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California Women Winemakers, Their Accomplishments, and Their Progress in a Male-Dominated Field

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Abstract

The website, <http://womenwinemakers.com>, has been developed to present a comprehensive directory of California women winemakers, their accomplishments, and research data to assess the presence of women as the lead or primary winemakers for wineries in California. The study, which used the database of women winemakers developed for the site, indicates the glass ceiling has not yet been shattered—only 9.8 percent of California wineries have a woman winemaker as its lead or primary winemaker, although this percentage is higher in the two key wine regions of the state.

Since 1970, there has been a significant increase in women's participation in science-based fields. Today, approximately half of all medical degrees and degrees in the life sciences are awarded to women. Increases have also occurred in the field of enology, the science and study of wine and winemaking.

California is by far the nation's largest producer of wine and its universities are among the premier enology programs in the U.S. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, few female students were enrolled in the programs in California for educating winemakers. In fact, MaryAnn Graf was the first woman to graduate from a premier enology program in the state, completing her degree in 1965. Graf, who joined Simi Winery in Sonoma County as its winemaker in 1973, is considered California's first female winemaker of the modern era. By the 1990s, the number of female graduates had increased to approximately half, and it continues at that level today (Kauffman, 2009). The career paths taken by these graduates include various positions associated with the winemaking process, such as enologist, cellar or winemaker assistants and associates, and winemaker.

It is widely purported that women constitute 15–20% of the winemakers in California and that gender parity will soon be achieved (e.g., Heimoff, 2007; Kauffman 2009). Are women

winemakers in California shattering the glass ceiling in an industry historically dominated by men? Until now, no comprehensive list of women winemakers has been available to provide an empirical assessment of this assumption.

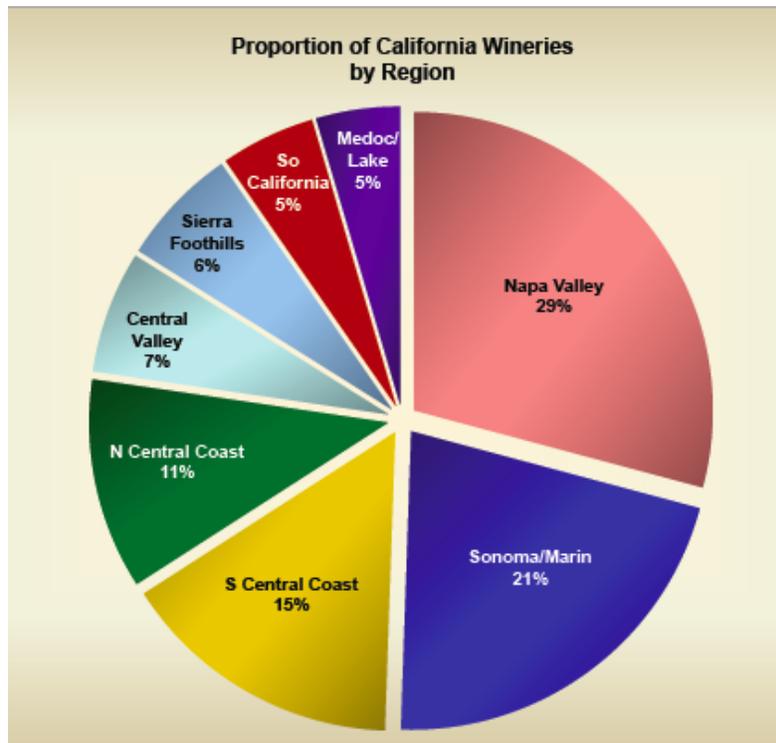
A key purpose of our project was developing an accurate database of women winemakers in California so that we could assess the presence of women as the lead or primary winemakers for wineries in California. The approach we used in providing an accurate assessment was to calculate the percentage of wineries with women as the primary or lead winemakers. By taking this approach, we were able to take into account the fact that some winemakers craft wine for more than one winery or craft wines for their own label in addition to their role as winemaker for one or more other wineries. This is particularly the case for well-known winemakers.

