Breaking the Glass Ceiling: The Evolution of Female Speaker Representation and Visibility at American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society Meetings Over Time

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INTRODUCTION: Although female students comprise over half of U.S. undergraduate and medical school enrollment, representation among residents and practicing surgeons in orthopaedics remains disproportionately low at 15% and 6%, respectively. The decline in residency may stem from a lack of early exposure to female mentors. This study investigates female representation in speaker roles at American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS) meetings over time.

METHODS: The annual AOFAS meeting programs for 2012, 2017, and 2022 were reviewed by three independent raters. Each speaker, moderator, and panelist was classified based on sex and role; 15% of the data was cross-checked and evaluated using Fleiss Multirater Kappa validation. Sessions discussing surgical or biomedical topics were categorized as "technical", and all other sessions (i.e., welcome sessions) were categorized as "nontechnical." Individual-year odds ratios (ORs) and confidence intervals (CIs) evaluating sex versus session status, as well as sex versus speaker role, are provided. Combined results controlling for year were calculated using the Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel method.

RESULTS: A total of 403 speaking sessions were analyzed; 12% of sessions were led by female speakers. On average, female speakers were significantly more likely than males to assume nontechnical speaking roles across the three years combined (OR 3.84; 95% CI, 1.43 to 10.33). Female speakers led 12.7% of the 381 technical sessions. Females also comprised 9.8% and 16.7% of moderator and panelist roles, respectively.

DISCUSSION: Although our study reveals an increasing trend in female speakers, panelists, and moderators from 2012 to 2022, these data demonstrate a persistent lack of sex diversity at AOFAS annual meetings, especially within technical sessions and moderator roles.

SIGNIFICANCE/CLINICAL RELEVANCE: Increasing female representation at conferences while fostering mentorship opportunities for medical students may serve as a valuable opportunity to address disparities between males and females within orthopaedics.