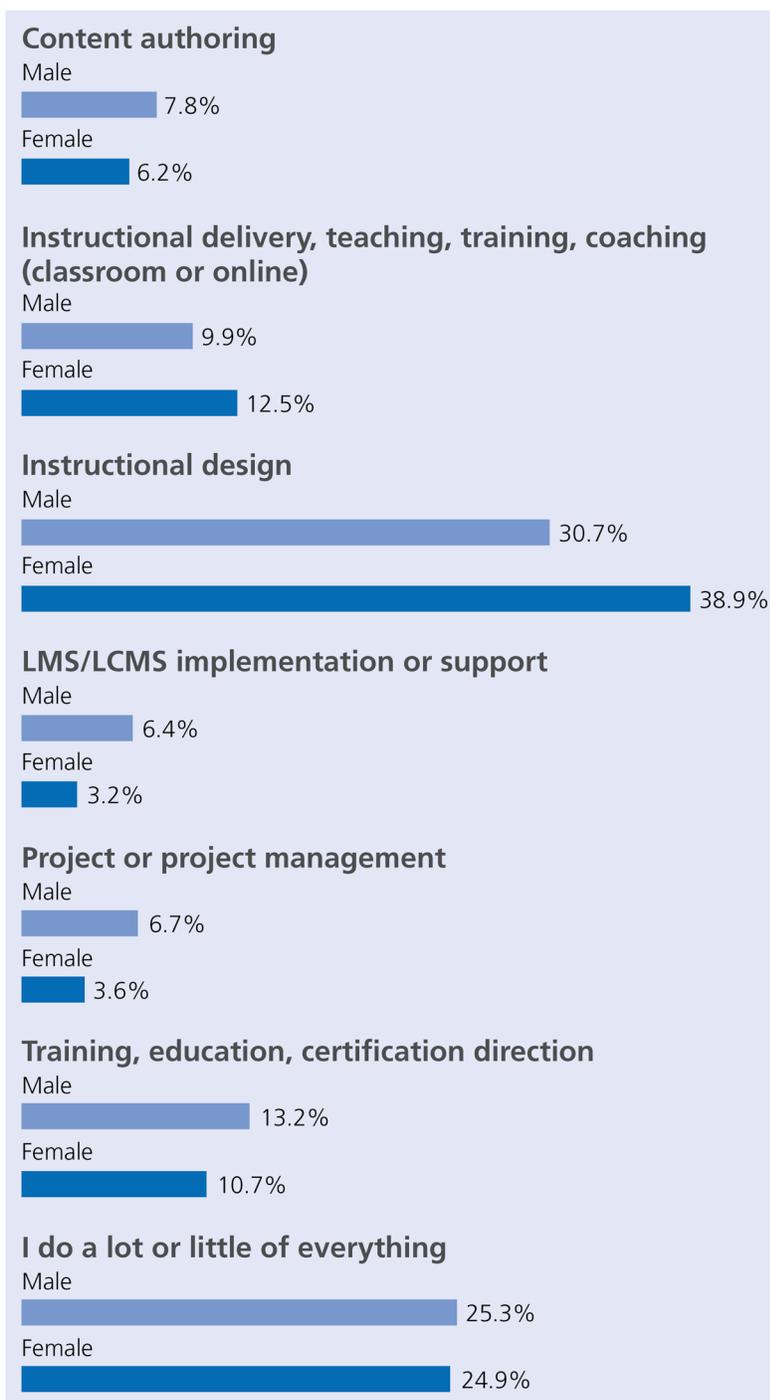
Principal Job Focus

As mentioned earlier, job focus refers to job grouping within the eLearning, L&D, or HR fields. In 2015, we updated our job focus areas to more accurately represent current eLearning job functions, and we also included the following job groups found within our wider membership population:

- Database creation, administration, and maintenance
- Help desk/customer support
- Information technology/IT liaison
- LMS/LCMS implementation/support
- Media creation or production (e.g., video, audio, animation, or multimedia)
- Programming/scripting (e.g., Java, .NET, JavaScript, XML)
- Web development

Also included was the category of “I do a lot or a little of everything,” which we have found to be popular in smaller eLearning organizations where a small number of individuals serve in multiple job roles.

In this report, we are only concerned with gender percentages as to “who does what” in eLearning. See the 2016 salary report for a detailed analysis of last year’s base salary and principal job focus. We will also analyze and compare our newest salary and job focus data in the 2017 salary report.



Source: Guild Research, 2017

Figure 3: Gender comparison of principal job focus

Note: Figure 3 reflects the fact that we eliminated the very small percentage results and only included focus areas that had at least a 5% response rate. There were two exceptions to this rule: first, women reporting their job focus as LMS/LCMS implementation or support (3.2%), and second, women in project or product management (3.6%). These were included for comparison purposes because the data for men in these two job focus areas did exceed the 5% cutoff.