Method

Using the official list of 3200+ wineries in California available from *Wines and Vines* (<http://www.winesandvines.com/>), we gathered information from winery websites and calls and visits to wineries to develop our database. Using this information, we coded whether a winery's main or lead winemaker was a female or a male or a female-male co-winemaking team. We were able to obtain sufficient information to code the sex of the winemaker for 97% of the wineries. We omitted from the data analysis the wineries that had a female-male co-winemaking team (2.7%). In nearly all these cases the co-winemakers represented spousal pairs.

A winery's wine region was also coded. Eight wine regions were used: Mendocino/Lake County, Napa Valley, Sonoma/Marin, Sierra Foothills, Central Valley, North Central Coast, South Central Coast, and Southern California. These regions are widely recognized in the industry. (Note: The wine regions are defined on the Women Winemakers Website associated with this project, <http://www.womenwinemakers.com>. Please click on the California map on the home page of the web site for definitions of the eight wine regions used for our project.)

To place the wineries and wine regions into the larger context of California, we have provided below a pie chart showing where the wineries in our database were located. As can be seen from the chart, the percentage of wineries in the eight wine regions ranged from approximately 5% to 30%, with Napa having the highest percentage, and Southern California and Mendocino/Lake Counties having the lowest. Approximately half of the state's wineries in our database were located in the Napa Valley and Sonoma/Marin regions.



Theoretical Underpinnings and Hypotheses

The theoretical underpinnings of our study were derived from gender theory. We hypothesized that the visibility and cult status of a few highly acclaimed women winemakers in California have resulted in the perception that there are far more women winemakers in California than there actually are. Perceptions that women are already well represented in a field can serve as barriers to their increased participation in a traditionally male-dominated field (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009; Morrison et al., 1994; Rossi, 1985). Such perceptions lower the perceived need to encourage women to enter the field and to provide the mentoring and support needed to facilitate their career success.

We also hypothesized that the proportion of wineries with women winemakers would be higher in the state's premier wine regions (Napa Valley and Sonoma/Marin) than in the other wine regions of California. One important factor in changing views of women's abilities in fields historically unavailable to them is for women to be awarded "exceptional" status (Unger, 2006). This kind of visibility opens doors for the exceptional women and also increases opportunities for other well-qualified women. The most highly acclaimed women winemakers in California are from Napa and Sonoma (Laube, 2010).

