

A glass ceiling smashed? Reflecting on gender equity in the discipline of history

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Abstract

Women hold between 40 and 50 per cent of all academic appointments in the discipline of history in Australia. Even among the social science disciplines, which are seen as more welcoming to women than STEM disciplines, this makes history a 'success' in terms of gender equity. Measures of success, however, go beyond the presence of women. In taking a deeper dive into data I found a more complicated picture of 'success', where women's increased participation in the discipline is concurrent with men's continued dominance in 'hard' disciplinary fields such as political history, a decline in the overall numbers of historians, and increased questioning of the authority of the discipline. [109 words]

Keywords

gender equity, history discipline, patriarchal equilibrium

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The under-representation of women¹ in academia in STEM disciplines in Australia, such as the physical sciences, engineering and mathematics, is well-recognised: it is monitored by the Australian Government,² and a range of initiatives exist to remedy the situation.³ While this under-representation is also evident in some of the social science disciplines in Australia – women make up around 20 per cent of the professoriate in political science and philosophy and just 13 per cent in economics⁴ – the humanities and social science disciplines are generally seen as more welcoming to women: they are not monitored and no special initiatives for gender equity exist for these disciplines. In the discipline of history, women are concentrated in lower level appointments with fewer at the professorial level as is common to almost all disciplines, but their share of total appointments – between 40 and 50 per cent depending on the source of the data – is greater than most others. Only women in sociology fare better.

Measures of success, however, go beyond the presence of women in any profession or sector. In taking a deeper dive into the discipline of history I found a more complicated picture of ‘success’, where women’s increased participation in the discipline is concurrent with men’s continued dominance in the ‘hard’ disciplinary fields such as political history, a decline in the overall numbers of historians, and increased questioning of the authority of the discipline. Of even greater concern, this complicated picture appears to follow a visible and long-observed pattern in any profession, occupation or industry into which women move in greater numbers: women’s increased parity is accompanied by a devaluing of the work and loss of status. It seems that increasing the numbers of women does not necessarily achieve the feminist goal of equity.

¹ I acknowledge the inadequacies of studies that categorise gender as binary, however data in Australia that uses non-binary sex/gender categories is rare. This may change: the Australian Bureau of Statistics released in January 2021 its new standards for the collection and dissemination of data relating to sex, gender, variations of sex characteristics and sexual orientation which they are encouraging other organisations to use. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables/2020> (accessed 4 March 2021).

² <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/stem-equity-monitor>

³ Including a government-appointed Women in STEM Ambassador (<https://womeninstem.org.au>) and Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) which administers the Athena Swan national accreditation framework (<https://www.sciencegenderequity.org.au>).

⁴ Gender and the Research Workforce, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2018, Australian Research Council, <https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/ERA/GenderWorkforceReport/2018/>

The discipline of history in Australia: a picture of success and its origins

In 2016 Yves Rees reported on the success of women historians in an article in *The Conversation*, a year in which 64 per cent of the presenters at the AHA's annual conference were women – the article's headline is 'How women historians smashed the glass ceiling'. Rees evidences the discipline's success in AHA leadership (where women were president for 14 of the previous 20 years), in ARC grants (where women were more than half of that year's history recipients), in Academy fellowships (where women were 38 per cent of history fellows in the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences), and in journal article authorship (where, in *Australian Historical Studies* and *History Australia*, women were 62 and 56 per cent of authors over the previous five years).⁵

Martin Crotty and Paul Sendziuk confirmed this optimistic picture of the discipline in their 2018 report to the Australian Historical Association, in which their data revealed 'near gender equality across historians in History discipline formation in Australia and New Zealand in 2016'.⁶ As did the Australian Research Council (ARC), also in 2018, when it included in its Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) report (*State of Australian University Research 2018-2019*) data on workforce gender ratios in the field of research classifications (FOR codes) at the four-digit level: a change in reporting that enables us to consider gender and the research workforce at something approaching disciplinary levels, with the additional advantage of capturing historians working beyond history departments in other social science disciplines or in teacher education. In the combined FOR codes 2103 (Historical Studies) and 2199 (Other History and Archaeology) women were 44 per cent (headcount) or 49 per cent (FTE) of the academic appointments in history.

My own survey of history departments in Australian tertiary institutions in 2016 came up with very similar figures. I undertook this work as part of the ARC-funded Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences (GESS) project begun in 2015 at the Australian National University. The GESS project surveyed five individual disciplines (economics, history, political science, philosophy and sociology) in four countries (Australia, Canada, the UK and the US) to identify more clearly the extent of gender equity.⁷ The ultimate aim of the GESS project was to ask what the impact of women's limited numbers, influence, and status in key fields of research has on our capacity to grapple with the social and political changes necessary for progress, not only towards gender equality, but also towards solutions for all the complex and urgent problems that the world faces.⁸

⁵ Yves Rees, 'How women historians smashed the glass ceiling', *The Conversation*, 19 October 2016, <https://theconversation.com/how-women-historians-smashed-the-glass-ceiling-66778>

⁶ Martin Crotty and Paul Sendziuk, *The State of the Discipline: University History in Australia and New Zealand*, Report to the Australian Historical Association Executive, March 2018, <https://theaha.org.au/the-state-of-the-discipline/>, 16.

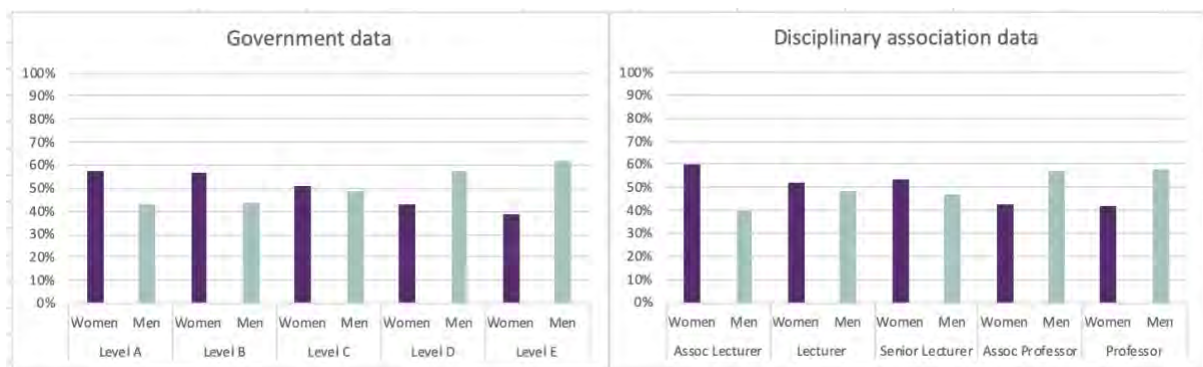
⁷ Fiona Jenkins, Helen Keane, Marian Sawyer, Claire Donovan, Gendered Excellence in the Social Sciences, ARC Discovery Project, DP 150104449, 2015, <https://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gess-home>.

⁸ As its title anticipates, the project sought to develop a critical account of the concept of disciplinary 'excellence'. See Fiona Jenkins, 'Are Equality and Excellence a Happy Marriage of Terms? How Gender

The ambitious aim of the GESS project meant looking further than women’s academic workforce participation rates; it meant investigating, as Rees had touched on, women in disciplinary leadership, as generators and gatekeepers of disciplinary knowledge, and as valued members of and contributors to the discipline.