The gender comparison in Figure 3 shows that the instructional design job focus area is where the largest numbers of both male (30.7%) and female (38.9%) practitioners work.⁷⁵

Women whose job focus area was instructional *delivery* (classroom or online), teaching, training, and coaching outnumbered men in this job area at 12.5% and 9.9%, respectively. The somewhat related job focus area of training, education, or certification *direction* held a slightly higher percentage of men: 13.2% as compared to 10.7% of women.

Job Level

In examining job level, we are primarily interested in whether a survey respondent is an individual contributor or someone who has direct reports and managerial or executive-level responsibility. We are also interested in the percentage of our population who hold academic or student/intern positions.

In general, we have found that the overall percentage of those who identify as individual contributors (or as “practitioners”) is increasing year-over-year, regardless of gender (Figure 4).

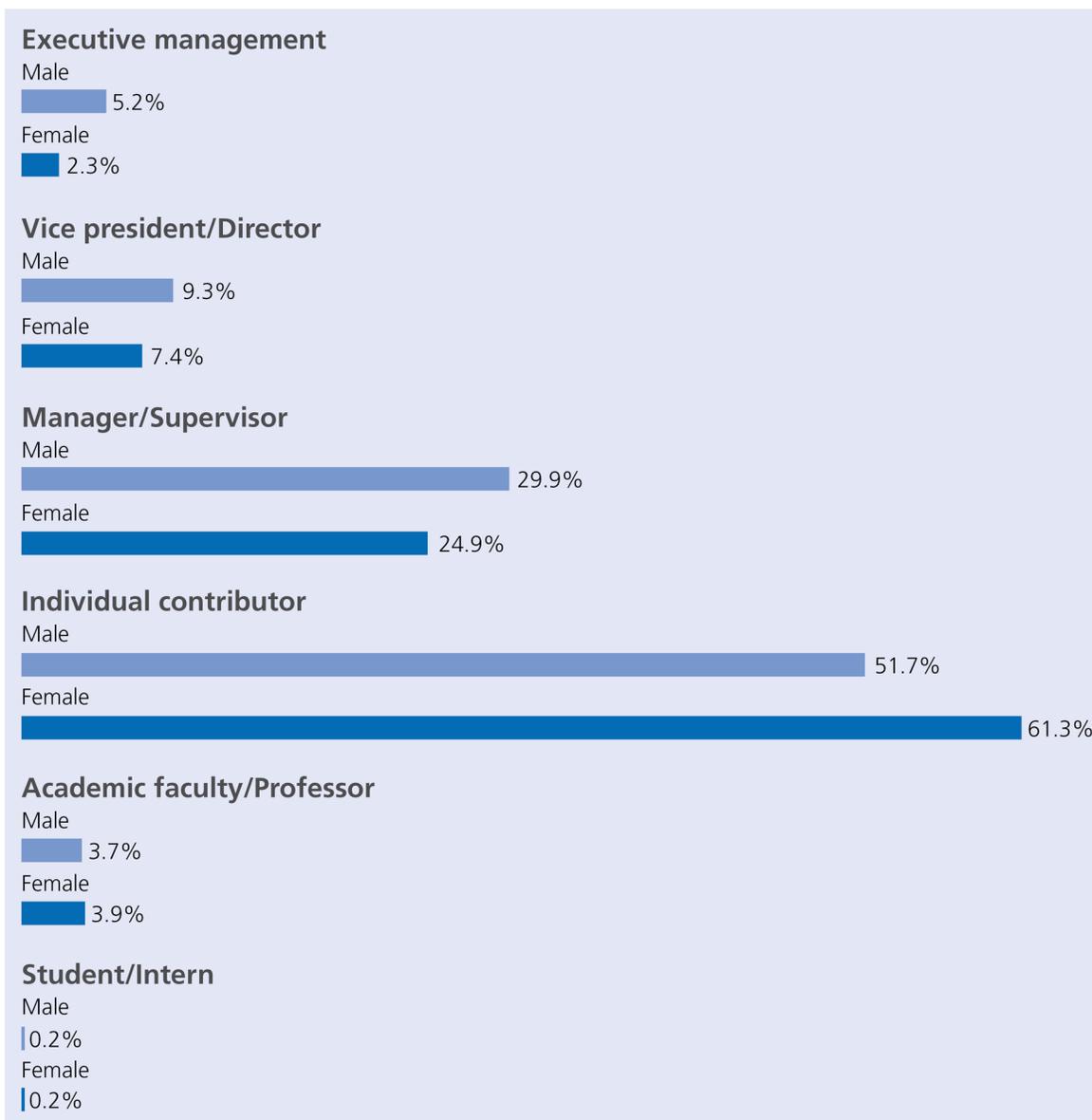
⁷⁵Instructional design has traditionally been the primary job focus area for Guild members worldwide. For further information about this focus area, see: Munzenmaier, *Today's Instructional Designer: Competencies and Careers*.

