



The
STELLA
C O U N T
2017



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SUGGESTED CITATION:

Harvey, M. and Lamond, J. (2018) *Stella Count 2017*,
The Stella Prize.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Isentia provided essential data collection and analysis
services for the 2017 Stella Count. The Stella Prize wishes
to thank the entire team at Isentia, in particular, Peter
Hannagan.

Our thanks also to all the literary editors who shared
information about their publications' reviews with the
Stella Prize.



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ABOUT THE COUNT

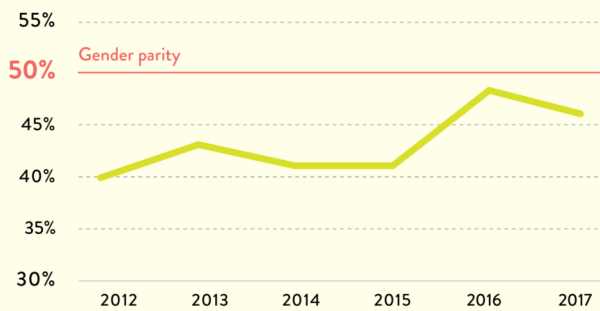
The 2017 Stella Count surveys twelve publications – including national, metropolitan and regional newspapers, journals and magazines – in print and online. The Count assesses the extent of gender biases in the field of book reviewing in Australia. In order to do this, it records the authors, book titles and book genres reviewed, as well as the gender of reviewers, and number and size of reviews published.

For the second time, the 2017 Count also surveyed the cover-to-cover bylines in leading magazines and journals.

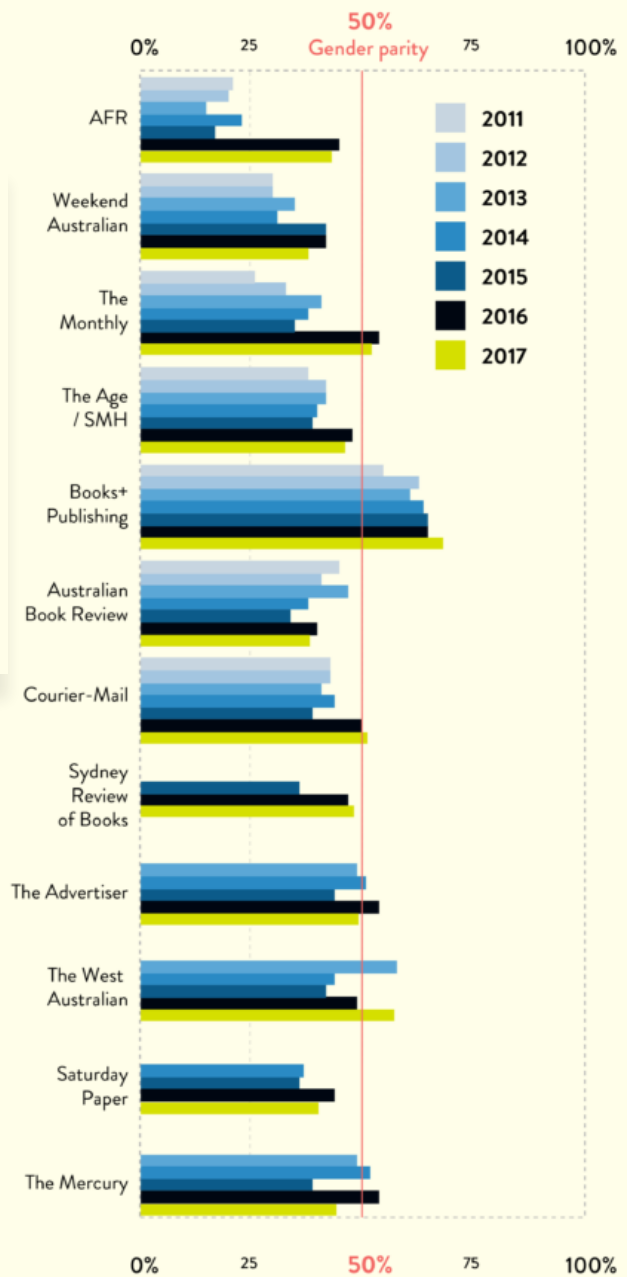
Read on for an analysis of notable points of interest from the results.

Top-level Findings

Overall representation of women authors in Australian review pages, 2012 – 2017



Representation of women authors in Australian review pages, 2011 – 2017



Authors

KEY FINDING

Across the publications surveyed, the percentage of women reviewed has dropped from 48% to 46% since 2016.

The 2017 Stella Count marks our sixth consecutive year of assessing gender representation in the book pages of Australian newspapers and journals.

The 2016 Count was the first year in which all twelve of the publications surveyed either increased or maintained their percentage of women authors reviewed compared with the previous year. Those statistics seemed to suggest that a shift towards gender parity was afoot in terms of commissioning books for review by the nation's publications.

The 2017 Count suggests that this hopeful story requires some qualification. Across the publications surveyed, the percentage of women reviewed has dropped from 48% to 46% since 2016. While most publications have improved their gender parity overall across the past six years of counting, 2017 sees a correction to the significant increases in the reviewing of women's books we saw in 2015 and 2016.

There has been a drop in the representation of books by women reviewed in eight of the twelve publications surveyed in 2017. Four publications increased their representation of books by women in their reviews pages. The *Courier-Mail* and *Sydney Review of Books* saw modest increases from 50% to 51% and 47% to 48%, respectively. *Books + Publishing* increased its already significant scrutiny of women's books from 65% to 68%. Finally, the *West Australian* saw a major increase from 49% to 57%, which sees it almost back to its high point of women's representation, which was 58% in 2013.

The publications with the lowest representation of women authors in their reviews pages in 2017 remain the *Weekend Australian* (38%), *Australian Book Review* (38%) and *The Saturday Paper* (40%). The *Weekend Australian* and *The Saturday Paper* both reduced their representation of female authors by 4 percentage points since 2016 while over at *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* it has dropped from 48% to 46%. The most significant drop over the past year was at *The Mercury*, where the reviewing of books by women fell from 54% to 44%. The largest decrease in the representation of women authors over the six years of the Count is in *Australian Book Review*, which has dropped from its high point of 47% in 2013 down to 38% in 2017.

We are left with a situation in which the two publications with the highest circulation figures¹ – *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* – have never achieved gender parity in the six years the Stella Count. At the same time, it seems that metropolitan papers based outside of the publishing hubs of Sydney and Melbourne are more willing to approach gender parity in their reviews pages.²

1: <https://mumbrella.com.au/abcs-fairfax-medias-weekly-titles-continue-decline-australian-grows-digital-subscribers-407573>

2: Combined, *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* had the highest circulation over this period, followed by the *Australian* and the *West Australian*.

