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Benchwarmers: What a decade of data says about gender equality at sportswear brands

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This story is part of a series. Find the rest here.

Seven. As of July, that's the total number of new women CEOs in the entire retail and consumer goods industry in 2019, according to Challenger, Gray & Christmas. It's not much higher than it was in 2010, a year when there were five new women CEOs named.

There have been good years, like 2014, when the total of new women CEOs outnumbered the total of outgoing women CEOs 12 to six. And then there have been bad years, like 2015, when the total of new women CEOs was half the number of outgoing women CEOs (six and 12, respectively). In 2017, 58 men were named to CEO roles, compared to 11 women.

"It is a slow climb," Colleen Madden Blumenfeld, Director of Public Relations at Challenger, Gray & Christmas, told Retail Dive in an email. "Movements like MeToo that shed light on the disparity are helping to move boards and leadership to start promoting more women, but it is not at the rate that will bring equality quickly."

Athletics retailers are not immune. At the top five sportswear brands, as defined by Euromonitor International, Retail Dive found that a combined total of 23% of top executives are women and 27% of board members are women. Top executives were defined as those listed in annual reports under "executive officers of the registrant."

"We are going to need a lot more women in positions of power and at the table at all levels in order to truly make lasting change," Athleta CMO Sheila Shekar Pollak said of the lack of gender diversity at athletics retailers. She noted that some issues, like support for pregnant athletes, just don't come to mind for those

who haven't had those experiences.

“A lot of times people just aren't aware of these needs if you aren't a woman or you aren't a mom and you haven't been through it,” she said, adding that it will take more inclusive representation across gender, ethnicity and other minority perspectives to solve some of these equality issues.

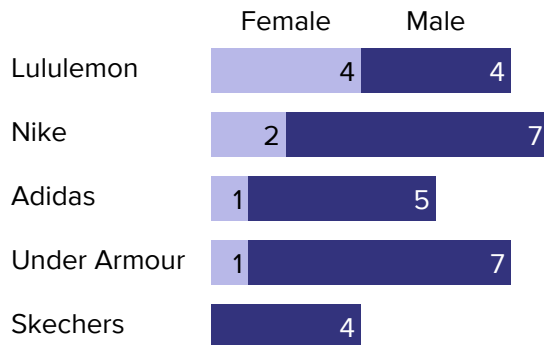
To get a sense of the problem, Retail Dive took a look at the executive teams and boards of directors at some of the top sportswear brands to see how much the representation of women has changed over the past decade.

These were our findings.

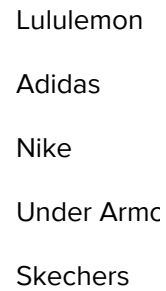
TOP FIVE BRANDS

Number of male and female executives and board members at the top five athleticwear brands in the current year.

Executives



Board members



Across the top five sportswear brands, as defined by Euromonitor International, 27% of current board members are women and 23% of current top executives are women. That's based on a total of 60 board members across the five companies and 35 executives.

In every case, the current number of female executives was lower than the number of female board members. Adidas and Lululemon had the highest number of female board members, five, while Lululemon and Nike had the largest number of female executives, with four and two respectively.

Of the five brands, Lululemon is the only one where women make up 50% of either the board or the executive team — women make up half of both teams at Lululemon. The company said in an email to Retail Dive that half of its employees at the senior management level are women, 61% of its management-level employees are women and 78% of employees at the company as a whole are women.