An academic historian in Australia is now almost as likely to be a woman as a man. Workforce data, despite the different methodologies used for collection, show women fill more than 50 per cent of associate lecturer (Level A) appointments, dropping to around 40 per cent at professorial (E) level (figure 1). History certainly has higher rates of participation by women than, for example, economics, philosophy and political science where the numbers of women at the professorial level (13, 20 and 21 per cent respectively) are more comparable to STEM than social science disciplines (figure 2). Only in sociology are there more women than men. Moreover, women hold a larger proportion of academic appointments in history in Australia than in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States (figure 3).⁹

Figure 1: Women in academic history appointments in Australia, 2016-2017



Sources: Government data uses figures from FOR codes History 2103 and Other History and Archaeology 2199 as reported in ARC, *State of Australian University Research 2018-2019*; disciplinary association data is from Martin Crotty and Paul Sendziuk, *The State of the Discipline: University history in Australia and New Zealand: Report to the Australian Historical Association Executive*, March 2018. All figures are FTE.

Figure 2: Women in five social science disciplines in Australia, 2017

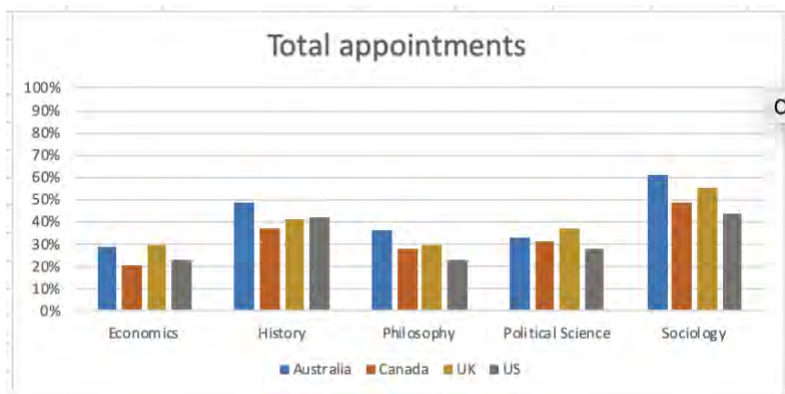
Figures in the Business Case for Change’, in *Inequalities and the Paradigm of Excellence in Academia*, ed. Fiona Jenkins, Barbara Hoenig, Susanna Maria Weber and Andrea Wolfram (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2022).

⁹ These figures should be viewed with caution as only Australia and the UK have government-collected data for a similar period (2017-2018): as at time of writing data since 2010-2011 for Canada has not been forthcoming and the data for the US is extremely patchy and from different periods for each discipline.



Source: ARC, *State of Australian University Research 2018-2019*. FOR codes used: Economics 14; History 2103 and Other History and Archaeology 2199; Applied Ethics 2201, History and Philosophy of Specific Fields 2202 and Philosophy 2203; Political Science 1606; Sociology 1608 and Other Studies in Human Society 1699.

Figure 3: Women in academic appointments in five discipline in four countries



Sources: Australia ARC, *State of Australian University Research 2018-2019*; Canada *Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), 2013-14*; UK *Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2018*. Data from the US is from a survey of economics departments in 2017,¹⁰ American Historical Association membership data 2016,¹¹ a survey of philosophy department websites in 2015,¹² data collected by the American Political Science Association in 2019, and a survey of sociology departments in 2006-2007.¹³

Women’s success in the discipline of history in Australia is complex and conjectural. It can probably be attributed to a mix of institutional and government initiatives, broader changes in society, the support of male allies in history departments, and the persistence of pioneering women. Women historians benefitted from institutional and government policies that promoted women’s participation

¹⁰ Shelly Lundberg, *The 2016 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession*, Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession, American Economic Association, 2017, <https://www.aeaweb.org/content/file?id=3643>

¹¹ I thank the American Historical Association for sharing this data.

¹² Julie Van Camp, *Tenured/Tenure-track Faculty Women at 98 U.S. Doctoral Programs in Philosophy*, APA Committee on the Status of Women, 2015, <http://www.apaonlinecs.org/data-on-women-in-philosophy>

¹³ Kirsten A. Dellinger, Paula England, Margaret K. Nelson, Belinda Robnett, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, and Roberta Spalter-Roth, *2009 Report of the American Sociological Association’s Committee on the Status of Women in Sociology* (American Sociological Association’s CSWS, 2009), http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/about/Council_Statements/Rpt%20of%20Cmte%20Status%20Women%20Aug%202009.pdf

in universities generally: from the admittance of women to universities from as early as 1879,¹⁴ to the abolishment of tertiary tuition fees in 1974, the requirement in 1986 that universities report on their progress towards targets of employment and seniority of women staff, and initiatives during the 1990s that specifically considered the career interruptions that women faced. They also benefited from the social activism on women's issues, spotlighted by International Women's Year in 1975. During that decade 'women's studies', which was hugely popular among women students, was founded at universities: at Flinders, for example, in 1973 and at the ANU in 1976. A historian, Ann Curthoys, was the first coordinator of the subject at the ANU and she was succeeded by another historian, Susan Magarey. It was an exciting move that opened up new topics of research that needed pioneering theorists.¹⁵

These societal changes and government and institutional initiatives affected all women in academic appointments, but sociology and history were the disciplines in which women made most gains. Surely individual women and men must have played a part in that success; women such as Kathleen Fitzpatrick and Margaret Kiddle who, in the 1930s and 1940s were able to negotiate from their privileged race and social position some of the difficulties of academia; and men, such as Max Crawford and Ernest Scott, who encouraged, supported, and acted to include women – as the following anecdote from 1937 reveals. When Crawford interviewed Fitzpatrick for a position at Melbourne University he consulted on the choice between her and a “bright young man” with another professor who argued for the man on the grounds that he was, to quote, a “great all-rounder, Rhodes type, and a man's man”. Crawford obviously disagreed with his colleague's point of view and he appointed Fitzpatrick.¹⁶ The professor whose advice Crawford ignored in 1937 was in the school of philosophy, and the discipline of philosophy remains male-dominated still.

Ann McGrath reflected on history's success after participating in one of the first symposiums organised by the GESS project. McGrath was peppered at the end of the day with questions from the other social scientists who wanted explanations. “Why,” she was asked, “did the men in your discipline help rather than block you?” McGrath was forced to think more deeply about a situation that she had ceased to consider exceptional. McGrath recalled the older generation of male historians who, in the late 1970s and 1980s, were sceptical of, even resistant to, feminist history, but her clearer memories were of men who recognised that research into women's history was long overdue and should be undertaken by women in the academy. Even male historians who publicly challenged the assumptions of feminist history, such as John Hirst in his commentary on *Creating a Nation*, was

¹⁴ Alison L. Booth and Hiau Joo Kee, ‘A Long-Run View of the University Gender Gap in Australia,’ *Australian Economic History Review* 51, no. 3 (2011): 254–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8446.2011.00329.x>, 256.

¹⁵ S.G. Foster and Margaret Varghese, *The Making of The Australian National University: 1946-1996* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2009), 246–248.

¹⁶ Patricia Grimshaw and Jane Carey, ‘Kathleen Fitzpatrick (1905-1990), Margaret Kiddle (1914-1958) and Australian History After the Second World War’, *Gender & History* 13, no. 2 (2001): 354, 349–73.

supportive of women in the discipline.¹⁷ Why male historians in Australia acted differently from many of their fellow social scientists, here and overseas, remains an open question.