Reviewers

KEY FINDING

Across all publications, author gender matching reviewer gender remains steady at 65%.

In 2017 women reviewers were responsible for 55% of the coverage of books reviewed in our data. *Australian Financial Review's* entire suite of 49 book reviews was written by women, all but one produced by a single woman, Nicole Abadee. Other publications in which women reviewers dominate the book pages are *Books + Publishing* (82% of books covered were reviewed by women), *The Advertiser* (79%), *West Australian* (78%), *Courier-Mail* (75%), *The Monthly* (70%), *Mercury* (68%) and *The Saturday Paper* (53%). These are the same eight publications that published more reviews by women than by men in 2016.

Only four of the twelve publications surveyed have fewer books reviewed by women than by men: the *Weekend Australian* (36%, up from 32% in 2016), *Australian Book Review* (39% up from 38%), *Sydney Review of Books* (45% down from 46%) and *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* (46%, steady). Two of these three publications – *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian* – account for 44% of the total number of reviews in our data.

In the 2016 Stella Count we noticed that individual male reviewers tended to dominate the statistics as far as repeat reviewing was concerned. This continues to be the case. At the *Weekend Australian* only two of the top ten repeat reviewers are women, and there has been some improvement: six of the fifteen reviewers who reviewed ten or more books were women – that's up from four of seventeen reviewers in 2016. At *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald*, three of the top ten reviewers are women. We see the reverse situation

in the papers with high numbers of books reviewed by women: at the *Advertiser* and the *Courier-Mail*, for example, seven and six of the top ten repeat reviewers are women respectively.

The trend of men reviewing books written by men and women reviewing books written by women identified in the 2016 Stella Count persists. Across all publications, author gender matching reviewer gender remains steady at 65%. For every three books women review by women, they review two books by men. For every five books men review by men they review only two books by women. This particular trend is even starker in certain publications, with the highest differentials seen in the *Weekend Australian* and *Australian Book Review*. There is only one publication in which men review women nearly as much as they review men, which is *Books + Publishing*, though there are two publications, *The Saturday Paper* and the *Mercury*, in which women review men nearly as much as they review women.

The pairing of books with reviewers in Australia continues to be strongly divided along gender lines. The idea that certain toys are for boys and others are for girls is often criticised. Do these figures suggest that the world of books for grownups is like the toy shop, split down the middle and colour-coded, like our signature pies, green and blue?

Length

KEY FINDING

64% of all large reviews (a review of more than 1000 words) are of books by men, up from 59% in 2016.

In the 2016 Stella Count we saw that while coverage of women's books had, happily, increased across the board, men's books continued to have a stranglehold on the space devoted to books coverage. This story continues into 2017: male authors command the large review (i.e. a review of more than 1000 words) and medium review (i.e. reviews of between 300–1000 words) space in our surveyed publications. 64% of all large reviews are of books by men, up from 59% in 2016. As in the 2016 Count, in 2017 small reviews were accorded fairly evenly to male and female authors, while men receive 56% of medium-length reviews.

As with all of the Stella Count statistics, the gender disparities regarding length vary from publication to publication. Women authors are least likely to receive long reviews in the pages of *Australian Book Review*, *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Weekend Australian*. In *Australian Book Review*, the ratio of men receiving long reviews compared to women has grown from nearly 2:1 in 2016 to more than 3:1 in 2017. Of its total books covered, only 7% are long reviews of female-authored titles; 23% are long reviews of male-authored titles. Men authors are also given more of the medium-sized reviews (56%/44%). At *The Age*, male authors are getting the long reviews just under twice as often as women authors (65%/35%) and also outnumbering women in the medium-sized reviews (56%/44%). The percentage split for long reviews over at the *Weekend Australian* is 64%/36%. Male authors outnumber female ones as far as long reviews go at *The Saturday Paper* (60%/40%) and *Sydney Review of Books* (52%/48%).

Interestingly, the publications producing high volumes of reviews of books by women tend not to publish long reviews at all. In some of them, men dominate the medium reviews: namely the *Courier-Mail* (100% men authors – though a very small sample size of 3) and *Mercury* (61% men authors/39% women authors).

In 2016 we observed that men reviewers were also dominating the long reviews. This is true again this year with the percentage of large reviews written by men – across all publications surveyed – up from 65% to 66% this year. Women reviewers are less likely to have long reviews published than their male counterparts in *Australian Book Review* (only 18% of long reviews in 2017 are by women), the *Weekend Australian* (33%) and *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* (35%).

KEY FINDING

One constant over the period of the Count has been the fact that men dominate nonfiction as authors.

Across the six years of the Stella Count we have seen a continued association between nonfiction and men, and fiction and women – as both reviewers and authors. While this trend certainly continues, there has been a slight shifting of the landscape since 2016.

One constant over the period of the Count has been the fact that men dominate nonfiction as authors. All publications except *Books + Publishing* published more reviews of nonfiction by men than by women. Several publications are skewed strongly in favour of men in nonfiction reviews: in the *Australian Financial Review*, for example, 41% of the total books reviewed were of nonfiction books by men compared with 11% by women. *Australian Book Review*, the *Weekend Australian*, and the *Mercury* all published more than twice as many reviews of nonfiction works by men than by women.

None of this is very surprising given the findings of previous Counts, but the fiction statistics do show some shifts. While women's works of fiction remain more likely to be reviewed than women's works of nonfiction, and vice versa for men, we are seeing more works of men's fiction reviewed than in previous years. In 2016 42% of all fiction reviewed was written by men; in 2017 this has increased to 48%. Across all books by men that were reviewed in 2017 there has been a 3 percentage point increase in the representation of fiction and a 2 percentage point decrease in nonfiction. This suggests that the increase in attention paid to male authors this year has been largely in the field of fiction.

This is particularly apparent in some publications that, for the first time, reviewed more fiction by men than by women: the *Weekend Australian* (18% of all reviews were of fiction by men, 14% of fiction by

women) and *The Saturday Paper* (39% of all reviews were of fiction by men, 25% of fiction by women). While most publications still review more fiction by women than by men, the *Advertiser* is at parity and *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* is approaching it in their fiction reviews.

Reviews of children's and YA books by women make up 5% of the overall field of reviews compared to 3% by men. Poetry is the most gender-equitable of our genres: 2% of all reviews are of works of poetry by men and 2% of works of poetry by women.

The reviewing of books by genre has seen some slight shifts, too. It remains the case that women review significantly more fiction and children's/YA fiction than men do and men review slightly more nonfiction and poetry than women do. Across the board, women's dominance as fiction reviewers remains: 63% of fiction was reviewed by women in 2017, up from 61% in 2016. Women review more fiction than men in every publication except the *Weekend Australian*, where 64% of the fiction titles covered were reviewed by men.