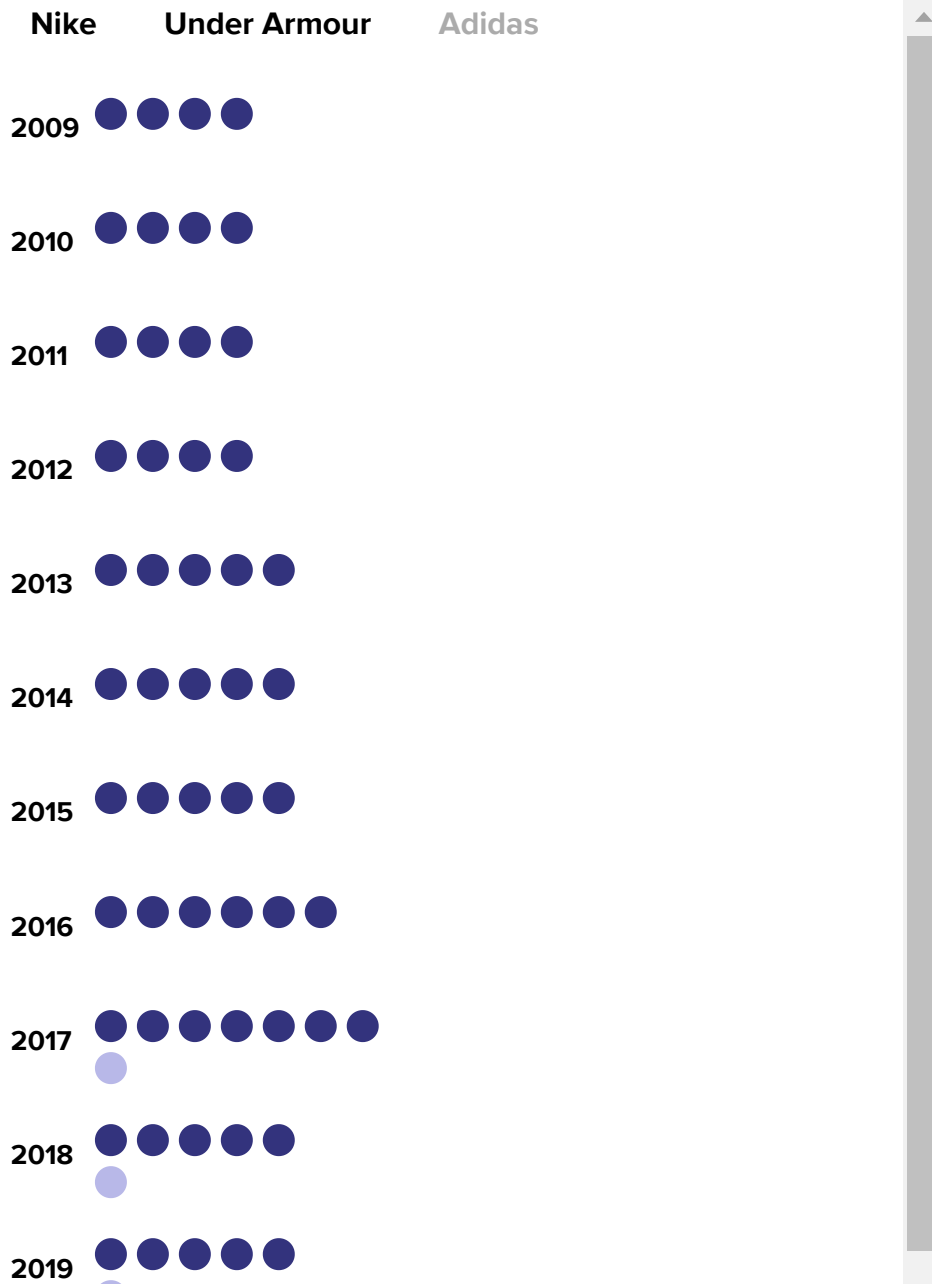
Skechers, on the other hand, had both the lowest number of women on its board of directors (one) and was also the only brand with no female executives listed.



To get a better view of how these numbers have changed over time, we took a deeper look at the top three sportswear brands: Nike, Adidas and Under Armour.

EXECUTIVES

This chart shows the breakdown of male and female executives at each company for the past 11 years.

● Male ● Female
— Consecutive years — Non-consecutive years





Over the past 11 years, Nike has consistently had the highest number of female executives on its team, two. It should be noted, however, that the size of the executive team has not stayed consistent every year, thus changing the ratio.

According to a May 2019 letter from CEO Mark Parker, the sports retailer has “increased VP-level representation of women by 4% to 36% globally” and “achieved a global pay equity ratio for men to women, and white to underrepresented groups in the U.S.”

Adidas, on the other hand, did not report a single woman on its executive board from 2009 through 2016. In 2017, the brand introduced one woman to its executive board, Karen Parkin, who continues to lead global human resources for Adidas.