The existence of male allies, however, should not detract from the individual women who spoke up, wrote back, worked collaboratively and bought other women along with them in their rise through the discipline. Women such as Patricia Grimshaw, Beverley Kingston, Jill Roe, Marian Quartly, Lyndall Ryan, Susan Magarey, Ann Curthoys, Kay Saunders, Marilyn Lake and Jackie Huggins – many of whom were active in the women’s movement of the 1970s and knew and supported each other – gave the discipline an intellectually inspiring canon of feminist texts and have personally nurtured a couple of generations of women historians.¹⁸

This success of women in the discipline of history in Australia begs further research. How did the distinctive Australian context of university development, government policies and social activism interact with methodological and theoretical changes in the discipline of history and the attitudes and behaviours of male historians to create spaces in which female historians flourished? And how did these women negotiate and seemingly overcome the career limiting effects of caregiving responsibilities – or do female historians who achieve the success of their male colleagues have to choose between career and family? Further investigation into the history of the history discipline in Australia, and the particular experience of its female historians, is certainly warranted.

The discipline of history in Australia: looking more closely at the figures

The Royal Historical Society’s 2018 report on gender equality in the discipline lamented the lack of gender balance in the discipline in the UK where, despite slightly more women than men study history at school and university, less than 42 per cent of academic staff are women and only 26 per cent of professors are female.¹⁹ A high proportion of respondents to the Society’s survey had ‘experienced, seen or suspected’ gender inequality in ‘all the main fora of intellectual exchange in History’.²⁰ The survey underpinning Crotty and Sendziuk’s report to the Australian Historical Association did not include a comparable question, but as part of the GESS project I investigated the presence of women in some of these history fora in Australia where I found an unevenness in women’s presence that the workforce data does not divulge;²¹ and, specifically, that women are

¹⁷ Ann McGrath, ‘The Loneliness of the Feminist Historian,’ *Australian Feminist Studies* 29, no. 80 (2014): 204–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.928400>.

¹⁸ Ann Curthoys was on my own PhD supervisory panel.

¹⁹ Nicola Miller, Kenneth Fincham, Margot Finn, Sarah Holland, Christopher Kissane, and Mary Vincent, ‘Promoting Gender Equality in UK History: A Second Report and Recommendations for Good Practice,’ Royal Historical Society, November 2018, 16–17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

²¹ Methodology and visualisations of the data on history that I collected for the GESS project and from which I draw figures can be found at <https://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/gess/workforce-data>.

concentrated in – to use the ‘tenuous but persistent’ descriptors²² – ‘soft’ fields (such as history of culture and gender, often thought of as ‘feminine’ and of interest to women) and men in ‘hard’ fields (such as political and military history, often thought of as masculine and of interest to men).

Supra-institutional expectations of academics include work in disciplinary associations as office holders and committee members, and on journals as editors or members of editorial boards. Such roles are essential for the vitality of a discipline. Across 32 disciplinary associations in 2020, women were just over 50 per cent of presidents and chairs and closer to 60 per cent of committee members – numbers, considering that women fill just under 50 per cent of academic appointments, that could be read as a healthy indication of women’s leadership and influence, but they could equally be read as women carrying a slightly disproportionate burden of work. These aggregated figures for association committee membership obscure the large range in compositions of individual committees: for example, the Australian Women’s History Network had no men on its committee, the Religious History Association committee had equal numbers of women and men and the Naval Historical Society committee had no women. The committees of associations also showed a range of gender composition and economic, forest, military, mining, and sport history associations were male dominated. The membership figures of associations revealed a similar range of gender composition and in certain fields men dominated: in economic, forest, military, and mining history.

There was a similar gender profile at history journals: women were 54 per cent of editors and 43 percent of editorial boards but the aggregated figures hide the variations in gender balance. Of the four journals with a single editor three of them were women, while the journals covering economic and political history had no women as editors, and men dominated on editorial boards of journals in the fields of economic, mining, colonial and religious history.

What about the authors of articles in these journals? The peer-reviewed article is, arguably, the most used indicator of research output, in terms of quality and status, in most academic disciplines. While the book remains paramount for historians and their discipline (if not their institution’s performance matrices), finding data on the authorship, and sales, of history books proved impossible for the material and human resources of the GESS project. I therefore limited my survey to four disciplinary journals – two generalist journals with predominantly female editors (*Australian Historical Studies (AHS)* and *History Australia (HA)*) and two specialist journals with predominantly male editors (*Australian Journal of Politics and History (AJPH)* and *Journal of Australian Colonial History (JACH)*), and a more public-facing online platform, the *Conversation*.

An article count since 1999 for each of the four journals revealed that the *AHS* had gained parity in the authorship of articles at that time and since 2009 women have authored more articles than men.

²² Kaela Jubas and Shauna Butterwick, ‘Hard/Soft, Formal/Informal, Work/Learning: Tenuous/Persistent Binaries in the Knowledge-based Society’, *Journal of Workplace Learning* 20, no. 7/8 (2008): 514–25.

Women have been published more often than men in most *HA* issues since its establishment in 2003. The gender division of authors has fluctuated in *JACH* while male authors have been published more often in *AJPH* throughout the period. From 1999 to 2020 women were 53 per cent of authors in the two generalist journals, 38 per cent in the colonial history journal and only 26 per cent of the politics and history articles.

The GESS project did not have the resources to analyse the topics of these articles, but a recent large-scale analysis in the US did. Correlated topic modeling of articles published in history journals between 1951 and 2014 and history dissertations between 1980 and 2015 in the US found that women and men explored many of the same topics, including religion, colonialism, African history, and aspects of historiography. “Yet, there is a notable divergence,” said the authors of the study. “Men tended to focus on topics related to political and intellectual history, military history, and Big History (i.e., the study of history on a large scale). Women historians tended to write about topics relation to gender, body history, patterns of consumption, family and households, sexuality, the US civil rights movement, and the cultural turn.” There was also a correlation between the gender pairings of doctoral students and primary supervisors and the choice of dissertation topic: the top four topics for students with a male supervisory were military history, diplomatic history political history and political revolutions; those for a female supervisory were women and gender, consumption and consumerism, the cultural turn, body history and family. Students with a female advisor are more likely to choose a gender topic, and female students tend to select gender topics whether or not they study with a female supervisor.²³

The trend of women historians to be found in greater numbers in ‘soft’ fields of history (social, cultural, women’s) and men historians in ‘hard’ fields (politics, military, economics) appears to carry through to publications in more public forums such as the *Conversation* but here, again, a closer look at the data on historians in Australia reveals a more complicated picture.

The *Conversation* is an online news and views site the charter of which includes a pledge to ‘unlock the knowledge of researchers and academics to provide the public with clarity and insight into society’s biggest problems.’²⁴ It is a free resource in that it is free to read and free to share or republish under a Creative Commons licence. The *Conversation’s* ‘top contributor’ list, displayed on the website, names the 15 authors who have published the largest number of articles (at the time of viewing) although it does not list them in order of number of publications.²⁵ The ratio of women to

²³ Stephan Risi, Mathias W. Nielsen, Emma Kerr, Emer Brady, Lanu Kim, Daniel A. McFarland, Dan Jurafsky, James Zou and Londa Schiebinger, ‘Diversifying History: A Large-Scale Analysis of Changes in Researcher Demographics and Scholarly Agendas’, *PLOS ONE* 17, no. 1 (2022): e0262027. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0262027>.