Guild Salary Data: Year	% Individual Contributors/Practitioners
2013	40.8
2014	40.6
2015	42.5
2016	50.6
2017	57.8

Source: Guild Research, 2017

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents identifying themselves as individual contributors/practitioners

Continuing this year-over-year trend, our 2017 survey data (Figure 4) now shows that more than half (57.8%) of all respondents work as individual contributors/practitioners.



Source: Guild Research, 2017

Figure 5: Gender comparison of job level

When we look at a gender comparison of this largest overall percentage group (Figure 5), we see that women work as individual contributors (at 61.3%) at a higher rate than do their male counterparts (at 51.7%).

Other noteworthy results regarding gender comparison for job level include the following:

- The second-largest percentage group is that of managers and supervisors. A higher percentage of men (29.9%) than women (24.9%) reported belonging to this group. This difference was also true of executives and vice presidents/directors, although by a smaller percentage.
- At the academic faculty/professor job level, the gender percentages are nearly equal, with 3.9% of female respondents and 3.7% of male respondents belonging to this group.
- Student/interns comprised the smallest group, with both genders reporting 0.2% each.

Tenure in Current Position

Recall that we had not asked about years of experience in the eLearning field (including L&D and HR) since our 2015 salary report. In the 2016 report, we replaced that item with a different question about tenure in current position.

In this year's survey, we asked both questions—"years in the eLearning profession" (Figure 2) and "tenure in current position" (Figure 6)—to gain better insight into experience within the eLearning field as compared to tenure in a specific position.



Source: Guild Research, 2017

Figure 6: Gender comparison of tenure in current position

In Figure 6, the 2017 data shows that a large percentage of eLearning practitioners have low amounts of tenure in their current job.

This might be interpreted as a situation where individuals of both genders have a substantial amount of experience in the eLearning field (Figure 2), but still tend to change jobs due to a number of factors, including career progression and professional development advances; job relocation or economic downsizing; or other factors that may relate to an increasingly younger and more mobile workforce.⁷⁶

We will discuss these underlying factors in greater detail in the forthcoming 2017 salary report.

Looking at a gender comparison of the data, we see that about 45% of both male and female eLearning practitioners have two years or less time in their current positions. Compare this to the longest-tenured practitioners with more than 10 years in the same position: A higher percentage of men (9.6%) than women (6.5%) reported being in this group.

⁷⁶For example, see: Gatto and Silva, "Changing Workforce Demographics."

Part 3: Where We Are Now

Julie Dirksen

We, the authors, believe that eLearning is a great field to work in as a woman. eLearning is a great field to work in altogether. I find that the people who work in eLearning often share a common set of characteristics—they like helping others, they are curious about how things work, they are interested in how technology can make our lives better, and they love to learn new things. Trina Rimmer, in her response in Part 4, points out that “empathy is at the heart of the work of many eLearning practitioners.” Who wouldn’t want to work with these people?

eLearning is already a great field for women, particularly in comparison to related fields like information technology or computer game production (where the news isn’t so good). But eLearning, and the business community in general, do still have opportunities for progress.

Within instructional design, my area of specialty is behavior change. When I apply a behavior change lens to the question of equal treatment across the gender continuum (including salary equity), a few issues are prominent for me. Each of these represents a way that I think the conversation is improving.⁷⁷

A better understanding of the nature of bias. In many places, I’m seeing better, more sophisticated conversations about the nature of bias happening. Bias, by its very nature, is hard to see. One thing that is often left out of the conversation about bias is that it stems from functional behaviors. It’s a functional behavior to find points of commonality based on previous experience. If someone rings the doorbell of my home, it’s reasonable for me to look at aspects of their appearance to start predicting the nature of the conversation. (Are they familiar? Are they wearing a uniform? Are they carrying a clipboard?) If I’ve had a personal experience of something, it’s usually very reasonable to use that prior experience to inform future expectations.

The difficulty is when these behaviors lead us toward biased behaviors, such as hiring only people who are like ourselves, or judging people based on their appearance (rather than on behaviors or ability), or allowing a negative experience with one member of a particular group to color our experiences with others from that group in the future. It’s hard when habits that work pretty well most of the time suddenly really don’t work well at all. Usually, we need help seeing where our automatic behaviors aren’t working well.

⁷⁷For another perspective on these conversations, see: Engelbert, “Starting A New Conversation For Women.”

One of my favorite studies in recent years was a study at the University of Wisconsin–Madison that used a habit-based approach toward improving racial bias. Participants in the study were given specific triggers to look for that indicated a racially biased thought (we’ve all had them at one time or another). When they recognized a trigger, participants were asked to immediately employ a counter strategy (e.g., try to think of the most distinguished person of that race that you can, or think of someone you personally know of that race). Many participants successfully improved their score on the IAT (implicit-association test), which historically is a very difficult thing to do.

