From individual allyship to collective action for gender equity: Transforming geoscience culture

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ALLIES

Ally is a verb, not a noun

Allies are members of dominant social groups who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege (Broido 1997)

1. Intervening when witnessing microaggressions and other acts of bias (bystander intervention)

2. Supporting people when they experience microaggressions and other forms of discrimination

3. Ensuring that everyone is included and valued

4. Working to understand the barriers that limit the success of minoritized people

5. Speaking up to challenge institutional practices, policies, and structures that create these barriers

Beware the "faux allies" and "fair weather allies" – being an ally takes sustained action!

Faculty Allies program increases ally actions

Examples of Ally Actions

1. I intervene if I witness a bias incident

2. I have spoken up when I notice a woman or other marginalized colleague being interrupted

3. I ask women and other marginalized colleagues about their experiences of the climate within their department

4. I talk to women and other marginalized colleagues about their research

5. I nominate women and other marginalized colleagues for university awards

6. I volunteer to serve on committees with the specific purpose of being an ally for faculty equity
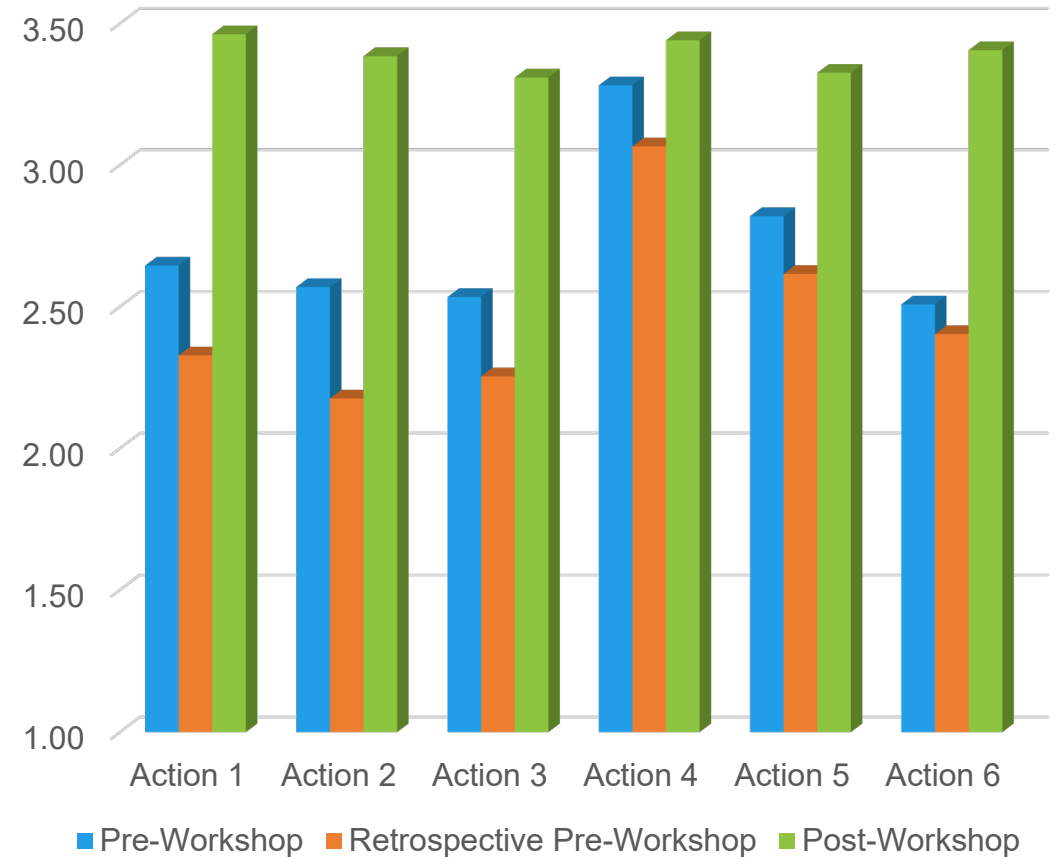
1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Occasionally 4 Regularly
N = 82 (3 cohorts)

How do faculty conceptualize allyship?

Data Set

105 full-time faculty and faculty administrators

51 men, 50 women, 1 nonbinary

75 white, 22 faculty of color

81 tenure-track, 14 non-tenure track

48 STEM, 27 Social/Behavioral Sciences, 20 Arts/Humanities

Survey Question on Allyship

"Describe what actions you might take as an ally to women and other marginalized groups in your work setting."