²⁴ <https://theconversation.com/au/charter>

²⁵ Explanation provided in personal correspondence with Molly Glassey, Digital Editor, *The Conversation*, 18 March 2021.

men among ‘top contributors’ for articles with history ‘tags’ (in the Australian edition in December 2020), revealed the predominance of women among authors of ‘women’s history’ and their under-representation in ‘sports history’ and ‘political history’. Although there is gender balance in the ‘top contributors’ of ‘Australian history’, for the 1005 articles tagged only as ‘history’, just 3 of the 15 ‘top contributors’ were women. The gender ratio of ‘top contributors’ needs to be considered in conjunction with the frequency of use of various article ‘tags’. The tag ‘political history’ was used on 21 per cent of articles. In contrast, tags for ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’ history were used on 8 and 7 per cent of articles, ‘military’ and ‘economic’ on 4 per cent, ‘women’s’ on 3 per cent, ‘environmental’ on 2 per cent, and ‘feminist’ on 1 per cent of articles.

From additional data that the *Conversation* provided to me, I was able to determine that of their 15 most read authors – who were historians working in Australian institutions – nine were women. The most read author was a man who would be broadly categorised as working in the field of political history. A woman was, however, the author of the most read article, and there were eight women authors, five men authors, and two female/male co-authors in the top 15 most read articles. The most read article was on a religious history topic, but five of the top 15 were on political history topics.²⁶

The number of articles on the *Conversation* tagged as ‘history’ grows every week along with ever-changing numbers of additional history tags, and shifting ratios of women to men among the authors, but this simple number-crunching of the *Conversation* data does suggest that women historians publish in the public arena at rates even higher than might be expected from their presence in academia. When considering the frequency of specific history tags, however, we see that political history is more likely to be both published and read than articles from other fields. This is, perhaps, an example of the ‘gendered hierarchy of knowledge within the discipline’ that Carol Johnson has identified in the discipline of political science.²⁷ The prioritised and privileged fields of history, such as politics and military, are not only the fields to which men appear to have retreated as women entered the discipline, they may also be the fields in which women need to work if they are to be successful in disciplinary terms.

In summary, it appears that men historians still dominate in ‘hard’ subject areas: economic, military, and political history – and sport history. These are the subjects that the general public reads and, I would argue, policy makers heed.

Whether the contributions of women are valued is another aspect of ‘success’. The GESS project identified and investigated three measures of esteem for women in academia: as fellows of academies, as recipients of academic awards; and as recipients of public prizes. In July 2020, the percentage of

²⁶ I counted authors who were historians working in Australian institutions. I am grateful to Molly Glassey, Digital Editor, *The Conversation*, for providing this data.

²⁷ Carol Johnson, ‘Hard Heads and Soft Hearts: The Gendering of Australian Political Science,’ *Australian Feminist Studies* 29, no. 80 (2014): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.928191>.

historians on the Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) and Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) fellows list that were women was 35 per cent and 41 per cent respectively, or 37 per cent combined. These figures are a reasonable reflection of the current academic workforce and compare favourably with the other disciplines in the GESS study: only women sociologists are better represented among fellows of ASSA. ASSA, however, has a separate category for 'Economic History' and the percentage of women fellows in this category is only 10 per cent.

There is quite a range of awards for historians and their work in Australia, and some of these prizes and awards honour eminent women historians. The Mary Bennett Prize for Women's History, for example, is awarded every two years by the Australian Women's History Network to an early career historian. It does not stipulate that the nominees must be women but all prizes have been awarded to women since its inception in 2000.²⁸ The largest national body for academic historians, the Australian Historical Association (AHA), bestows six awards and prizes, three of which are named for women historians and three for men. There is one further award which is open only to women: the Magarey Medal for Biography. The AHA also offers six bursaries and scholarships, two of which are named for highly-regarded historians, one women and one man.²⁹

The gender division of recipients for all AHA awards and prizes since their inception reflects the large numbers of women in academic history. The newest prize, the Ann Curthoys prize, has been awarded once, to a woman. The recently established Jill Roe Prize for postgraduate students has been awarded five times, twice to women. The Kay Daniels Award has been awarded nine times and seven of its winners are women, with a further award going to a co-authored work by a woman and a man. The Allan Martin Award assists early-career historians further their research in Australian history: four out of eight winners of this award have been women, with a further award going to a co-authored work by a woman and a man. The Serle Award for the best postgraduate thesis in Australian history has been won seven out of 10 times by women. And the W.K. Hancock Prize, for a first scholarly book in any field of history, has been won seven out of 15 times by women, and a further two women were joint winners with a man.

The oldest and, arguably, the most prestigious prize in history in Australia is the Ernest Scott Prize administered by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne. Since its inception in 1952, women have been 23 per cent of all awardees. Since 2004, however, women have been 42 per cent of recipients.

The presence of women as fellows of Academies and as recipients of academic prizes and awards shows that their scholarship is recognised by their colleagues in the discipline of history, but less so

²⁸ 'Mary Bennet Prize', Australian Women's History Network, accessed 12 May 2021, <http://www.auswhn.org.au/prizes/mary-bennett-prize/>

²⁹ 'Awards and Prizes', The Australian Historical Association, accessed 10 May 2021, <https://www.theaha.org.au/awards-and-prizes>

the more prestigious the accolade. This uneven recognition of women's scholarship extends beyond academia to the works of history that are recognised in public literary and book awards. Among these awards, women historians have received their fair share – apart, that is, from the most prestigious, the Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History.

Of the Queensland Literary Awards–University of Southern Queensland History Book Award made from 2012 to 2019, seven were to women and two were to men, including a jointly authored work in 2016. All recipients were academic historians.³⁰ Nine women and five men won the Western Australian Premier's Book Awards–State Library of Western Australian West Australian History between 2004 and 2016, and there were mixed gender co-author winners in 2005 and 2006.³¹ And of the NSW Premier's Australian History Prizes made from 2012 to 2020, four were to women and five were to men.

Since its inception in 2008, however, the Prime Minister's Literary Awards Prize for Australian History has been won by five women and 16 men. Of those five women only three have won the prize outright, and that has been in the last four years. The two other women were a joint winner, in 2014, and the co-author of one of the joint winning books, in 2016. Of the 18 books that have been awarded this prize, half might be classified as recognisable 'hard' knowledge: six were on a war topic and three on a politics topic. Of the other half, six were on an Indigenous topic, one on environmental history, one on religion and one was a biography. Not only is the most prestigious public award for history still dominated by men, the fields of history most closely aligned with men also dominated.

A similar pattern observed in the discipline of psychology

I don't think this high but uneven presence of women in the discipline of history in Australia is unique but studies of the phenomenon in other disciplines are scarce. There is, however, an extensive study of the discipline of psychology published in 2020³² in the United States where around 78 per cent of undergraduates and 71 per cent of graduate students are women and historical gender gaps in promotion and tenure rates are closing or have closed in recent years. Although a gender gap remains in senior positions, including as professors, it may be that the closing of the gap at lower levels is too recent to be reflected yet. Women psychologists receive grants at rates comparable to those of men. A

³⁰ This award was not made in 2020 and is no longer in the list of Queensland Literary Awards. There is no explanation for this change on either the State Library of Queensland or the USQ websites (at February 2021).

³¹ This award has not been made since 2016.