There are many opportunities here to recognize potential instances of bias and have a plan in place to deal with them. For example, there are some common words that are leveled at women in leadership (such as “abrasive” or “unlikable”); if you hear or think those things, you could immediately do the “flip test” described earlier in this report to test your perception—picture an equivalent male doing those same things, and consider whether you’d still have a problem with the behavior. If you are involved with hiring, compensation, management, or mentoring, keep track of your actions and decisions and see whether you can detect any trends. If you create scenarios in your eLearning courses, take an extra step to identify any bias that might have crept in. For example, I realized a few years ago that when I needed an image of a “boss” in an eLearning scenario, I was more likely to pick a 50-something white man than other possible images. I’ve stopped doing that, but I’m sure I have other biases that creep in.

The hidden nature of bias also makes data, including many of the studies talked about in this document, very important—in the absence of data, many of those biases can stay hidden.

Recognition of the importance of treating people as individuals. Women are prevalent as eLearning practitioners, but are still underrepresented at leadership levels. When someone is part of a minority, one of the ways that bias manifests itself is that an individual gets used as evidence of some characteristic of the larger group. For example, I was talking several years ago to someone who organized industry conferences. We were talking about the relative difficulty of finding good women to keynote. He told a story about booking a particular woman in an attempt to have more gender equity among the keynotes, and then went on to say that she was a terrible speaker. She read her speech verbatim from a transcript and didn’t really look at or engage with the audience. He told this story (I believe) to support his argument that bending over backward to include women as keynotes was not good for the quality of conferences.

This is an instance where if a man reads his keynote speech poorly, he's judged as an individual to be a bad speaker, but no one would think that he is representative of male keynote speakers in general. A woman in a similar situation becomes a representative of her entire gender's ability to hold their own as keynote speakers.

Recognition of the importance of embracing both "male" and "female" attributes.

Clay Shirky, a media professor at New York University and well-known writer, wrote a blog post a few years back called "A Rant About Women" in which he expressed frustration at how many of his female students were failing to put themselves forward: "[Women] are bad at behaving like self-promoting narcissists, anti-social obsessives, or pompous blowhards, even a little bit, even temporarily, even when it would be in their best interests to do so."

Shirky is echoing a sentiment that has historically been seen throughout discussions of women in the workplace—the idea that they'd do better if they just learned to be *more like men*. The business media is full of advice to women on how to be tougher negotiators, how to use fewer qualifiers in their speech, how to be more assertive. While these are things we could all work on, the overriding message is that if things are out of balance, then women are the ones who should change to address that imbalance.

But the good news is that I also see this conversation evolving and changing. There's more recognition that people with attributes considered more "feminine" are often excellent leaders, and that part of the contribution they may make is in the emotional labor that is fundamental to making our communities function. As our definitions of gender expand (with the increasing recognition that gender is not a binary concept), so does our understanding of the contributions that all people have to make to our workplaces and communities.

I'm happy to see these expansions to the conversation and eager to see where we go next.

Part 4: Joining the Conversation

Outreach and connection with thought leaders was one of the goals of this research effort. We not only wanted to hear from the best and brightest thinkers in our field, but also from those who have written on the subject of women in eLearning and contributed substantial insights to this ongoing discussion.

Notice that we did ask several men to respond to our questions. This was important because, as Aisha Taylor points out in her response, “we aren’t involving men in the conversation. Any solution to gender issues has to include men as a part of the discussion.”

As one way to continue the conversation, we posed three questions to our group of eight thought leaders. In talking to them about their potential answers, we stressed the need for practical, positive, and forward-looking insights that could create momentum for upcoming conversations in 2017 and beyond.

In fact, the common theme that runs through all three questions is *forward movement into the future*. Although we cannot change the past, we can arm ourselves with knowledge, skills, and insights to make things different in the future.

Each of our thought leaders was gracious enough to respond to these questions:

- As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?
- What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?
- What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

Let’s see what they said and how their insights can inspire us to move the conversation forward.

Aisha Taylor



Aisha Taylor is the chief geek for Nine21 Enterprises. Aisha works with her clients to build innovative learning solutions using virtual classrooms, collaborative environments, virtual worlds, eLearning, and mobile platforms. In 2011, Aisha received a Brandon Hall Award and a BP Helios Commended Award for the BP Petrophysics Accelerated Development Program, and her ISD team received a Brandon Hall Award for Best ISD Team. She holds a BS degree in computer science and engineering from MIT and an MEd degree in educational psychology from the University of Georgia. Aisha has over 15 years of instructional design, consulting, and teaching experience.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

People are looking for a quick fix to gender issues. No one wants to talk about it because it's awkward and uncomfortable. You can't just make everything pink or create policies that include one woman in every third photo. Fixing these issues is something that will happen over time as we create environments and workspaces where people feel comfortable to raise the issues without retaliation or criticism.