We see a different story with nonfiction. In 2016 60% of all nonfiction was reviewed by men; in 2017 this has dropped to 55%. It would seem that women are entering the field as nonfiction reviewers. In 2016 men reviewed more nonfiction than women in 10 out of 12 publications: in 2017 this was the case in only 5 out of the 12 publications. Women now review more nonfiction than men in the *Advertiser*, *Australian Financial Review*, *Books + Publishing*, the *Courier-Mail*, *The Saturday Paper*, *The Monthly*, and the *West Australian*. While we still see men doing most of the nonfiction reviewing in the 'big three' – *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald*, *Australian Book Review* and the *Weekend Australian* – other publications

KEY FINDING

The most significant improvement has been *Meanjin* from 42% in 2016 to 50% in 2017, reaching gender parity.

2017 marks the second year that Stella has counted cover-to-cover bylines for articles published in six leading magazines and journals: *Good Weekend*, *Meanjin*, *The Monthly*, *Overland*, *The Saturday Paper* and the *Weekend Australian* magazine. Overall, the balance of male and female writers of articles in these publications has shifted since last year: 56% of articles are written by men, 44% are written by women. This is increased from 2016 when 61% of articles were written by men, 39% were written by women.

There have been improvements by individual publications: *The Saturday Paper* has increased its representation of women from 35% to 40%, the *Weekend Australian* magazine from 37% to 39%. The most significant improvement has been *Meanjin* from 42% in 2016 to 50% in 2017, reaching gender parity.

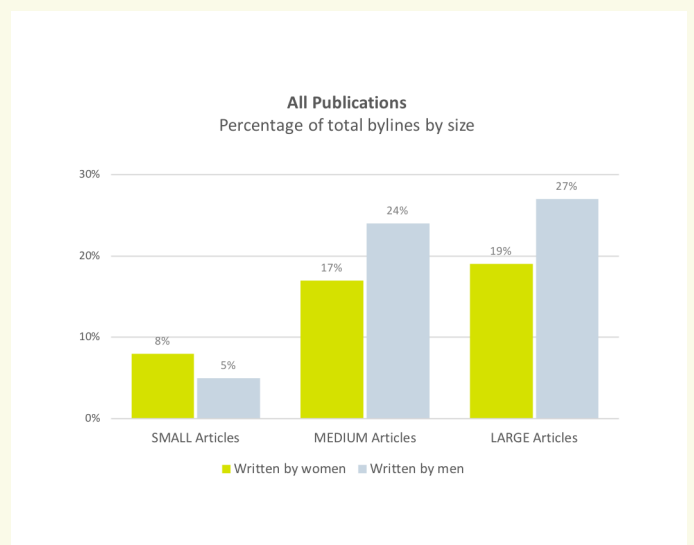
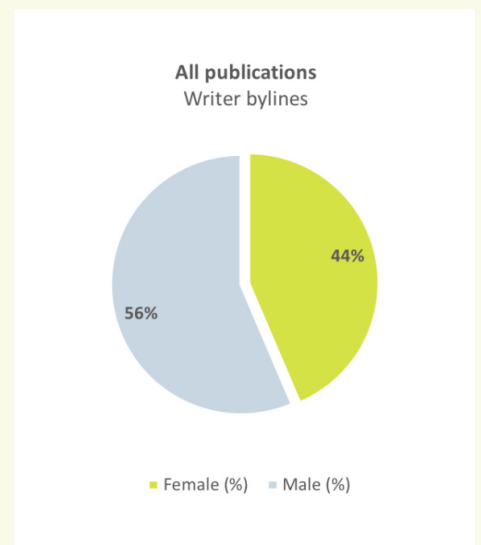
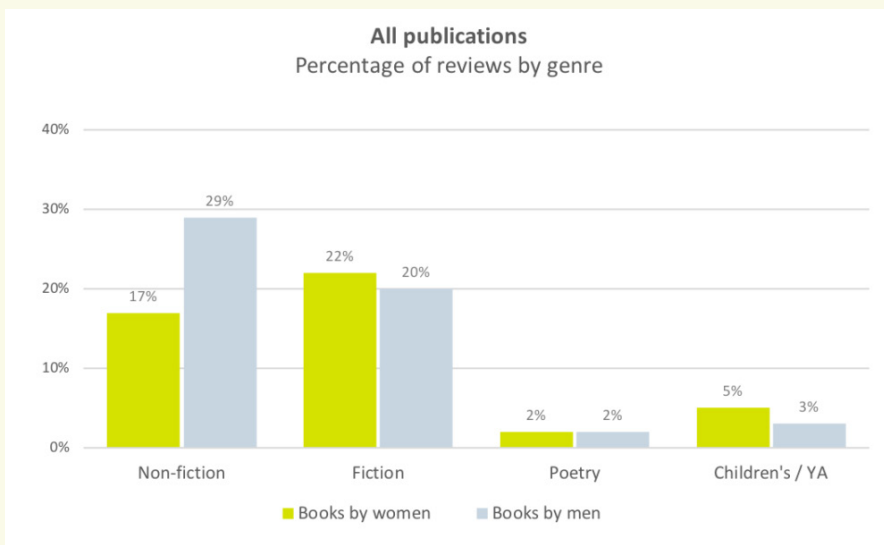
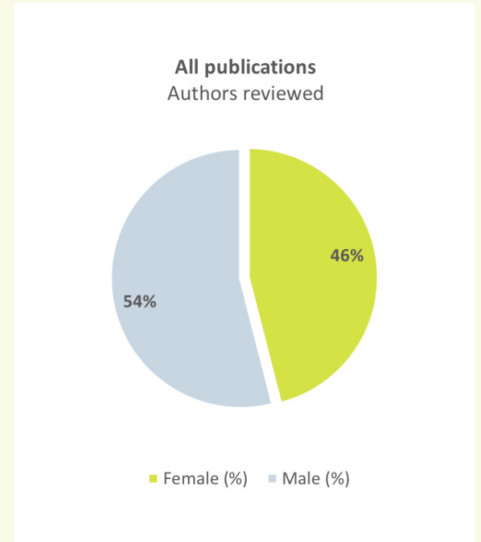
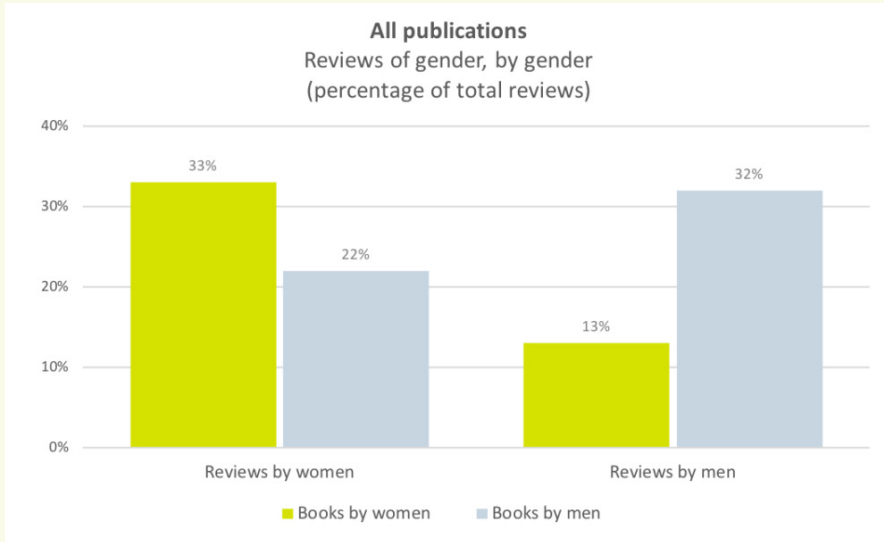
The Monthly is approaching parity across its bylines (56% male authors, 44% female). Two publications publish more work by women than by men: *Overland* (53% women) and the *Good Weekend* (53%).