³² June Gruber, Jane Mendle, Kristen A. Lindquist, Toni Schmader, Lee Anna Clark, Eliza Bliss-Moreau, Modupe Akinola, et al, 'The Future of Women in Psychological Science', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620952789>. This was a more comprehensive study than was feasible for the GESS project. The article has 59 authors.

study of authors of articles in 130 high-impact peer-reviewed psychology journals found that 44.2 per cent were women. Women are, by these indices, close to parity in the discipline.³³

There are, as there are to the discipline of history in Australia, caveats to this picture of success in the discipline of psychology in the US. On receipt of grants, it appears that women are less likely to apply for grants than men. Men's articles are cited roughly 1.3 times more than women's and women's 'h' indices are roughly 4.47 points lower, regardless of age or career stage. And there is a notable difference between subdisciplines: fewer women publish in in fields such as sensation and perception (29.9 per cent women authors) and neuroscience (36.5 per cent women authors), whereas clinical (48.9 per cent women authors) and health (52.2 per cent women authors) showed gender parity, and developmental psychology had more women authors (59.5 per cent). These numbers are at least partly a function of differences in women's presence in subdisciplines: there are, for example, more women in developmental psychology. Regardless of discipline the prevalence of women authors declined linearly as the journals' impact factors increased.³⁴

When it comes to indices of 'eminence' in the discipline of psychology – defined as 'explicit outcomes' (who is deemed to be 'eminent', 'important', 'influential', 'a public intellectual') and 'implicit outcomes' (awards, invited talks, publicly visible research, leadership roles) – there are clear gender imbalances in both scholarly and popular outlets. There are, for example, only 14 women on a list of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the modern era (classified by the authors as the post–World War II era). Beyond the discipline, as public intellectuals, women in psychological science appear to be underrepresented: in August 2019, women accounted for approximately a third of the psychological scientists listed on the Edge website, a centre showcasing the work of important public intellectuals, and only a quarter of the authors published in the Gray Matter section of *The New York Times*. Women are also underrepresented as invited speakers at colloquia and conferences and their presence as speakers seems predicated by the gender of the symposium chairs, that is those who organise the symposium and invite the speakers. Where there were all-female chairs 49.6 percent of speakers were women, with mixed male and female chairs 42.5 per cent were women, and with all-male chairs 33.8 percent were.³⁵

In summary, women psychologists are more likely to be found in subdisciplines more closely aligned with traditional care work (clinical, health and developmental psychology, that is children) than those more aligned with the sciences (sensation and perception, and neuroscience). They are less likely to be published in journals regarded as authoritative and less likely to be present in public debate. Moreover, with its basis in the social sciences, the discipline of psychology is, arguably, the 'soft' knowledge in the field of the study and treatment of the mind and its disorders rather than the 'hard'

³³ Ibid., 4–6.

³⁴ Ibid., 4–5.

³⁵ Gruber, et al, 'The Future of Women in Psychological Science', 6–7.

knowledge of psychiatry which is based in medical sciences. It is noteworthy, then, that, in the US and the UK, there are four times as many women in the discipline of psychology than in psychiatry.³⁶

Patriarchal equilibrium at work

This patchy presence of women across academia – between STEM and social science and humanities subjects for example – and inside disciplines such as history, is visible in other sectors, industries and professions and it raises questions about achieving gender equity through increasing the numbers of women in the workforce. In 2021 there were more women than men journalists in Australia, yet gender inequity is actually worsening, with women journalists getting younger and earning less than men journalists who are, on average, getting older and better-paid. Moreover, advertisements for journalism jobs show a decline in the importance of ‘hard’ skills such as ‘reporting’, ‘editing’ and ‘investigative journalism’ and an increase in the ‘soft’ skills of ‘communications’, ‘public relations’ and ‘social media’.³⁷ Across the world women hold around 70 per cent of jobs in the health workforce but gender inequities remain. As detailed in a 2019 Gender Equity Hub (GEH) of the World Health Organization (WHO) report, women are segregated both horizontally (they dominate nursing and men dominate surgery) and vertically (they are concentrated in lower-status, lower-paid roles). As the report encapsulates in its title health is ‘Delivered by women, led by men’.³⁸

That women are concentrated in lower-status, lower-paid roles, is not a unique phenomenon of ‘care’ work which has traditionally been, and remains, gendered female. Whenever women have moved into occupations in large numbers, those jobs begin to pay less, and this remains the case when data is controlled for work experience, education, and skills, as interrogated in a study of US Census Data from 1950 to 2000.³⁹ The presence of women not only devalues the work being done, as reflected in remuneration, but increases the incidence of harassment and blocked mobility, two features of women’s experience in the workforce that were expected to disappear as their numbers increased.⁴⁰ Where policy might allow women in, practice will continue to make it difficult for them: witness the

³⁶ Dawood M. Hafeez, Ahmed Waqas, Salman Majeed, Sadiq Naveed, Khalid I. Afzal, Zehra Aftab, Muhammad Zeshan, and Faisal Khosa, ‘Gender Distribution in Psychiatry Journals’ Editorial Boards Worldwide’, *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 94 (2019): 152119, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2019.152119>.

³⁷ Nikolas Dawson, Sacha Molitorisz, Marian-Andrei Rizoiu, and Peter Fray, ‘Layoffs, Inequity and COVID-19: A Longitudinal Study of the Journalism Jobs Crisis in Australia from 2012 to 2020’, *Journalism*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884921996286>.

³⁸ ‘Delivered by Women, Led by Men: A Gender and Equity Analysis of the Global Health and Social Workforce’, *Human Resources for Health Observer Series*, No. 24, Commissioned by World Health Organisation, 2019, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311322/9789241515467-eng.pdf>.

³⁹ Asaf Levanon, Paula England and Paul Allison, ‘Occupational Feminization and Pay: Assessing Causal Dynamics Using 1950-2000 U.S. Census Data’, *Social Forces* 88, no. 2 (2009): 865–91, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0264>.

⁴⁰ Janice D. Yoder, ‘Rethinking Tokenism: Looking Beyond Numbers’, *Gender & Society* 5, no. 2 (1991): 188, <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124391005002003>.

lack of military armour designed for women in the military,⁴¹ or space suits for women astronauts – not to mention the lack of a space toilet that would accommodate women’s specific anatomical needs in zero-gravity, a problem that was only solved in 2020.⁴² Further features of some women’s working lives – such as their isolation from informal social and professional networks, and an exacerbated pressure to perform well because they were so visible – have also been shown to be a result of gender rather than tokenism: ‘token’ men do not have the same experiences and their visibility appears to give them an advantage in promotion.⁴³ This phenomenon, of men in occupations where women dominate moving more quickly into leadership roles, is called the ‘glass elevator’ effect.⁴⁴

Women have difficulty getting past the ‘remarkably durable and global’ perception that equates leadership qualities with male qualities. This ‘think manager–think male’ problem, means that only men are seen to have the qualities required in a manager because a woman with those qualities is betraying gender expectations: he is assertive, she is unacceptably pushy; he is authoritative, she is shrill, and so on.⁴⁵ When women do get into leadership positions, they often find themselves on – in an extension of the ‘glass’ metaphors – a ‘glass cliff’. Women are more likely than men to be promoted to CEO in organisations that are experiencing short-, medium- or long-term declines or are in crisis.⁴⁶ This may not actually be a misogynistic impulse to find a female scapegoat but rather a belief that women have the specific social and emotional capabilities to deal with the challenges of decline or crisis. It might also be the result of a genuine willingness to give women an opportunity to shine, a ‘golden opportunity’ rather than a ‘poisoned chalice’.⁴⁷ Whatever the motivation, the outcome is the same: women move into leadership when the role is more difficult and the rewards less likely to be realised.