We aren't involving men in the conversation. Any solution to gender issues has to include men as a part of the discussion. If they don't see a problem, why not? If they do, what do they think are good solutions?

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

Mentorship is critical. Offer your mentorship to the people you want to see move ahead in the business. Share with them your successes and your failures. Solicit their input on how to improve diversity and encourage females. Allow them to be open and honest with you so that you can work together to improve your workplace and your products.

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

1. **Don't forget that you are a woman.** Being a woman is part of the diversity in the office; our opinions are different and valuable and important. You don't have to hide that part of yourself or help the men in the office forget that you are a woman.
2. **It can't be said enough: Be a mentor and seek mentors.** Too often, we try to go it alone or treat other women as competition. We must help each other to succeed.
3. **Speak up.** If you review a storyboard that isn't inclusive, say something. If you read a paper that feels like it's missing a perspective, share your opinion.

David Kelly



David Kelly is the senior vice president and executive director of The eLearning Guild. David has been a learning and performance consultant and training director for more than 15 years. He is a leading voice exploring how technology can be used to enhance training, education, learning, and organizational performance. David is an active member of the learning community and can frequently be found speaking at industry events. He has contributed to organizations including ATD, *eLearn Magazine*, LINGOs, and more. David is also known for his curation efforts, especially related to conferences and events for learning and performance professionals.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

I think the biggest issue women face in eLearning is an extension of the issue women have in business in general: men occupying the more senior-level positions in the field. While the percentage of women in senior organizational learning is higher than in some other fields, there are still opportunities to level the playing field for senior roles.

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

I think the best thing we can all do is make a conscious effort to raise our personal awareness. It may seem like an oversimplification, but I think awareness is a huge part of the problem. We all go through life wearing the blinders of our experiences. We see the world through a very distinct filter that is "me." For many people, being aware of the world outside our personal filters takes conscious effort, but it's worth it. It's being aware that helps us notice inequities. More importantly, it's being consistently aware of others that helps shape our thoughts and behaviors.

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

I'm not a woman, so I can never truly understand the context of the challenges women face. I'm an observer of these challenges, which is very different from being subject to the challenges myself. That said, I am a father of a young woman, so I will share the advice I give her that I am hoping prepares her to face these sorts of challenges as she enters adulthood.

1. **Be confident.** Be strong in your belief in what you know and do. Understand the contributions you add to the world. Be proud of them and the value they add.
2. **Be accountable.** Follow through on everything you commit to. If you make a mistake, acknowledge it, own it, and move on. Allow people to form an opinion of you based upon what you *do*.
3. **Be bold.** If you have an idea, share it. If you have a desire, express it. If opportunities are not presented to you, create one. Do not let others dictate your path.

Ellen Wagner



Ellen Wagner was a partner at Sage Road Solutions, where she was responsible for industry intelligence and enablement services, and solutions practices. Ellen was formerly senior director of worldwide eLearning at Adobe Systems and senior director of worldwide education solutions for Macromedia. Prior to working in software solutions marketing and product development, Ellen was CLO and director of education for Viviance New Education, a Switzerland-based eLearning firm. She was also CLO and VP of consulting services for Informania. Ellen is a former tenured professor and department chair at the University of Northern Colorado.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

Professional aspiration development that offers paths beyond HR and general marketing. I'm not just talking about "courses in coding," I'm thinking about opportunities for strengthening entire professional pathways—introducing people to jobs such as solutions marketing manager, sales rep, product manager, product marketing manager, market analyst, designer, developer, and engineer; and hearing from those people why they made choices they did, what skills they brought to the table, what skills they've needed to develop, and what they wish someone had told them before they started.

Keeping issues of gender parity front and center. Not just shaming the "mansplainers," although I have to say I've been doing more of that these days, myself. I'm really thinking more about providing support for the competent female voices in our respective universe.

It's hard not to personalize when one feels as if one has been a target of overt offensive behavior. Just remember that this is bigger than all of us. Take the time to address opportunities for raising the bar on the conversation, and be confident enough in yourself to call out bias when you see it.

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

Holding ourselves accountable is a first step in trying to help others get better at this. I don't think any one of us is aware of the degree to which our decision-making is influenced by our own held biases. We need to actively model the kind of (gender, etc.) parity we expect to see from others.

Then it takes acknowledgement. I've noticed myself speaking up in meetings to acknowledge contributions made by women that might get overlooked.

Finally, it takes leadership, personal demonstrations of competence, and doing one's best to ignore the sirens of hubris.

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

1. **Do good work.**
2. **Don't trust the echo chamber of awesomeness.** Use real metrics to keep track of your workplace impact efficacy. You need to know your baselines before you revolutionize.
3. **Develop a network of workplace professionals**—e.g., The eLearning Guild—who can help you keep up with what is going on in this industry, help keep you up-to-date on your practice, and help keep you honest in your assessment of your impact.