As we have seen in the data on reviews, men are more often authors of long articles than women: across all publications surveyed, 58% of large articles are authored by men and 42% are authored by women. Men were also more often authors of medium-sized articles: 59% compared to 41% for women. Women, however, were more likely to author short articles (60%, compared to men at 40%).

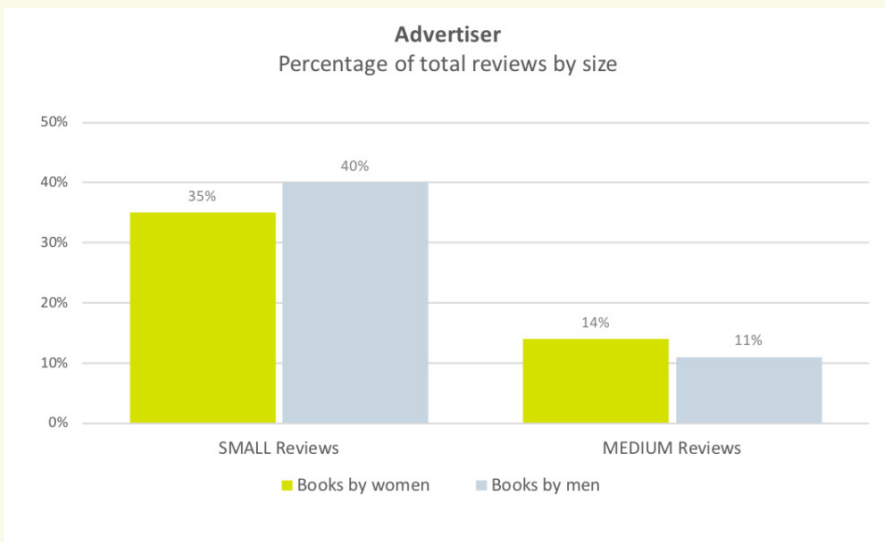
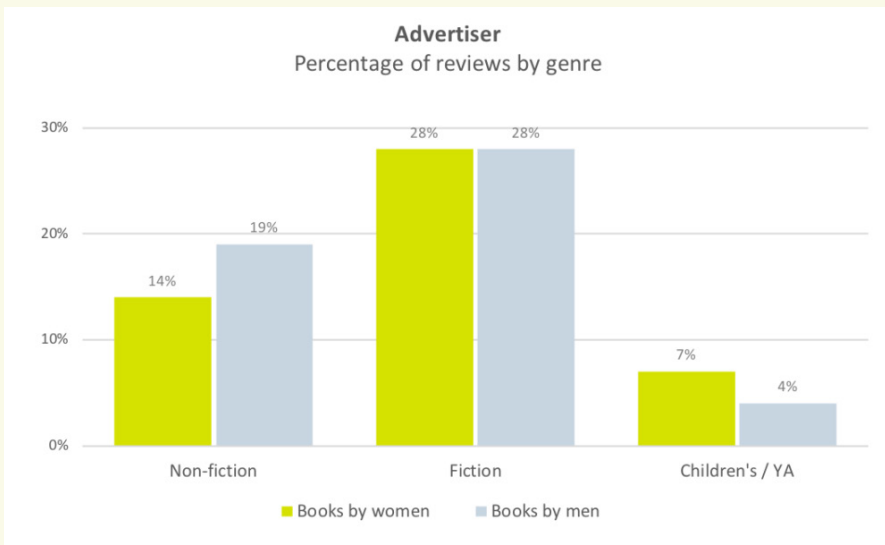
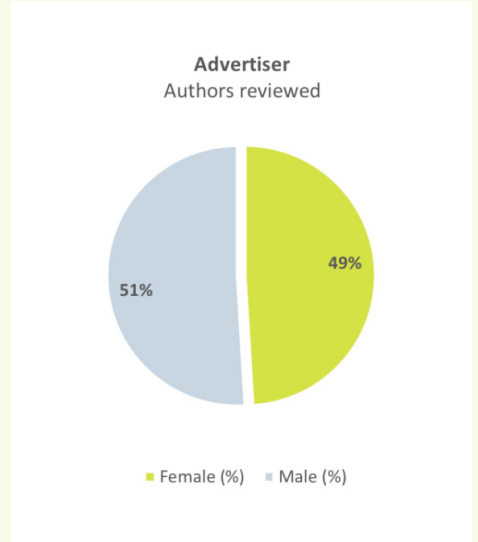
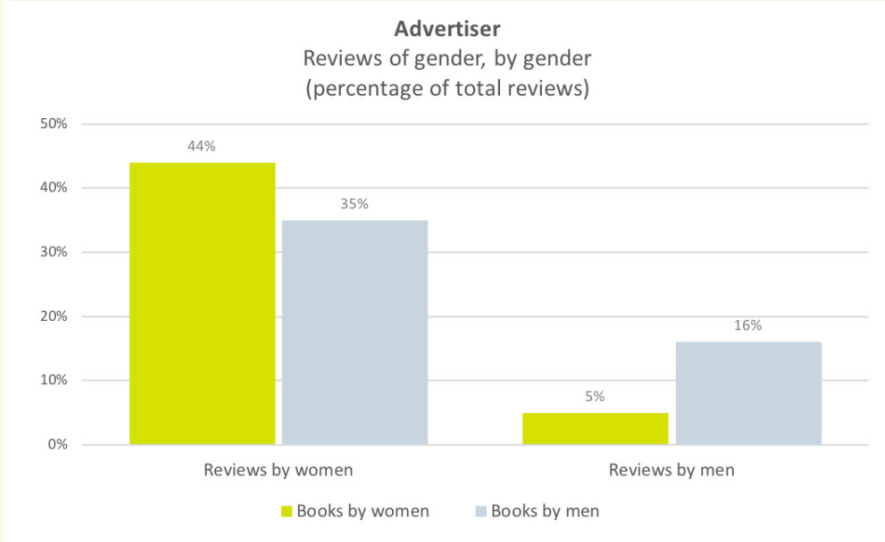
The disparity in regard to length is particularly apparent at *The Saturday Paper*, where 47% of all published articles are long and written by men compared to 29% by women, and at *The Monthly*, where long articles by men make up 43% of the whole, compared to 31% by women.