The discipline of history in Australia could arguably be described as in decline. Women have been filling their fair share of academic positions as the numbers of historians in Australian academia have declined. There were around 320 tenured historians found by a survey in 1973 with perhaps 75 in other departments such as economic history and maybe 200 or so in the colleges of advanced

⁴¹ Andrea N. Goldstein, “‘Why Are You Trying to Destroy the Last Good Thing Men Have?’” Understanding Resistance to Women in Combat Jobs’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20, no. 3 (2018): 392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1451259>.

⁴² Marina Koren, ‘NASA Finally Made a Toilet for Women’, *The Atlantic*, 12 October 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2020/10/space-toilet-nasa-women/616686/>.

⁴³ Yoder, ‘Rethinking Tokenism’, 180–181.

⁴⁴ Michelle K. Ryan, S. Alexander Haslam, Thekla Morgenroth, Floor Rink, Janka Stoker, and Kim Peters, ‘Getting on Top of the Glass Cliff: Reviewing a Decade of Evidence, Explanations, and Impact’, *The Leadership Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2016): 446–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.10.008>.

⁴⁵ Michelle K. Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam, ‘The Glass Cliff: Exploring the Dynamics Surrounding the Appointment of Women to Precarious Leadership Positions’, *Academy of Management Review* 32, no. 2 (2007): 551.

⁴⁶ Alison Cook and Christy Glass, ‘Above the Glass Ceiling: When Are Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Promoted to CEO?: Research Notes and Commentaries’, *Strategic Management Journal* 35, no. 7 (2014): 1087, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2161>.

⁴⁷ Ryan and Haslam, ‘The Glass Cliff’, 559.

education and institutes of technology that became part of the university sector in the 1960s.⁴⁸ That's about 600 in total, just before the mid-1970s surge in women entering university and being able to take courses in women's studies taught by women academics. In the last survey undertaken by the AHA in 2017, there were 295 historians in continuing positions, and that figure rises to only 346 if you include fixed term and fellowship positions where the fellowship holder doesn't have a continuing position to return to. That is a significant decline in total numbers.⁴⁹ Martin Crotty and Paul Sendzuik point out in their report to the AHA in 2018 that most of this decline in numbers had already taken place before the year 2000 and that figures have remained reasonably steady since. Student numbers in history, however, almost doubled between 1995 and 2016, 'starkly illustrating' say Crotty and Sendzuik how academic historians are 'required to do much more with less'.⁵⁰ The rise in proportion of women in academic history appointments overall, and in senior positions in particular, has taken place at a time when workloads have increased.

Journalism in Australia is also subject to declining numbers. A recent editorial pointed out that the Australian Parliaments' 'press gallery A-team' are now all women, a situation remarkable to the author because women were for so long excluded from 'high-status rounds like politics' despite women's increasing numbers in the profession.⁵¹ Yet, just as in the discipline of history, this increase in numbers of women and their rise to the top of the profession has happened while the overall numbers of journalists has declined.⁵² Moreover, this change in the profile of a journalist is against a backdrop of a collapse in mainstream media organisations and a growing mistrust of journalists and journalism, a diminishment of authority and influence, not only in Australia but around the world: less than a third of US citizens report confidence in news organisations.⁵³ Journalism, writes Christopher Warren, now has 'less cultural weight'.⁵⁴ A lessening of 'cultural weight' might also describe history: many subject areas and analytical approaches of the discipline certainly do not seem to be valued by government.⁵⁵ The methodological and theoretical changes in the discipline of history, that is the ones that have helped women historians and feminist approaches to flourish, and the expanding fields of history's sub-disciplines, the ones that women's scholarship have enriched, have been the fodder of

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Serle, 'The State of the Profession in Australia', *Historical Studies*, vol. 13, no. 61, 1973, pp. 686–687.

⁴⁹ Crotty and Sendzuik, 'The State of the Discipline', 10. Neither the 1973 nor 2017 figures included casual staff.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵¹ Christopher Warren, 'Press Gallery A-Team Captures the Mood of the Nation — and They're All Women', *Crikey*, 1 March 2021, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2021/03/01/press-gallery-women-journalism/>.

⁵² Dawson, et al, 'Layoffs, Inequity and COVID-19: A Longitudinal Study of the Journalism Jobs Crisis in Australia from 2012 to 2020'.

⁵³ Sue Robinson, 'Crisis of Shared Public Discourses: Journalism and How It All Begins and Ends with Trust', *Journalism* 20, no. 1 (2019): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918808958>.

⁵⁴ Christopher Warren, 'Discounted Goods: Rita Skeeter and the Decline of Trust in Journalism', *Griffith Review*, no. 64 (2019): 103.

⁵⁵ Guy Rundle, 'The Government Is Sending Our True History off a Cliff — and Few Seem to Mind', *Crikey*, 4 June 2021, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2021/06/04/australian-national-archives-neglect/>.

culture wars and the derogatory target of opponents of so-called identity politics. History from below, the cultural, ethnographic and transnational turns, and an acknowledged need for diversity that includes incorporating culture, ethnicity, gender and sexuality differences into authorial perspectives are too often ‘conflated in the rhetoric of conservative critics with relativism and postmodernism’, becoming reasons to doubt the authority of academic historians.⁵⁶

The changing profile and fortunes of the discipline of history – from fewer historians required to do more, to the questioning of historians’ expertise – is a reflection of what is happening in academia in Australia more broadly. Although total academic workforce figures increased between 2010 and 2018 (by 36.6 per cent) most of that growth was staff who are not on FTE-based contracts, including casual, visiting, exchange or seconded staff. The numbers employed on an FTE basis actually decreased from 2015 to 2018 (by 6.7 per cent).⁵⁷ Worryingly, 33 per cent of all research outputs in the 2018 Excellence in Research for Australia collection was contributed by non-salaried staff include emeritus, visiting, exchange or seconded staff, unpaid visiting fellows, or conjoint, clinical and adjunct staff.⁵⁸ Fewer scholars are adequately remunerated for the work they do and a third of them are not remunerated at all.

The questioning of historians’ expertise is arguably one manifestation of a generalised distrust of experts and intellectuals that has been on the rise over recent decades and extends even to science disciplines. This ‘anti-intellectualism’ is a term credited to Richard Hofstadter (in 1962) for whom populism – the idea that ‘the plain sense of the common man ... is an altogether adequate substitute for, if not actually superior to, formal knowledge and expertise’ – was central to his definition. It is conceivable that the simultaneous democratisation of knowledge and increased importance of academically-qualified experts in ever-growing government bureaucracies has contributed to scepticism not only of humanities but also of science disciplines.⁵⁹ Although distrust of scientists themselves is rare, confidence in them appears to fail in the context of politicised debates, notably

⁵⁶ Frank Bongiorno, ‘The Statue Wars’, *Inside Story*, 4 September 2017, <https://insidestory.org.au/the-statue-wars/>. For a summary of recent criticism see Robert Manne, ‘Abbott, ANU and the Decline of Western Civilisation’, *The Monthly*, August 2018. <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2018/august/1533045600/robert-manne/abbott-anu-and-decline-western-civilisation>.