While the brand’s reported numbers for top executives are not particularly encouraging, an Adidas spokesperson told Retail Dive in an email that globally the company is 49% female and 51% male, and the brand is making strides toward equality in its top ranks.

“In 2011, we made a global commitment to increase the number of women in leadership roles at our company from 24 percent to 32 percent by 2020,” she said. “We are already at 33%, so we’ve exceeded this target. Increasing the number of women in leadership roles is a priority for adidas, which is why we proactively set that goal and also put several measures into place, including Executive Board Members mentoring female talent.”

Despite the strides these brands might be making behind the scenes, the positions they’re required to report tell a slightly

different story. Neither Adidas nor Under Armour reported more than one female executive in any given year, though it should be noted that Adidas generally reported a smaller number of executives than Under Armour did.

For both brands, every year that a woman was present on the executive team she held a human resources role. For Under Armour, that included six years in a row that the brand had eight to 10 executives listed and only one woman, responsible for human resources (Kerry Chandler held the position of chief human resources officer from fiscal 2014 to fiscal 2017, after which she was replaced by Tchernavia Rocker as chief people and culture officer).

An Under Armour spokesperson told Retail Dive that almost half (49%) of the brand's global "teammates" are women and the same percentage in the U.S. are racial or ethnic minorities.

"The executives listed are just a subset of our senior most leaders," she told Retail Dive in an email. "We continue to focus on diversity in the leadership roles at Under Armour — we have senior women leaders in functions throughout the company including Product, Design, Supply Chain, Legal, HR, Communications, Marketing, Digital, and Retail."

Nike had two female executives listed every year. The data also suggests that those women had a relatively long tenure at Nike.

Of 20 executives listed between 2010 and the current year, only three were women, but the longest tenured, Hilary Krane, has been listed as a top executive for the entire period studied (she is currently executive vice president, chief administrative officer and

general counsel for the brand), followed by seven for Jeanne Jackson and four for Monique Matheson, who is currently the brand's executive vice president of global human resources.

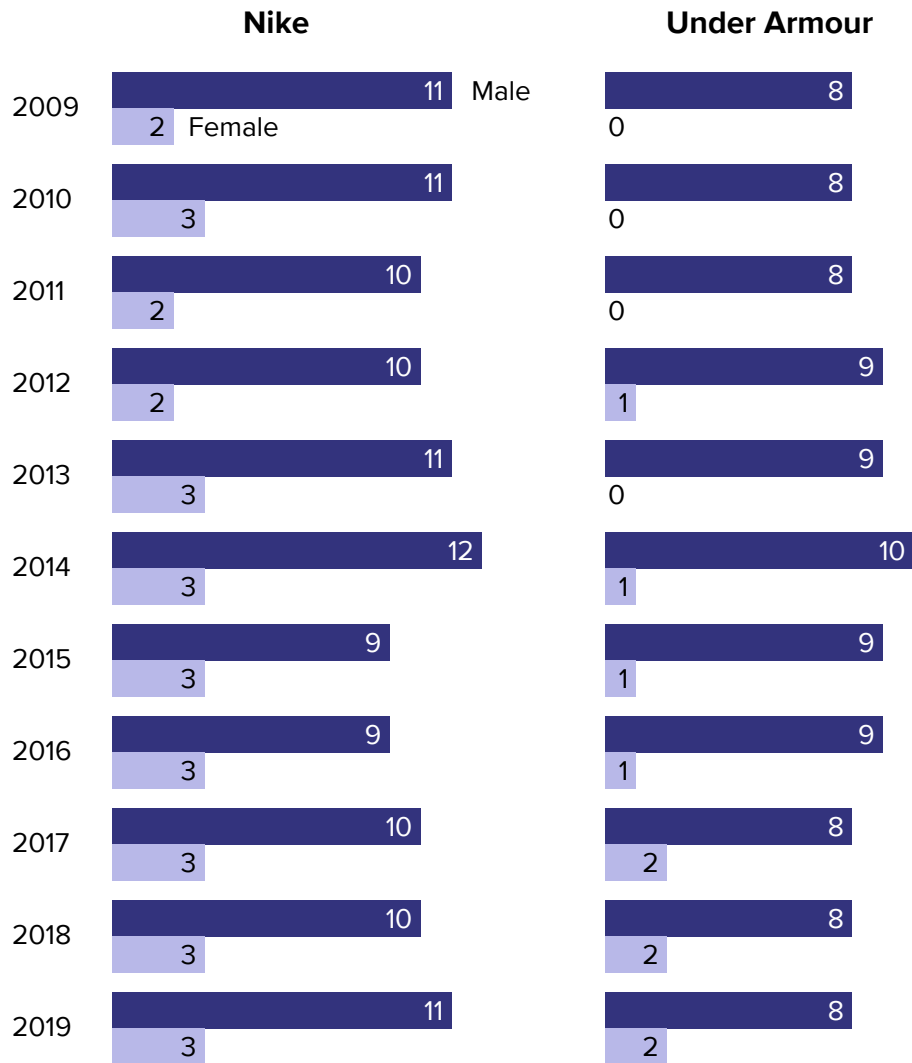
In addition to Krane, CEO Mark Parker, Executive Vice President of Global Sports Marketing John Slusher and Chief Operating Officer Eric Sprunk were the longest tenured executives over the period studied, appearing every year since 2010.