The two exceptions to the 'long means male' rule are *Good Weekend*, where women write 55% of the long articles published, and *Overland*, where 52% of the long articles published are by women. *Overland*'s gender balance across articles of various sizes suggest a current editorship that is conscious of the ways gender bias can play out in literary publications.

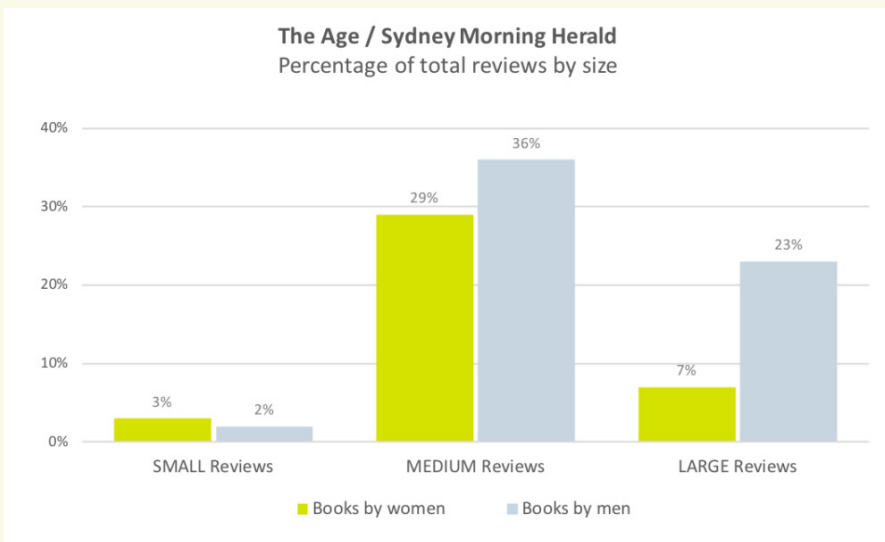
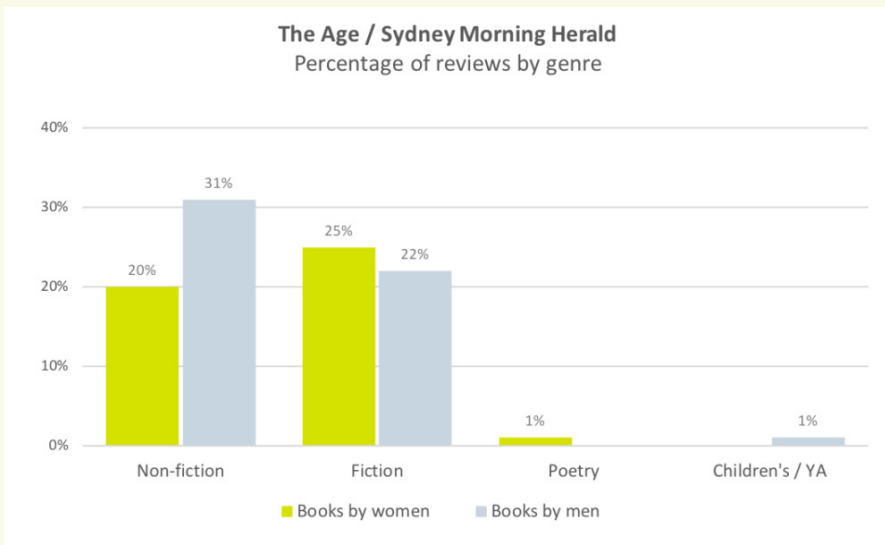
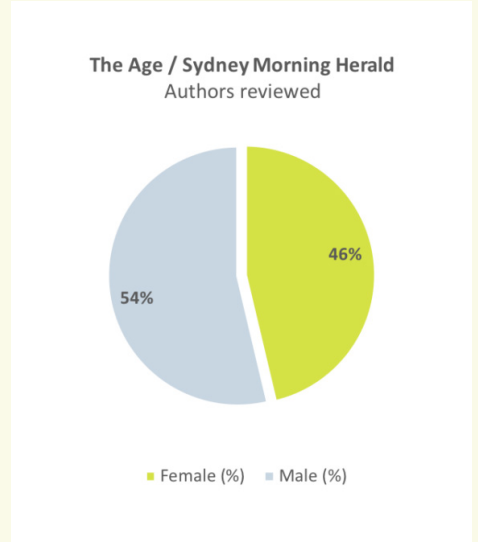
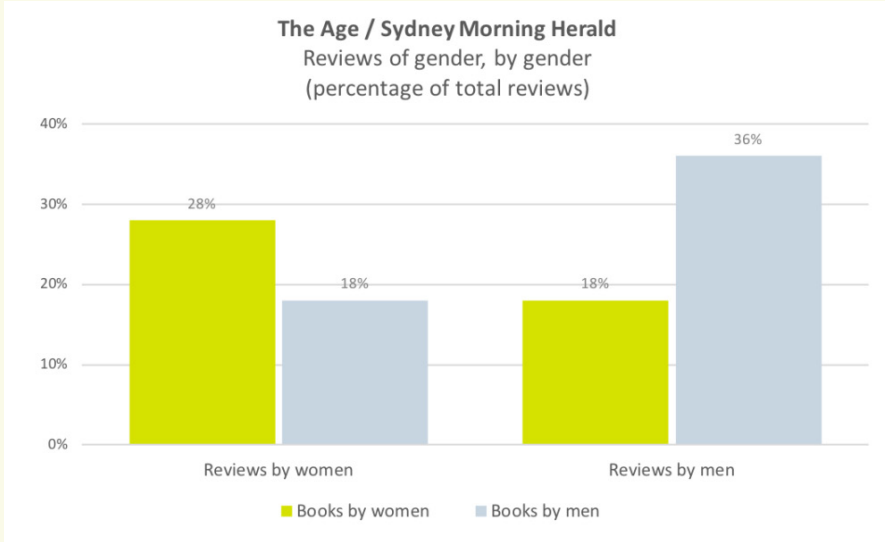
All Publications