⁵⁷ Section 1: Research Workforce, Gender and the Research Workforce, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2018, Australian Research Council, <https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/ERA/GenderWorkforceReport/2018/>

⁵⁸ ‘Non-salaried staff include emeritus, visiting, exchange or seconded staff, unpaid visiting fellows, members of religious denominations, conjoint, clinical and adjunct staff with a demonstrated publication association with an eligible institution. These researchers make an important contribution to the Australian university research sector and broader research community, as authors they contribute to 33 per cent of all outputs for ERA. Section 1: ERA 2018 National Overview, Contribution of Non-Salaried Staff, State of Australian University Research 2018-19, ERA National Report, Australian Research Council, <https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/ERA/NationalReport/2018/>

⁵⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963); Eric Merkley and Peter John Loewen, ‘Anti-Intellectualism and the Mass Public’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic’, *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2021, 2.

about climate change and the environment, but most recently about public health.⁶⁰ In Australia many of the ingredients of anti-elite culture wars – on issues such as land rights, feminism and Australian history – were on display as early as the 1980s in the pages of the *IPA Review* in the lead up to Australia’s Bicentennial in 1988. They were clearly visible in the so-called ‘history wars’ of the ‘Howard years’ following Liberal Party success in the 1996 Federal elections. These ingredients have provided ‘an adaptable discursive framework that could be readily used to speak to a variety of issues and that has since been used by conservative commentators to reframe scientific issues such as global warming in terms of an “elites versus ordinary people” struggle.’ And because the discursive framework was devised by a conservative think-tank, the Institute of Public Affairs, these elites are usually ‘left-wing’.⁶¹

It may be coincidence that anti-elite discourse entered popular parlance in Australia at the same time as the emergence of second wave feminism,⁶² however, much of anti-academic vitriole has been directed at women academics, underscoring the correlative, if not causative, role of feminism in the rise of anti-elite and anti-intellectual sentiment. Early feminist research was met with critical distrust because of its perceived tendency to be more qualitative than quantitative. This tendency was very evident in history, and even though early feminist histories of the family made particular use of quantitative evidence, a 2020 study of two key women’s history journals found the research to be overwhelmingly qualitative.⁶³ The tendency was also particularly evident in sociology, the other discipline in the GESS study in which gender parity has been reached. The conflation of anti-academic/anti-feminism sentiment was seen in a recent incident in the UK when the *Sunday Times* published a story based on an academic journal article with a ‘problematically inaccurate’ headline that was reproduced in other publications, online readers’ comments were scathing about academics’ lack of ‘real life’ experience, their access to taxpayers’ money for research, and the irrelevance of their work. Comments also covered a well-worn range of anti-feminist, homophobic tropes and discussed the women researchers’ unattractiveness to men as this Dailymail.co.uk comment exemplifies: ‘Most men would run a mile from a feminist as they are half mad haridans who refuse to

⁶⁰ Malcolm Fairbrother, ‘Environmental Attitudes and the Politics of Distrust’, *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 5 (2017), 3; Merkle and Loewen, ‘Anti-Intellectualism and the Mass Public’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic’.

⁶¹ Mark Davis and Nick Sharman, “‘Strange Times’: Anti-Elite Discourse, the Bicentenary, and the IPA Review”, *Communication, Politics & Culture* 48, no. 2 (2015): 80, 78–97.

⁶² Marian Sawer, *Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990); Davis and Sharman, “‘Strange Times’”, 81.

⁶³ Alana Piper and Ana Stevenson, ‘Business as Usual: Feminist History in a Post-Truth World’, in *History in a Post-Truth World: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Marius Gudonis and Benjamin T. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2020), 191; see also Sharon Block and David Newman, ‘What, Where, When, and Sometimes Why: Data Mining Two Decades of Women’s History Abstracts’, *Journal of Women’s History* 23, no. 1 (2011): 81–109.

shave their pits or nether regions. Ladies who are feminine by contrast are loved by all men. With the exception of the g a y s [sic] of course.⁶⁴

Judith Bennett warned us of this ‘pattern of women gaining access to institutions only when those institutions are in decline’ back in 2006, a pattern Bennet wrote that is ‘often observed in women’s history’: her particular example of women in the English brewing industry between 1300 and 1700.⁶⁵ The move of women into a discipline, profession or industry that is accompanied by the maintenance of men’s dominance in ‘harder’ knowledge areas or in managerial roles, is an example of the ballroom dance that Bennett describes, ‘a dance where women and men – many different sorts of women and men – move across the room, alter their steps, movements and rhythms, even change partners or groups, but *always the men are leading*.’⁶⁶ Bennett called it ‘patriarchal equilibrium’ and it can be seen in the discipline of history or psychology, in journalism or health, in the military or in space.

Patriarchal equilibrium in the academy

Nancy Niemi gives a particularly dire account of patriarchal equilibrium in America where women attend college in ‘record numbers, earning more and higher degrees than before’ but where ‘men remain in positions of greater economic, social, and cultural power.’ As Niemi explains:

‘just as women have learned to play the higher education game very well, they are finding the rules of game have changed. Now that women are succeeding in greater numbers than men in college enrollment, college achievement (academic and extracurricular), and college completion, these achievements are being countered by responses in American economic and political spheres that render women’s college successes less meaningful. I maintain that as women obtain more college credentials, the value of those degrees are diminishing, making the cultural call for more college attendance, particularly for those who have never attended before, a shell game with dubious rewards and significant risks.’⁶⁷

Niemi amasses evidence that is familiar from what I have already discussed: from the gender profile of university students to changes in academia and labour market segmentation, men continue to lead. There is a persistence of uneven gender patterns in college majors where the majority of women are found in humanities and social science rather than STEM disciplines, and in STEM disciplines there

⁶⁴ Hannah Yelin and Laura Clancy, ‘Doing Impact Work While Female: Hate Tweets, “Hot Potato” and Having “Enough of Experts”’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 28, no. 2 (2021): 176, 180, 184.

⁶⁵ Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia, Pa: Penn, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 54–81.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁷ Nancy S. Niemi, *Degrees of Difference: Women, Men, and the Value of Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 4.

are more woman in some fields than others. There are fewer women, for example, in computer science, mathematics, statistics and physics – that is the ‘harder’ knowledge fields.⁶⁸ The saturation of the labour market with bachelor’s degree recipients has increased the importance of having a degree from an elite college, those institutions that ‘play critical roles in the transmission of power and privilege’. More women than men apply to these elite schools but they accept fewer women, and as the wealth of the institution increases, the percentage of women enrolled decreases.⁶⁹

As more women enter academia, and come closer to gender parity at the professorial level, the reward system has shifted to accommodate the work of men. Full-time tenure track positions have decreased and been replaced with casual and adjunct positions that offer little security and less room for advancement: these ranks are filled with women. Grant activity is ‘disproportionally and increasingly the work of men in research universities’ and decision-making, funding, and promotion criteria is still based on the ‘individualistic mythology’ of a lone researcher being rewarded for his individual work. No account is taken of the support that these male researchers receive, not only from women in the home, but from women in the academy who ‘do the great majority of the “academic housekeeping” necessary to keep students happy, educated, and properly advised.’⁷⁰