Qualitative Data Analysis

Constant Comparative Method (Strauss & Corbin 1998)

Faculty focus on individual actions

Unspecified, broad actions (N = 31):

"I'll speak up or say something"

"[I will] interact and get involved when necessary"

"[I'll] provide opportunities at all levels for equal inclusion"

"[I'll participate in] professional development activities...to educate myself on current policies, practices, and pragmatics of advocating for marginalized groups"
– Tenured white woman

Specific individual or interpersonal actions:

"Consciously refrain from speaking first in conversations or interrupting others"
– Tenured white man

"Interrupt the interrupters. Men frequently interrupt women in faculty meetings or at conferences and I can speak up when this happens and call it out. Ask minorities for input during meetings when they tend to be silent or ignored." – Tenured white woman

"[H]elp amplify people's voices, making sure that those who historically have been most silenced have space to speak and be heard"
– Tenured woman of color

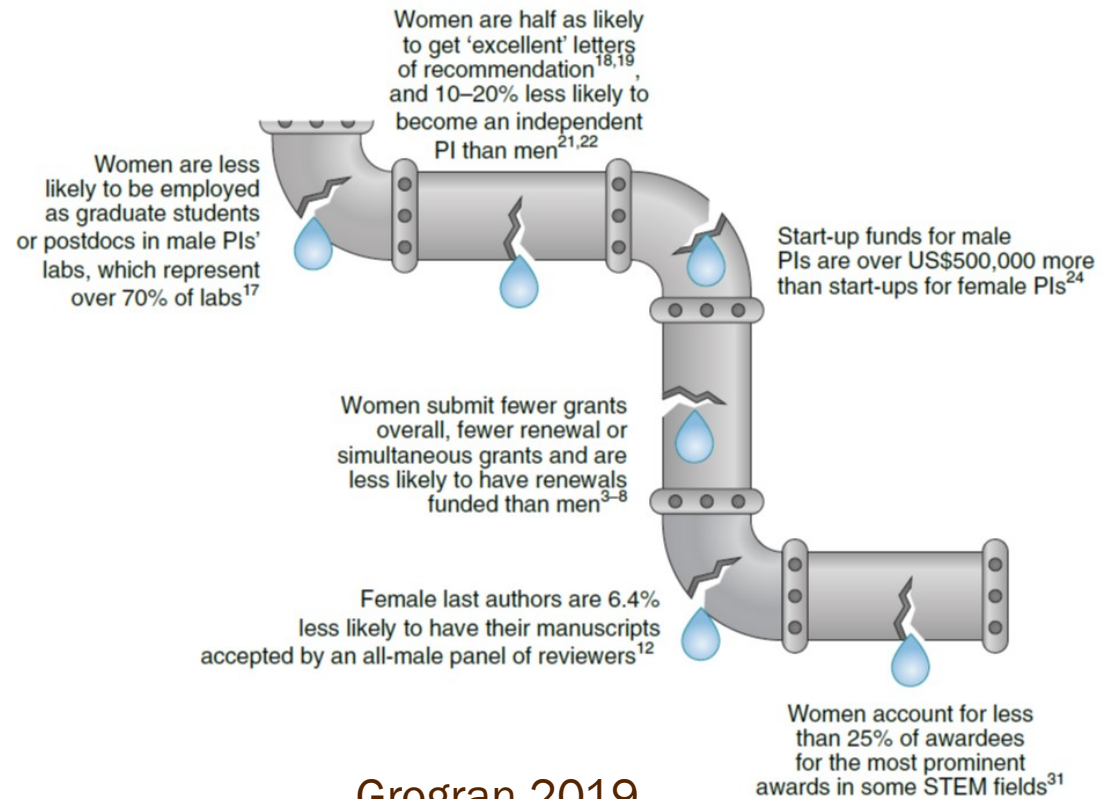Submitted to *Communication Quarterly*

Individual allyship is not enough

Women in STEM face many **structural** barriers that can't be torn down by individual actions

Allies become discouraged and succumb to burnout

We need to address the **cause** of the cracks in the pipeline, not just how to patch them (Grogan 2019), and **tear down** the barriers

We need to convert the pipeline into something more inclusive…

Women are less likely to be employed as graduate students or postdocs in male PIs' labs, which represent over 70% of labs[17]

Women are half as likely to get 'excellent' letters of recommendation[18,19], and 10–20% less likely to become an independent PI than men[21,22]

Start-up funds for male PIs are over US$500,000 more than start-ups for female PIs[24]

Women submit fewer grants overall, fewer renewal or simultaneous grants and are less likely to have renewals funded than men[3–8]

Female last authors are 6.4% less likely to have their manuscripts accepted by an all-male panel of reviewers[12]

Women account for less than 25% of awardees for the most prominent awards in some STEM fields[31]

Grogran 2019

The community swimming pool model

No mandatory, predefined start and end points

Ladders to help people enter and exit easily at many different places

Lifeguards on duty

Lots of different activities to do while in the pool, different ways of being "successful"

Easy to change activities

Still all one community!

How do we build the community pool?

To transform geoscience culture, we need to work collectively

How can we leverage existing organizational structures to promote this collective action?

Institutional change strategies

Bottom-up

- Peers listen to peers
- Create a critical mass (40%*) with shared understanding, vocabulary, goals, skills
- Provide toolkit with concrete strategies
- Build support networks within and across groups
- Sustain communication long-term

Top-down

- Conduct equity impact assesments of policies, practices
- Challenge structural norms that replicate biased power structures
- Revise reward structures to recognize and value a broader range of accomplishments (including JEDI work)
- Enforce meaningful consequences for bad actors

* Tolbert et al. (1995)

Transforming geoscience culture

Imagine the profession in a new way

Redefine success metrics

Agree on goals

Organize support networks

Train allies

Enforce consequences

Geoscientists

ADVANCE teams

Professional societies

Government agencies

Academic departments

Journal editors

Universities & museums

Funding agencies