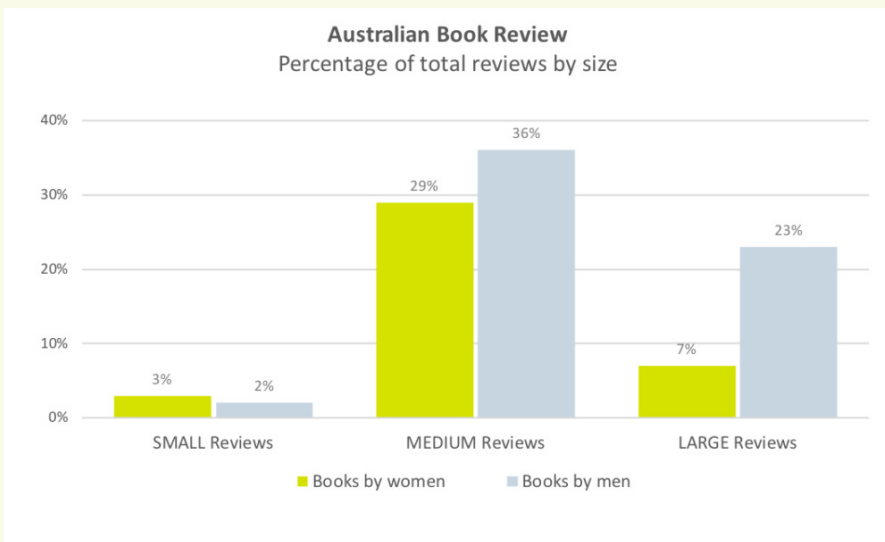
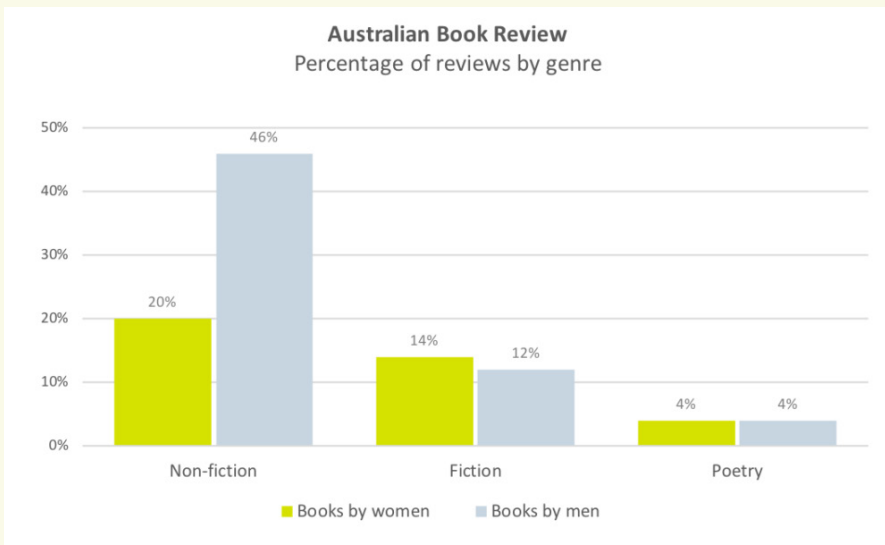
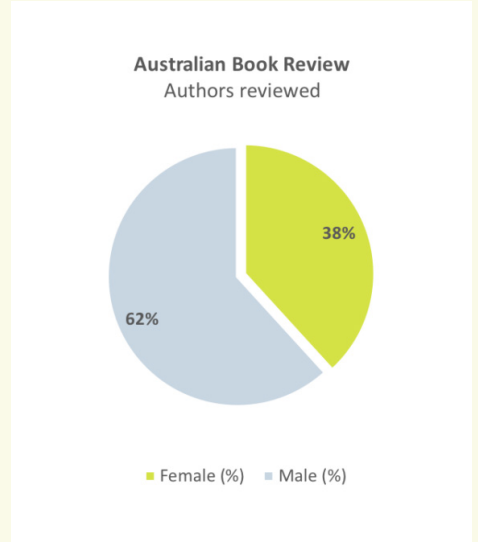
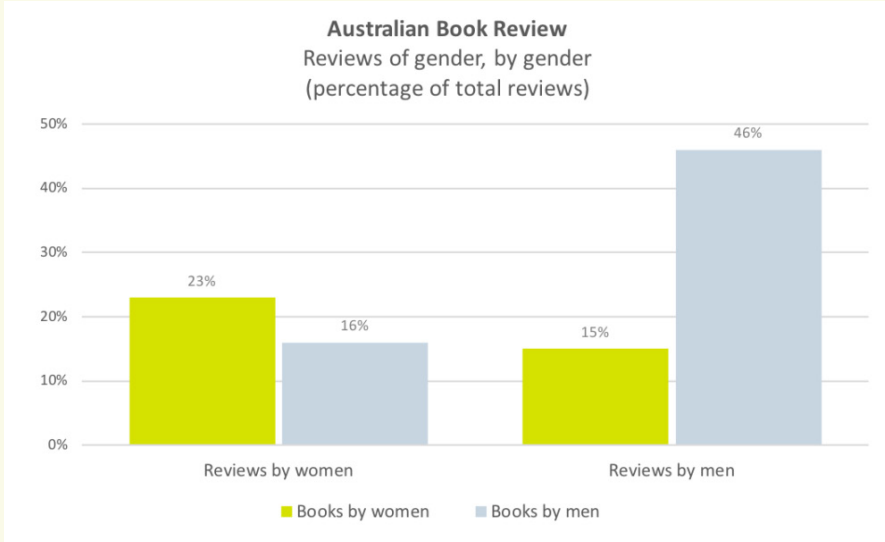
The Advertiser



