

The Boys Club: Academic Publishing and Barriers of Access

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Abstract

Gendered, unequal access in academic publishing has become a pervasive system that operates on exclusionary principles. These principles privilege maleness - and whiteness - above all else. Men continue to be the gatekeepers of what is deemed "worthy" of academic publishing, resulting in the systemic silencing of women in academia.

Keywords: Women in Publishing, Feminism

When we think of "publishing", many think of dimly lit coffee shops, late nights, and stacks of pages on the desks of unjustly romanticized editors. But who is really peering up from behind the hypothetical stacks of never-to-be-published journals? If we pull back the curtain of academic publishing, we would see rows upon rows of white men. White men letting in other white men, who let in their - you guessed it - white male friends. To put it blatantly, publishing is exclusive. Those being denied access? Women and those of visible minority status. If your identity just so happens to fall on the intersections of the aforementioned identities, then the door to academic publication becomes that much more narrow. Within the publishing industry, or if you simply take a look at the resulting consolidation of big-name publishers, it is apparent that publishing, as an economic model, is not particularly sound. However, to be employed in the publishing industry is a privilege that is awarded to few. It is a privilege because what we have come to value as literary culture, and what we begin to study in academics, is chosen by a very elite, narrow group, whether this is apparent or not. In *the Ethically Incomplete Editor*, Wershler (2016) echoes this sentiment by saying that such

cultural artifacts, and their surrounding policy, “regulate the existence of the very objects that Canadian literary scholars typically study: books, magazines, genres, critical and political movements, authors, presses.” (p.225). This means that we are operating under a system that is laden in patriarchal decision-making. Based on these decisions, we, as a society, begin to associate these cultural products with different levels of class, which only further reinforces who is being included or, more importantly, who is being left out.

If you open a textbook, especially one from a science-based faculty, it becomes evident that the published works that drive learning in our academic institutions are overwhelmingly written by men. In fact, in almost all disciplines, men out-publish women an average of 2 to 1 (Mathews, A., & Anderson, K., 2001). So, where are the women? Do women simply not like being academics? Are women not enrolling in university and going on to further their careers in post-education? Well, no, because statistics show that women make up the majority population of undergraduate degrees and are nearly equal to males in Ph.D programs at 46% (Marschke, et al., 2007). If women, more or less, make up equal demographics in post-secondary education, then why are their successes largely left out of academic publications?

This paper aims to assess the current climate of academic publishing for women, addressing the barriers of access and the visible inequalities that remain as a result of a pervasive forms of structural misogyny. Academic publishing is suffering at the hands of hegemonic institutions of inequalities that privilege preconceived ideals of masculinity and maleness over femininity and femaleness, disadvantaging women beyond mere publication and, instead, extending to job prospects and overall career success. As a result, academic publishing has become a self-perpetuating cycle in which men allow access to men, who allow access to more men, who prioritize research of their own kind and of their own interests.

However, it is important to note that such inequalities go much deeper than male versus female. Rather, it is an issue of complex intersectionality in which publishing prioritizes whiteness above all else. While many resulting statistics often do not differentiate between race, sexuality, ability, or identity expression, each additional intersection adds another barrier of access and limited representation amongst the larger industry. To get an idea of the magnitude of

racial differences, a survey published by Catalyst (2017), found that in Canada, visible minorities accounted for only 17% of the overall university-based professions. Meanwhile, self-identified Indigenous Canadians are almost entirely absent, making up only 2.1% in the last available census, published in 2006 (Catalyst, 2017). Before continuing to discuss the response to women in publishing, it is crucial to keep these particular statistics in mind. While this is a standardized “average” report on representation, people of colour, particularly women, make up even smaller portions of representation and are, as a result, continuously disadvantaged by said institutions. In this broader, gender-based scope, Catalyst (2017) also found that, on average, female professors were making 87.8% of what their male counterparts earned.

Aside from greatly influencing the cultural texts and socio-political ways of knowing in academic literature, the lack of females published in academia also directly impacts women’s (in)ability to succeed in said academic careers, from salary, to promotion, to job security. Through countless studies, it has become apparent that white men have an unequal advantage when it comes to career and work opportunities, as well as having the benefit of researching topics of interest that are typically aligned with dominantly male-gendered preference, such as in mathematics and science-based fields (Mathews, A., & Anderson, K., 2001). However, not only do men dominate these particular fields, they continue to rank higher than women in fields where the majority of researchers are, in fact, women (Mathews, A., & Anderson, K., 2001). But what does this mean for the women whose careers rely on their ability to gain publicized recognition, particularly those working in post-secondary institutions? It means that women are being left out of a “boys club”.

When men are not only guarding the gates of access, while holding higher positions of power in both academia and the larger publishing industry, women who hope to rise higher in universities, such as from instructor to tenured professor, are denied on the basis of their lack of publications (Mathews, A., & Anderson, K., 2001). Given their higher-status positions, men are therefore more likely to make up the majority of boards in charge of policy and head the decision-making processes of said institutions. This in-group mentality means that women are directly left out of crucial avenues that lead to networking, influence, and

connections for resulting publishing opportunities (Mathews, A., & Anderson, K., 2001).

It has been shown that even when undergraduate students seek out instructors who are interested in pursuing scholarly work, women are less likely to be referred to by their colleagues, further barring them from access (Mathews, A., & Anderson, K., 2001). As a result, it has been found that as the perceived prestige of an institution increases, the representation of employed female professors decreases (Marschke, et al., 2007). But everyone should have equal access to general job security, right? Right? Unfortunately, this is not the case. A particular study on women in academic publishing (Hancock & Baum, 2010), shows that the number one indicator of professional success is the number of publications one has under their belt. This factor rated even higher than overall teaching quality and that, unless a particular instructor was outwardly ridiculed by colleagues on their inability to teach, those of lesser quality were still more likely to receive tenure than those of higher quality with less publications (Hancock & Baum, 2010). These findings, of course, reinforced the existing gender imbalance.