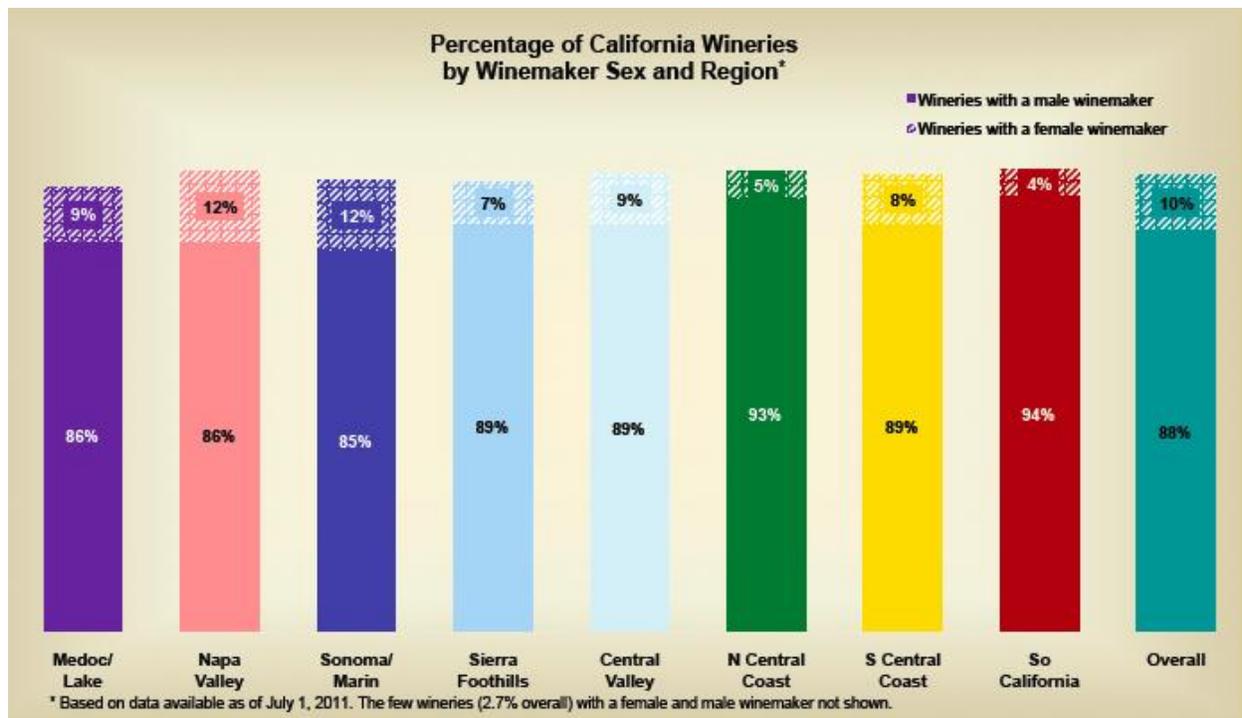
Results

Chi-square analyses were used for the purpose of testing our hypotheses.

The results of the chi-square analyses performed to test both hypotheses were statistically significant. With regard to the first hypothesis, we found that 9.8% of California wineries have a woman as their main or lead winemaker, which differs significantly from the lower end of the widely held 15–20% estimate. The best estimate of the number of wineries with a woman winemaker is between 9.5% and 12.8%. The latter percentage would be true only if all winemakers whose sex was unknown were female (3% of total number of wineries).

The second hypothesis regarded the proportion of women winemakers in the state's premier wine regions. In testing this hypothesis we included only those wineries for which we were able to identify the sex of the winemaker.

As we had anticipated, a higher percentage of women winemakers were found in the state's two premier wine regions than in the other six regions, $X^2(7, N=3,015) = 28.02, p < .001$. The percentage of women winemakers for the various regions ranged from 4.7% to 12.4%, with Sonoma/Marin and Napa having the highest percentages, 12.4% and 12.2%, respectively. The figure below depicts these percentages as a bar graph.



Conclusion

Although women winemakers in California overall have not reached the 15–20% percent that had been widely assumed, they are closer to this figure in the key wine regions of Napa Valley and Sonoma/Marin. Hence some progress has been achieved in the past twenty to thirty years.

As a point of comparison, women currently comprise 17% of the US Senate and House of Representatives, respectively.

Women today have more opportunities to gain the experiences and knowledge they need to become a winemaker than in past years. At the same time, guidance and understanding of what it takes to be successful are crucial. Certain factors appear to slow the progress to gender equity. Brescoli, Dawsin, and Uhlmann (2010), for example, reported that making small mistakes on the job is particularly damaging to individuals in gender-incongruent occupations. In addition, attitudinal changes take time (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995) and are associated with other social factors (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Women entering gender-incongruent occupations, such as winemaking, need to have some awareness of these factors and how they can handle them effectively as needed.

Another important dimension to increasing women's presence and success in a gender-incongruent field such as winemaking is having a better understanding of what is needed to eventually have a successful career as a winemaker. The life of a winemaker can have a glamorous appeal that obfuscates the day-to-day reality of what it takes to be successful. The career paths of winemakers are challenging and demanding. The women winemakers we have had the privilege of meeting are inspirational in their love for their work and their willingness to do what it takes to achieve their goals.

In developing the website, www.womenwinemakers.com, we realized the importance of providing information about *all* of the women winemakers and their accomplishments, not just a few "superstars." Providing profiles on the website was a first step to making more visible the varied career pathways of current women winemakers and their contributions to the wine industry. The next step in our research is identifying the various career paths of successful women winemakers and making these pathways more clear to women interested in enology and viticulture. Through conversations with women winemakers across the state of California, we are learning a great deal about the career paths of women winemakers and how they have become successful in a field historically dominated by men. The content of these conversations are being used to identify a taxonomy of career paths as well as to describe those factors that have contributed to the increased opportunities for women to become winemakers in the past thirty years.

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