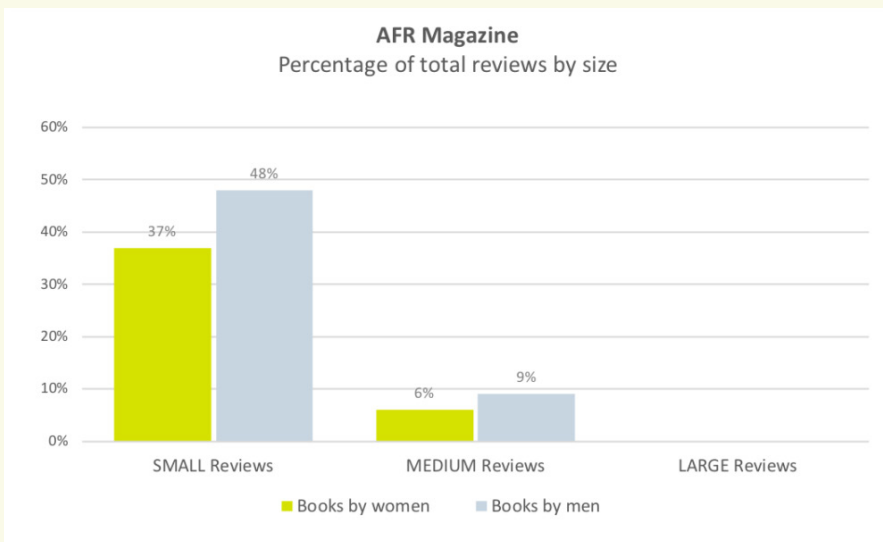
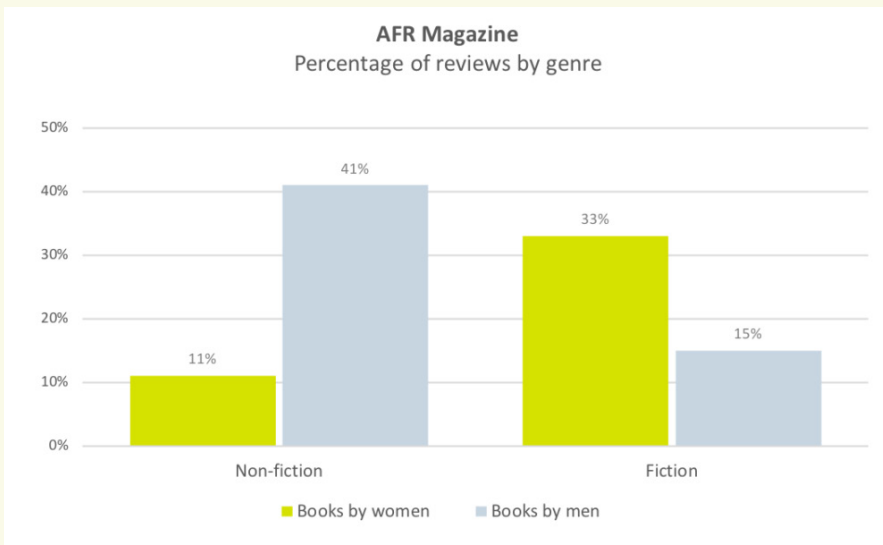
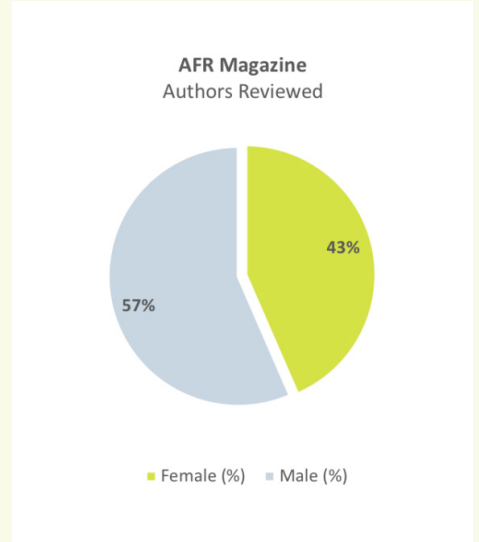
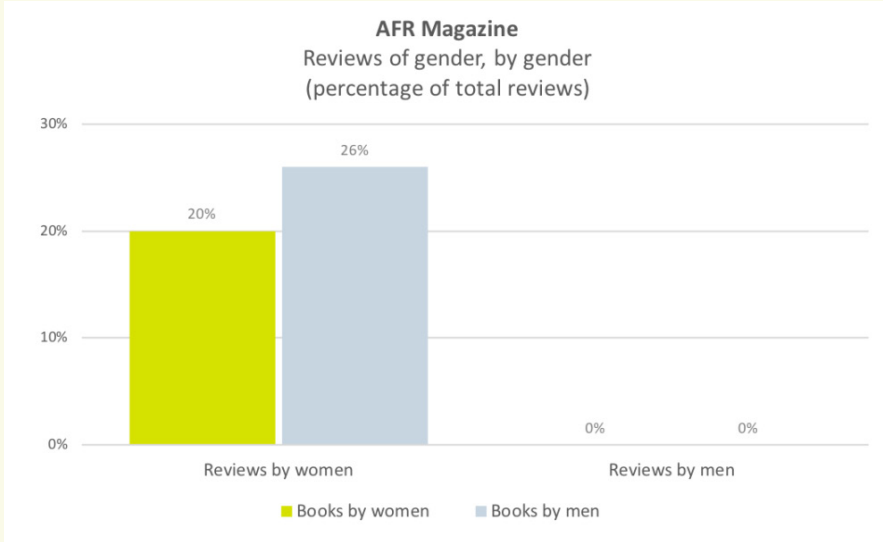
The Age/Sydney Morning Herald



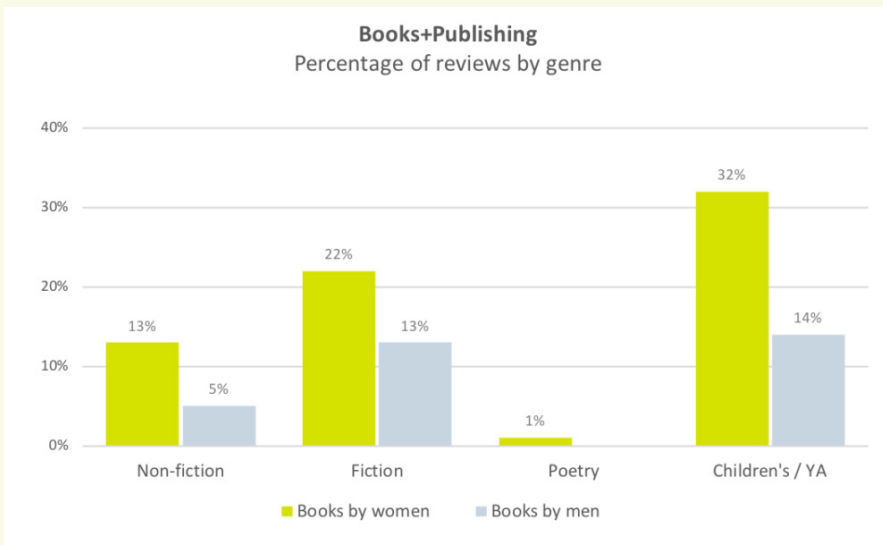
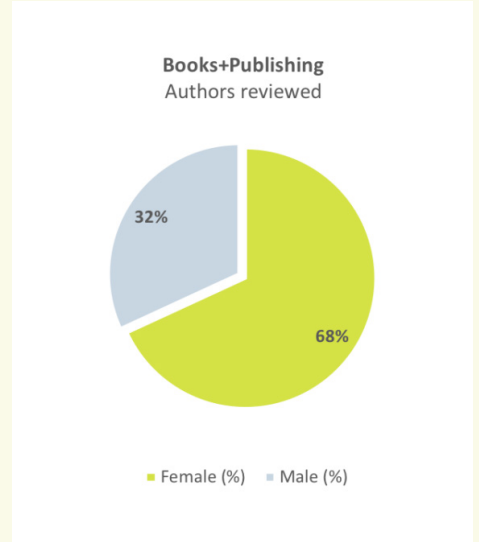
Australian Book Review