At Under Armour, the average tenure of the 28 executives listed in the timeframe was 3.6 years. The two women it's employed over that period have stayed for four and two years, respectively (Tchernavia Rocker is still with the company currently).

CEO and Chairman of the Board Kevin Plank was the only executive who showed up every year we studied, though Kip Fulks, who last served as chief product officer for the brand, stayed on for seven years.

BOARD MEMBERS

Number of male and female board members in each fiscal year at Nike, Under Armour and Adidas.



While executives may be more important to the day-to-day function of a company, the board of directors plays a key role — and gender inequality persists within these positions as well. While women were appointed to 40% of open Fortune 500 company board seats in 2018, they still control only 22.5% of the total share of those seats, according to a study by Heidrick & Struggles.

Overall, though, athletics brands were more inclusive on their boards of directors than on their executive teams. All three of the

sportswear brands we looked at had more women on their board over the decade we analyzed than in executive roles.

Adidas, for its part, had the highest number of women on its supervisory board, with four or more women from 2014 onward, though the company also reports a generally larger number of board members than Under Armour and Nike. A handful of its longest-running board members were also women: Of 10 supervisory board members who stayed with the company for 10 or more years, two were women.

Under Armour, on the other hand, was the only brand we studied in-depth that reported a year with no women on its board of directors. In fact, Under Armour had no women on its board of directors for four of the years we examined. The brand's five longest-serving board of directors members were also all male, and had been with the company the entire period.

Nike fell in the middle of Under Armour and Adidas, with two or three women on its board of directors every year. The brand's eight longest-serving board members includes one woman, Elizabeth Comstock, who was on the board for ten years. The remaining seven, however, had been with the company for the entire period (2010-present, which appears here as 2009-2019 to better align with the fiscal calendar Adidas and Under Armour follow).

METHODOLOGY

Retail Dive took a look at the executive teams and boards of directors at the top five sportswear brands to see how much the

representation of women has changed over the past 11 years.

Data for top executives at Nike and Under Armour was pulled from the listed “Executive Officers of the Registrant” in annual reports. Board of Directors information was pulled from the same annual reports. As Adidas is not a U.S. company, the brand’s “Executive Board” was used to reflect its top executives, while its “Supervisory Board” was used to reflect its board of directors. This information was collected through annual reports dating back for the past 11 years.

In cases where an outgoing executive or board member was listed at the companies, we included it in our count.

For Under Armour and Adidas, data was collected from 2009 through their current fiscal year, 2019. Since Nike has a different fiscal calendar, data was collected from 2010 through its current fiscal year (2020). As a result, adjustments were made for the sake of consistency to best reflect the same fiscal year.

The data for current top executives and boards of directors for the top five brands was pulled from the company’s respective corporate websites. In the case of Lululemon, a spokesperson requested the addition of three executives to our count, as the website was in the process of being updated at press time.

On Sept. 5, Under Armour announced a new head of North America, Stephanie Pugliese, who is not reflected in this count. Under Armour data is current through the story's initial publish date of Sept. 3.