But what about publications that have more than one author? Surely women have marginal representation in there? While women are represented more in joint publications, a study by West, Jacquet, King, Correll, and Bergstrom (2013) analyzed over 8 million papers from departments across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities and found that, since 1990, women made up only 26% of the assessed single-authored papers. In terms of their success in joint publications, while female professors may have their names next to male professors, their names are largely placed in the middle of their peers'. This means that women's names are often overlooked, as the industry's self-identified most "memorable" spot belongs to those who are either named first or last, where eyes are most quickly drawn to (West, et. al., 2013). What a world to live in when patriarchal preference is so ingrained, even women's names fall short.

Along with this, it has become evident that there is a substantial disconnect between females in academia and females publishing academic works. In response, many have considered the reasons as to why this may be. A common gendered assumption: that, maybe, women are just "naturally" less motivated to succeed than men (Mathews, A., & Anderson, K., 2001). However, such arbitrarily toxic

rules of gender-specific traits have been proven wrong time and time again. This is not an issue of women possessing some sort of inherent quality that makes them lesser, but, rather, a system of oppression that deems their presence as lesser.

Aside from this very evident systemic issue, many researchers often come back to exploring two other plausible reasons for why women find themselves underrepresented. First, it is speculated that women are more likely to leave academic institutions because of the lack of supportive networks, as a result of all of the previously outlined barriers (Hancock & Baum, 2010). Second, women are being pushed out of academia because of the pervasive gender bias, sexual harassment, and maltreatment as a result of a larger social context (Hancock & Baum, 2010). While both likely play a role, there are little to no studies that can find a concrete, conclusive answer on why this is. One could speculate that this may have to do with an issue that is much larger than institutional publishing. Another common argument has to do with women leaving or cutting down to part time work, due to childcare or familiar obligations, where many people simply assert that women therefore do not stick around long enough to publish. In reality, Mathews & Anderson (2001) found that, even when controlling for these variables, women still fell drastically short of their male counterparts in publications. These issues, however, begin as early as submissions for publication, regardless of topic or merit. When faced with identical submissions, it was found that reviewers favoured those that had a perceived male-gendered name over those who had a perceived female-gendered name (West et. al., 2013). This bias was found to be applicable to both male and female reviewers, showing that even women begin to internalize these structural examples of misogyny.

While many studies have been done to quantify academic publications by gender, much of the existing research on the gender inequalities of the industry do not further explore the potential “whys” in great detail. Given who the gatekeepers are, it is not difficult to speculate why this may be. Academic institutions become a reflective cesspool of the blatant misogyny and sexism that women face in everyday life. For instance, in *Women, know your limits: cultural sexism in academia*, Savigny (2014) argues that every instance of academic interaction is inherently gendered, giving rise to cultural sexism in which “women may be structurally disadvantaged by organizational university structures and their

positioning in organizational male-dominated cultures which reinforce hegemonic masculinities.” (p. n/a). This cultural sexism creates the norms of interaction within the institutions, privileging males and largely disadvantaging their female coworkers. Throughout her research, Savigny (2014) found that female academics felt at the mercy of performative masculinity when it took the form of sexist comments and actions. This resulted in women being unlikely to report such harassment, as well as internalize the sexist, and often dismissive, comments pertaining to not only their work, but their appearance. The creation of such a hostile, misogynistic environment only further oppresses women, limiting them from opportunities and spaces in which they are taken seriously and given access to critical networks that would aide in their personal and professional advancement.

These academic institutions have pervasive forms of what Armato (2013) refer to as enlightened sexism, which is defined as “attitudes and actions expressed and undertaken by men that on the surface appear to be gender egalitarian, but which actually support men’s privilege and women’s oppression” (p.578). Armato (2013) goes on to argue that these male academics then receive a hypothetical “pass” in which they are perceived as understanding the intersectionality of feminism, as earned through their level of education. However, as has been further studied, this enlightenment gets women nowhere. As it has been highlighted through this paper, women are still being barred from access to a predominantly male-dominated field. If anything, this “enlightened sexism” may be even more detrimental than overt sexism, as it functions under the surface and becomes trivialized, or written off, by those both inside and outside the academic sphere.

So, where do we go from here? There is a lot of danger in a single story. When you allow men to be the gatekeepers of the literature in which drives our education systems, we are doomed to repeat *history*. This was best said by Wershler (2016) in *the Ethically Incomplete Editor*, “as each generation of students replaces the previous generation of professors, the former objects of discipline become its subjects, and the system of values and practices reproduces itself.” (p.229). Women and people of colour continue to not be given the space to share their stories, on their terms. This continues to become evident from the process of selection to editing for final submission.

With this, it is imperative that research begins to focus on the “why” to better put in place the specific guidelines and policy that account for the current lack of criteria for how academic literature is being chosen, why certain genders and faculties are being prioritized, and how these gatekeepers are arising at their decisions of what is deemed to be “worthy” (Wershler, 2016). Granted, this may be achieved through further publications of scholarly feminist literature. However, if the climate in which women are deemed to be “academics” is constantly having to be (re)negotiated due to consistent sexual harassment and belittlement, then are we able to see proper change? This, then, becomes a question of how we can utilize the climate of these academic institutions in order to utilize what we have learned and come out on the other side with proper gendered policy. While this misogyny laden social climate may not be nearly researched enough to enact grassroots change, it is imperative that policy be put in place to allow women the access to these institutions which, by extension, will allow for the opening up of further publications and a larger network of influencers and subsequent networks.

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