Josh Cavalier



Josh Cavalier, CEO and founder of Lodestone, has worked in the eLearning industry for about 20 years. Focusing on the intersection of education and technology, Josh specializes in education media production and rapid eLearning tool implementation. Popularly known as Captain Captivate, he is an Adobe Certified Expert and instructor in Captivate. Josh also produces a blog that offers online tutorials and videos on Captivate.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

First, organizations should provide equal pay for work of equal or comparable value. Second, everyone should have access to all eLearning job roles, including developer and leadership positions, regardless of their gender. Finally, organizations should work to eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender, particularly in relation to family and caring responsibilities.

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

Within my professional eLearning peer group, I see support systems formed through social media, including Twitter and Facebook. It's critical these communication channels are leveraged for support and guidance. Social media platforms have benefited, and will continue to benefit, women who are looking for mentors and support groups in the industry.

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

1. **Seize opportunities.** When the door of opportunity opens, confidently walk through it. As scary as it sounds, you need to jump in and take advantage of an opportunity when it's presented to you. Everybody tries something new for the first time, and you need to fake it 'til you make it. Ask for the big assignment, move across the country, or try a new job role. Sometimes the best way to learn is to fail and get the experience.
2. **Articulate your value.** Let your team members and management know what you are great at. It's more than hustling and hard work. Establish your own personal brand, and tell people about your accomplishments. It's critical to know your value and how it affects the bottom line of your organization.
3. **Find a mentor.** You can't go through this journey alone. Find a mentor who will help you navigate your eLearning career. Mentors could be eLearning colleagues, business acquaintances, or former supervisors. Also, you will need to leave your ego at the door. Make sure you become a great listener and offer something in return for your mentor's time.

Koreen Pagano



Koreen Pagano, a product management director at D2L, is passionate about technology for organizational learning, with an emphasis on performance improvement and behavior change. She holds an MS in curriculum and instruction from Penn State University. In 2008, Koreen founded Tandem Learning, where she pioneered immersive learning in organizations by leveraging virtual worlds, games, and simulations. As director, enterprise product at Lynda.com and LinkedIn, she led the product vision for self-directed learning. Koreen is on the advisory board for emerging tech companies SilVR Thread and HelloYello. She is author of the blog *Learning in Tandem* and the book *Immersive Learning*.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

We've come a long way in raising awareness of gender bias and discrimination, but we have a long way to go in leveling the playing field. The three most critical issues impacting gender for 2017 are:

- **Unconscious bias.** From performance evaluations to speaking time in meetings, everyone tends to favor male-associated behaviors in the workplace. This unconscious bias toward a particular gender group impacts everything from salary to promotions to overall career trajectory. Raising greater awareness of unconscious gender bias is one of our greatest challenges, but could ultimately reap the greatest rewards.
- **Realizing gender isn't binary.** With the greater discussions happening around transgender folks, we are finally seeing that gender isn't just male/female, but falls along a spectrum. Being more inclusive in our language and policies will help us support and welcome everyone in our organizations into learning conversations, and it will make us more welcoming to our customers who work with us.
- **The impact of seeing more women in leadership roles.** The 2016 US election cycle led to discussions about women in leadership. It is our responsibility to continue these conversations to move our organizations forward in including many different voices (and genders) in leadership roles.

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

The same way they can encourage and support *any* eLearning practitioner: mentoring with feedback and encouragement. Women tend to not take as many risks as men in moving their careers forward, but they will if they are encouraged to do so. Mentoring relationships help create opportunities for these conversations.⁷⁸ But even if you're not a mentor, encourage people doing good work to market themselves and their accomplishments, to apply to speak at an industry event, or to apply for a promotion they deserve. We should all be lifting each other up!

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

1. **Try something hard.** The only way to get better and continue growing professionally is to push yourself. There will always be obstacles, and often failures, but you will learn and grow. There's no way to get better by staying in your comfort zone.
2. **Find a mentor.** Find someone you admire to give you feedback, encouragement, and that extra boost when things get tough. A good mentor can make all the difference in how you see yourself and your career potential.
3. **Find strength in numbers.** Often when I got discouraged, I would withdraw, thinking I was the only one. I never was. There are lots of people in your organization facing the same challenges, and there is truly strength in numbers. Form a lunch group, or an online cohort group, and use those folks to help strategize and support you through tough situations. Be clear that this is a group for support and solutions, not just commiserating! Over time, your peers will become your biggest allies and cheerleaders, even as you move into different roles or organizations.

⁷⁸For a discussion of how men can better mentor women colleagues, see: Smith and Johnson, "Men Can Improve How They Mentor Women. Here's How."