As university-educated women move into the workforce the work they do is devalued. US employment data reveals that in professions where women dominate in numbers – examples include human biology, veterinary medicine, and paediatrics – the pay levels have declined. ‘These professions require years of higher education, and yet each has seen its status decline.’⁷¹ Men remain dominant in employment that does not need a degree but has status, power and money. They overrepresented in higher risk industries such as construction, mining, firefighting, military, farming, fishing, and protective services.⁷² In policing, for example, women made slow and steady gains into the profession, increasing their presence at about one half of 1 per cent each year after 1971. After 2000 when women were around 14 per cent of all police officers in the US, their numbers stagnated and then began to decline. There is an even smaller percentage of women firefighters: just 3.4 per cent in 2012, a small decline from the 3.8 per cent in 2008. In the US defense forces 85 to 86 per cent of active personnel are men.⁷³ Women’s presence in combat roles – the highest status roles – is often unacknowledged and continues to be bitterly debated. There is a fear among military men that if a woman can do the job they cannot prove themselves to be ‘man’. As one special operations officer asked, ‘Why are you [women] trying to destroy the last good thing we [men] have left?’⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ibid., 70.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 67–69.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁷¹ Niemi, *Degrees of Difference*, 89; Levanon, England and Allison, ‘Occupational Feminization and Pay’.

⁷² Niemi, *Degrees of Difference*, 99.

⁷³ Niemi, *Degrees of Difference*, 100–102.

⁷⁴ Goldstein, ““Why are you trying to destroy the last good thing men have?””, 387.

As women move into occupations requiring university degrees, the traditional fields of power and status, men are moving into newer and growing fields and industries, to which power and status has shifted. These include: organised crime;⁷⁵ the industry surrounding professional sports where the occupation category of promoters grew by 30 per cent, and of managers by 17 per cent, between 2010 and 2014;⁷⁶ IT, where the numbers of women have been declining steadily since 1991 when it reached a high point of 36 per cent;⁷⁷ and the gaming industry where in 2014 women held on 11 to 22 per cent of jobs in the industry – around 11 per cent of designer roles and fewer than 5 per cent of programmer roles – even though they make up over 40 per cent of the gaming population.⁷⁸ These moves by men, argues Niemi, reflect American cultural expectations to ‘continue to encourage men to think about their young adult lives through Western, male-defined capitalism: Make money. Do not waste your time studying ideas that do not lead to a good job. Success is found in entrepreneurial ventures.’⁷⁹

Conclusion

Niemi’s bleak picture is of American academia, but commentators on the university sector in Australia have also identified this entrepreneurial ‘make money’ basis of power and status – ‘neoliberalism’ – as being a distinctive feature of the decline of, and ongoing threat to, Australian universities. It is, for Marian Sawer, the thinking that ‘sits behind anti-elite discourse’ that stems from ‘the libertarian economic thought of F.A. Hayek and his belief that social movements can never effect genuine social change, which is best left to markets.’⁸⁰ For Joy Damousi it means being pressured to characterise history, and the humanities in general, in conventional and utilitarian terms; accepting and promoting the discipline as it is, or as it was, rather than continuing the feminist quest for what it could be in the future.⁸¹ And for RW Connell this ‘neoliberal global patriarchy is a baroque monster of power without glory, violence without the capacity to create. All it can do is intensify its spirals of competition, mining both nature and social institutions with startling ruthlessness.’⁸² Three very

⁷⁵ Niemi, *Degrees of Difference*, 105–106.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁰ Marian Sawer, ‘Populism and Public Choice in Australia and Canada: Turning Equality-seekers into “Special Interests”’, in *Us and Them: Anti-Elitism in Australia*, ed. Marian Sawer and Barry Hindess (Perth: API Network, 2004), 37.

⁸¹ Joy Damousi, ‘Does Feminist History Have a Future?’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 29, no. 80 (2014): 196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.928188>.

⁸² Raewyn Connell, ‘Feminist Scholarship and the Public Realm in Postcolonial Australia’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 29, no. 80 (2014): 2226, 215–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.928187>.

recent Australian government moves to push university teaching and research to align more closely with the job market, business and commerce show that this push continues in Australia.⁸³

We may see some amelioration of neoliberal policies now that Australia has a Labor government. Neoliberalism, however, is not the full explanation of why women's increasing presence in all economic spheres is not translating into gender equity. Consider how women are necessary to neoliberalism's need for continual growth and that their participation in the workforce arguably fulfils the requirements of neoliberalism better than men because they are cheaper.⁸⁴ That the work performed by women replacing men is devalued rather than seen as more cost effective, and that women continue to be excluded from jobs when cost savings could be made, is not neoliberalism at work: it is patriarchy. Connell's phrase 'neoliberal global patriarchy' captures this notion.

The noxious nexus of economic and political ideology and action with gendered notions of entitlement and power goes some way to explaining both the persistence of the hard/soft binary that is visible in all disciplines, and arguably all descriptions of knowledge and skills, and the tenuous and slippery nature of those labels. The labels are relative, in that STEM subjects are 'hard' and social science subjects are 'soft', yet a STEM subject such as biochemistry will be seen as 'hard' while biology is seen as 'soft'; similarly a social science subject such as economics might be seen as 'hard' while history is seen as 'soft'. The labels also shift to accommodate women's entry into traditionally male-dominated areas so that STEM subjects once seen as 'hard' become 'soft' as more women undertake them. Real world consequences follow with 'soft' fields perceived as less rigorous, less trustworthy and less deserving of funding.⁸⁵ In this dance of patriarchal equilibrium, men continue to lead.⁸⁶

Much of the writing of this article was done under the cloud of the COVID-19 pandemic, a historical moment the ramifications of which are still to unfold. The gendered impact, however, is already being reported including its effects on women academics world-wide: home schooling while working from home highlighted both the way in which the academy chooses to not acknowledge childcare, and also reduced the time for the "sustained knowledge work" that leads to publication – that is, to the highest measure of performance and excellence. The latter may well have far-reaching consequences for women in the academy.⁸⁷

⁸³ Catharine Coleborne, '3 Big Issues in Higher Education Demand the New Government's Attention', *Conversation*, 23 May 2022. <https://theconversation.com/3-big-issues-in-higher-education-demand-the-new-governments-attention-183349>.

⁸⁴ Greg Jericho, 'You Can't Hide from the Numbers: Australian Women Earn Less than Men in Any Job', *Guardian*, 10 June 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2021/jun/10/you-cant-hide-from-the-numbers-australian-women-earn-less-than-men-in-any-job>.

⁸⁵ Alysson E. Light, Tessa M. Benson-Greenwald and Amanda B. Diekman, 'Gender Representation Cues Labels of Hard and Soft Sciences', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 98 (2022): 104234.

⁸⁶ Bennett, *History Matters*, 79.

⁸⁷ Sarah Crook, 'Parenting during the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020: Academia, Labour and Care Work', *Women's History Review* 29, no. 7 (November 9, 2020): 1226–38; David Peetz, Marian Baird, Rupa Banerjee,

Despite all the past obstructions and future hurdles , I believe women will continue to move into the discipline of history: the discipline may even become dominated by women at all levels. They will continue to move into the ‘harder’ sub-disciplines, asking the questions that will yield rich answers that illuminate the past and give insight into the human condition. Women will continue to be found in greater numbers in all fields of public, professional and economic life. But the pace is glacial and the evidence is growing that their presence alone is not sufficient to bring about the fairer world that the feminist project envisions and the world so desperately needs.

Our equity efforts may need to be broader than a numbers game.

[8000 words approx.]

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