

*Publishing can sometimes be seen as acting as the fuel behind the academic world. Yet, across social sciences, women are not publishing their share of research papers. **Karen Schucan-Bird** ([http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Karen\\_Schucan-Bird](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Karen_Schucan-Bird)) fears that if they are not publishing at a level comparable to their male counterparts, women are left standing at a career disadvantage.*



We all know how important it is to publish our research. Recognition and reward is granted to the productive scholar and their university. But, is there equal opportunity for all to succeed in this pursuit? With growing evidence from the material and life sciences that women publish less than men, it may be that myself and other female social scientists are publishing less than we would expect. I sought to investigate.

To do so, I compared two sets of data: 1) demographic ([http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/\\_images/Demographic\\_Review\\_tcm8-13533.pdf](http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/_images/Demographic_Review_tcm8-13533.pdf)) data ([http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/\\_images/Demographic\\_Review\\_tcm8-13533.pdf](http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/_images/Demographic_Review_tcm8-13533.pdf)) of ([http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/\\_images/Demographic\\_Review\\_tcm8-13533.pdf](http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/_images/Demographic_Review_tcm8-13533.pdf)) UK ([http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/\\_images/Demographic\\_Review\\_tcm8-13533.pdf](http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/_images/Demographic_Review_tcm8-13533.pdf)) academics ([http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/\\_images/Demographic\\_Review\\_tcm8-13533.pdf](http://109.108.130.200.srvlist.ukfast.net/_images/Demographic_Review_tcm8-13533.pdf)) to identify the proportion of social scientists that were women (in 2003/4, this was 40 per cent), 2) a random sample of 202 journal articles published at a similar time, so that I could identify the proportion of articles authored by UK-based women. The logic that drove my analysis was simple: if 40 per cent of social scientists were women, then we could expect that 40 per cent of publications would be written by women.

I analysed the social sciences as a whole as well as focusing on particular disciplines: political science, economics, social policy and psychology. These disciplines were analysed because, traditionally, they are gendered subject areas. Economics, for example, has tended to represent a 'harder', masculine area of social science, and with high proportions of male academics and students. In contrast, social policy is traditionally considered a feminine field, and with high levels of female scholars and students.

**My findings**

Across the social sciences as a whole, women did not publish as many articles as we might expect. Whilst representing 40 per cent of the social science community, women only contributed 32 per cent of the sampled articles (figures are set out in the table below). A similar discrepancy was found in the more 'masculine' disciplines. Whilst women made up 24 per cent of political scientists in the UK, they only contributed 8 per cent of the articles sampled. In economics women constituted 22 per cent of academics whilst writing 13 per cent of the sampled articles. This latter finding, however, was not statistically significant (whilst the other reported findings were).

There were more optimistic findings elsewhere. In the 'feminine' disciplines of social science, women were publishing at levels that we might expect. In psychology, women constituted a higher proportion of the discipline (43 per cent) and wrote a comparable proportion of the sampled articles (43 per cent). Similarly, women made up 46 per cent of social policy academics in the UK and contributed 53 per cent of the articles sampled. In these disciplines it seems that women were able to publish at a level comparable to their male peers.

The proportion of women in social science compared with the proportion of articles written by women:

	<b>Social Science as a whole</b>	<b>Political Science</b>	<b>Economics</b>	<b>Psychology</b>	<b>Social Policy</b>
<b>Proportion of female academics</b>	40	24	22	43	46
<b>Proportion of female authored articles</b>	32	8	13	43	53

So, it seems, there were differences in men and women's publication productivity. *How can we explain these findings and what do they tell us about the academy?* I outline three explanations below, all of which probably have some merit:

- Women's research is not sufficiently recognised or valued by our universities or the academy. Understandings of 'knowledge' and 'scientific quality' privilege traditional, more 'masculine' approaches to research that are more commonly undertaken by men. This may explain why men  
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([http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hefce.ac.uk%2Fmedia%2Fhefce1%2Fpubs%2Fhefce%2F2009%2F0934%2F09\\_34.pdf&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNEqHfOayDalaA5gfi8b0RBWp-gXpA](http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hefce.ac.uk%2Fmedia%2Fhefce1%2Fpubs%2Fhefce%2F2009%2F0934%2F09_34.pdf&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNEqHfOayDalaA5gfi8b0RBWp-gXpA)) colleagues  
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(<http://www.google.com/url?>

q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hefce.ac.uk%2Fmedia%2Fhefce1%2Fpubs%2Fhefce%2F2009%2F0934%2F09\_34.pdf&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNEqHfOayDalaA5gfi8b0RBWp-gXpA) Particular disciplines such as social policy and psychology may provide a space in which alternative research approaches are accepted, valued and published.

- Female academics may take on a greater proportion of the teaching and administrative roles within the academy. Thus, they have less time to dedicate to research and its publication than their male colleagues.
- Women are actively seeking new opportunities to undertake research and dissemination activities that do not involve publishing in the standard ways. Perhaps journals and other conventional outlets for research are being replaced by new media (such as blogs) and alternative platforms.

Whilst we may be able to explain my findings, I can't help but feel troubled by them. Publishing is absolutely central to the academic world. If women are not publishing at a level comparable with their male peers, for whatever reason, then surely they are at a career disadvantage? Don't we need to rectify this situation? As the 2014 (<http://www.ref.ac.uk/>)Research (<http://www.ref.ac.uk/>) Excellence (<http://www.ref.ac.uk/>) Framework (<http://www.ref.ac.uk/>) looms over us, I urge us all to consider whether our male and female colleagues fare differently.

*For more details see, "Do women publish fewer journal articles than men? Sex differences in publication productivity in the social sciences (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01425692.2011.596387>)" Schucan Bird, K. Nov-2011 In : *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 32, 6, p. 921-937.*

*Note: This article gives the views of the author(s), and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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