Lauralee Sheehan



Lauralee Sheehan, a design manager at Learnography, is a creative-directing, media-designing eLearning addict. She loves the process of coming up with design concepts and creative media solutions for clients, and she recently won an award for professional excellence in technology for her interactive digital development work. Being somewhat of a serial entrepreneur, Lauralee is also the owner of a creative digital studio and an online shop.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

I still think the wage gap is a huge issue for women in the eLearning field. As with many tech roles, women in particular are not always compensated properly for these technical and highly skilled hybrid roles. Visibility is another huge issue facing women in eLearning. Although there are lots of women working in the field, are they getting the right career opportunities and high-visibility projects? Are their careers growing quickly enough to accurately represent their gender?

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

Get together often and discuss the industry—that constant dialogue will inform change and offer a support system to help female eLearning practitioners troubleshoot through their career challenges. Let's be honest, there will be roadblocks, so having that support system in place is key.

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

1. **Get out there and don't be afraid to be disruptive.** Go to meet-ups, go to events, invest in meaningful conversations, and wear your "woman in tech" accomplishments proudly.
2. **Always keep learning.** Take as many courses as you can, and remember that you define what you do. Always keep growing so you don't get pigeonholed and miss out on opportunities.
3. **Make sure your personal branding is on point.** People expect every nuance of their experience with you to be flawlessly designed and developed, so use that as an opportunity to shine.

Steve Yacovelli



Steve Yacovelli, the director of inclusion and change for SweetRush, focuses on helping clients embrace and adapt to using new and innovative ways to work with their employees. Steve has worked with organizations such as The Walt Disney Company, IBM, Tupperware Brands, George Washington University, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Bellsouth-AT&T. A published author, Steve holds a BS degree in public relations, an MA degree in educational policy and leadership development, and an EdD degree in instructional technology and distance education.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

I think the biggest issue within our field (and well beyond) is unconscious bias, especially as it relates to gender bias. I continue to see, for example, visuals in eLearning that reinforce gender stereotypes: the middle-aged white man who is in the role of “leader,” or the female who is in the role of “HR manager.” Or the use of language that reinforces gender stereotypes (“strong female leader” or “female engineer” both reinforce the idea that these are not common occurrences). These small but telling examples reinforce gender stereotypes in the workplace and in the learning itself, and this year is a perfect opportunity to focus on “debiasing” our learning so it doesn’t perpetuate stereotypes or reinforce hidden gender bias.

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

Ask! Reach out to your female colleagues and ask what is stopping them from being that eLearning rock star that they could be. Is it opportunity with certain projects in your workplace, especially high-profile ones? Then give them that opportunity. If your organization has an employee resource group (ERG) for women, consider joining, especially if you are a man. Strive to understand the perspective of your female colleagues and how their opportunities may not be the same as their male counterparts’: It’s so easy, if you’re in the “in” group, to ignore or simply not be aware of the perspective of the “out” group. Open your eyes—and ears—and simply ask.

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

1. **Don't unconsciously reinforce stereotypes within the work you do.** Break out of your own implicit biases (you can use tools like [this implicit-bias test](#) to find your unconscious biases). Studies show we consciously process about 40 bits of data per moment, but we receive about 11 million bits of data: the 99.999996% "gap" is managed by our powerful unconscious selves. If you're human, you have biases, and some of those may even be against the groups of which you're a part. Discover yours and start to manage them.
2. **Don't remain silent or reinforce stereotypes when confronted with them in the workplace.**⁷⁹ A simple "Ouch!" lets others know you don't agree with a stated bias, and it goes a long way toward creating a culture of openness to our own biases and mitigating them. If you don't speak up, silent collusion says to others, "I tacitly support that stereotype." Don't perpetuate this in your workplace.
3. **If you find that your organization does indeed hold gender biases (either the conscious or unconscious type), do what you can to influence change from within.** Seek the help of senior leaders (of both genders), your human resource partners, and others within the business. But know when to say "Thanks, but no thanks" and find an organization that appreciates your diversity and perspective. Life's too short to be stuck in a workplace that isn't inclusive. Find one that values your perspective and gives you opportunities to shine and grow.

⁷⁹For one such example of these stereotypes, see: Margolin, "Stereotype Study Confirms That People Still Think Women Don't Tweet About Tech."

Trina Rimmer



Trina Rimmer, a community manager with Articulate, uses her many years of eLearning design and development expertise to nurture and grow the E-Learning Heroes community. Before joining Articulate, she worked as a designer, eLearning developer, and writer focused on delivering engaging, effective learning and performance solutions to various companies, from global aid organizations to the Fortune 500.

As we begin 2017, what do you view as the most critical issues impacting gender in the eLearning field?

This is broader than just the eLearning field. To attract and retain female talent in every field, we're going to need better mechanisms for supporting and empowering women and families.

The lack of paid parental leave and access to affordable child care in the US disproportionately impacts women. I'm fortunate to work for a company that is fully remote and that goes above and beyond to support women and families, and I'm hearing more about companies stepping up their efforts to support their employees in this area. I love the progress, but I think this is a long-overdue conversation that's going to have a much more prominent place in public policy discourse in the coming years.

Access to technology is another important issue I think we'll be hearing more about. Technology is an engine for economic growth. The lack of access to things such as basic Internet connectivity—or affordable devices like laptop computers—can have broad socioeconomic implications, particularly for women. Time and again, developing countries have shown that putting technology into the hands of women helps to drive innovation, builds stronger communities, and leads to increased economic stability for families, more robust academic performance by children, and a net reduction in poverty.

Women in the eLearning field work in a variety of settings, ranging from freelancing to in-house developer in large organizations. That means people face many different challenges in accessing child care and paid leave, but I think the need to connect with our peers to share our challenges and come up with better ways to ask for what we need is one thing we all have in common.

What do you see as the single best way that others in the field can encourage and support female eLearning practitioners?

Empathy is at the heart of the work of many eLearning practitioners. To create effective learning solutions, you need to open yourself up to other people's perspectives, what they see, and how they experience the world. Because of this, I think eLearning practitioners of all gender identities actually have a tremendous advantage over other fields in terms of supporting and encouraging one another—because it's already part of our makeup.

I spend a lot of time traveling and meeting with people from all walks of life, and the one thing I see over and over again is people sharing freely and generously with one another. The eLearning industry is full of that kind of support, encouragement, inspiration, and know-how. And if you're not feeling that level of support where you are, or if you're just feeling somewhat isolated from fellow practitioners, you can easily find an online community full of folks who want to help and connect—and you can experience the fulfillment of giving back to that community.

What three pieces of practical advice would you give to women in eLearning?

1. **Be assertive about highlighting your accomplishments.** Don't wait for folks to notice what you've done; show them.
2. **Build and maintain a portfolio of your work.** This gives you an opportunity to showcase your skills to potential employers, but is also a great way to chart your own growth as a learning professional. It's hugely rewarding to see how far you've come!
3. **Connect with professional communities outside of your workplace.** Thought leadership can be inspiring and help you develop a vision of what's possible, but don't forget to connect with people who have practical, real-world experience to share, too. Use social media to build an extended personal learning network (PLN) of trusted fellow practitioners you can turn to for advice on everything from your career to your individual projects.

Part 5: Moving the Conversation Forward

We avoided calling this last chapter a “conclusion” because our hope is that we have moved the conversation about women in eLearning forward into 2017, rather than concluding it here.

Reflections

Here are several of the main themes and insights that we saw in our thought leaders’ comments and advice:

- Build your visibility and personal brand; clearly articulate your value.
- Get a mentor who can model female leadership and gender parity, or become a mentor to a female colleague yourself.
- Build your support system—what Trina Rimmer calls the “professional communities outside your workplace” and “personal learning networks of trusted fellow practitioners.”
- Embrace the fact that you are a woman. As Aisha Taylor says, “Being a woman is part of the diversity in the office; our opinions are different and valuable and important. You don’t have to hide that part of yourself or help the men in the office forget that you are a woman.”
- Speak up and raise personal awareness of bias. As Taylor notes, “If you review a storyboard that isn’t inclusive, say something. If you read a paper that feels like it’s missing a perspective, share your opinion.”
- Keep issues of gender parity front and center. Women should challenge behavior that discounts women, and, as Ellen Wagner says, we should also “provide support for the competent female voices in our respective universe.”

Next Steps

We began by announcing that this white paper continues the Guild-sponsored conversation around the important topic of women in eLearning. As such, our goal is to create a framework and enhance momentum for upcoming Guild events, publications, and conversations on this topic beginning in 2017 and beyond.

We now invite you to join the conversation by exploring 2017 Guild events and resources on the topic of women in eLearning, and by expanding your own knowledge base using the resources provided in this paper. You do not need to be a thought leader or industry expert or published author. Your perspective is unique and valuable. In fact, let's go back to what [Julie Dirksen said in early 2015](#) about participating in this conversation and the advice she provided:

When we were talking, David Holcombe [founder, president, and CEO of The eLearning Guild] also reminded me, "The Guild has always endeavored to also include people who aren't the 'gurus'—our mission is to bring up new people and new voices. That's why we chose a guild as our model—to include the novices, journeymen, and masters, and to encourage people at all levels to step up and share."⁸⁰

We would like to hear from you. What conversations should we have around this topic? If you have ideas to share, what help or support would make those ideas work for you? What else should we at the Guild be talking about in our forthcoming 2017 events?

Also, please feel free to send additional comments about this white paper to [Sharon Vipond](#), The eLearning Guild's director of research.

Will you [join the conversation](#)?

⁸⁰Dirksen, "Women in the eLearning Field: Beginning a Conversation."

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The eLearning Guild

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