Australian Financial Review Magazine

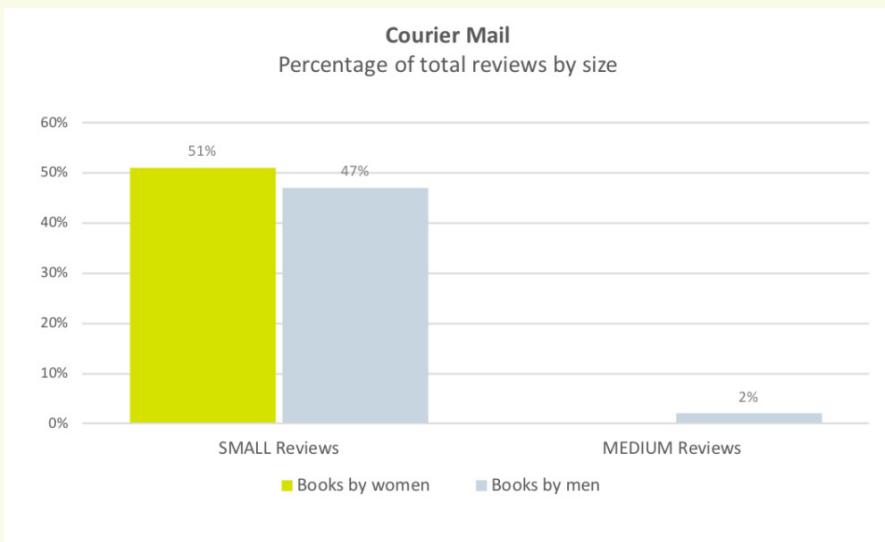
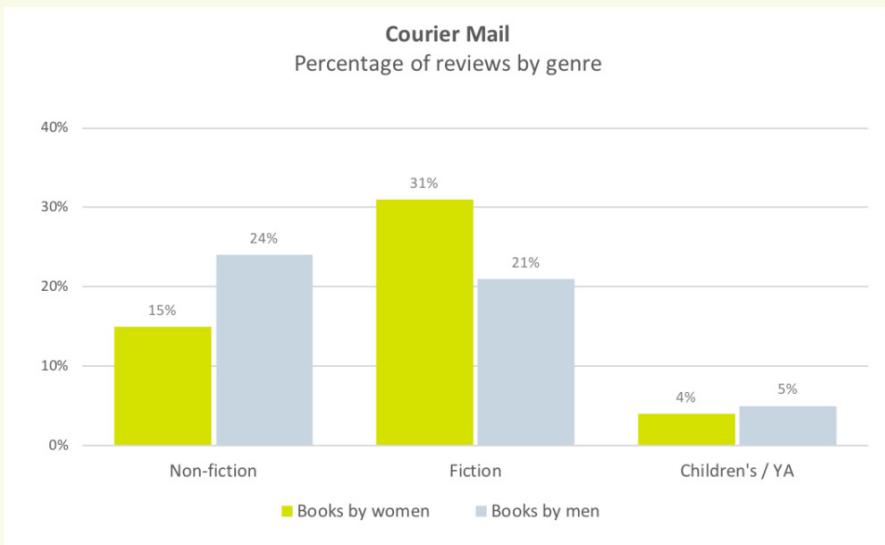
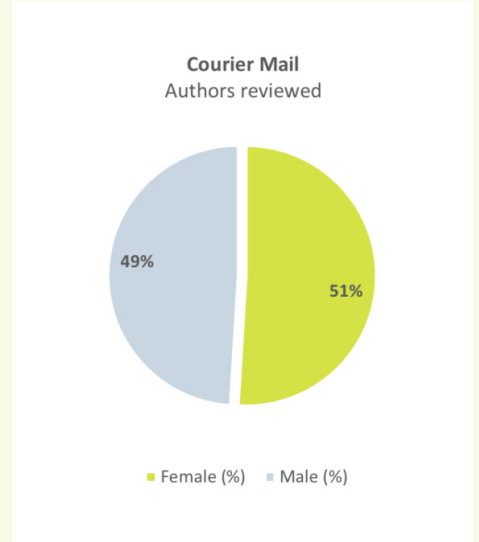
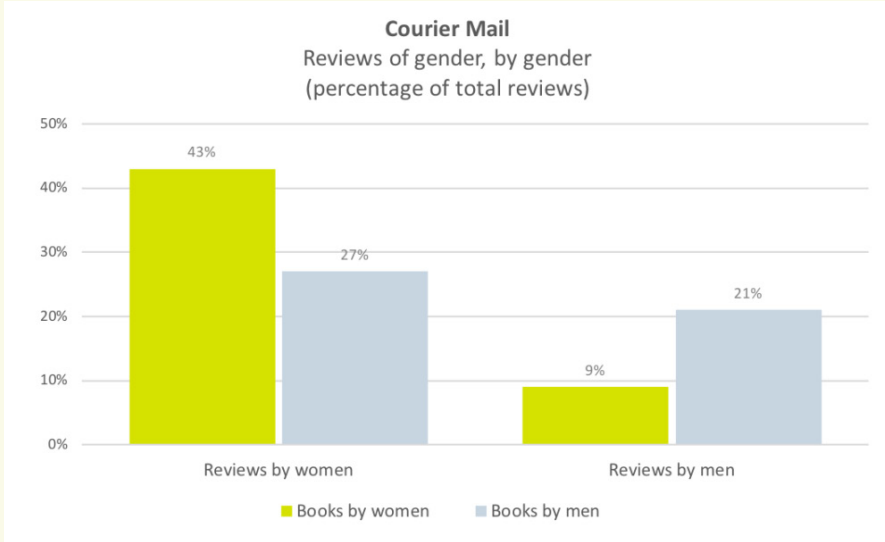


Books+Publishing

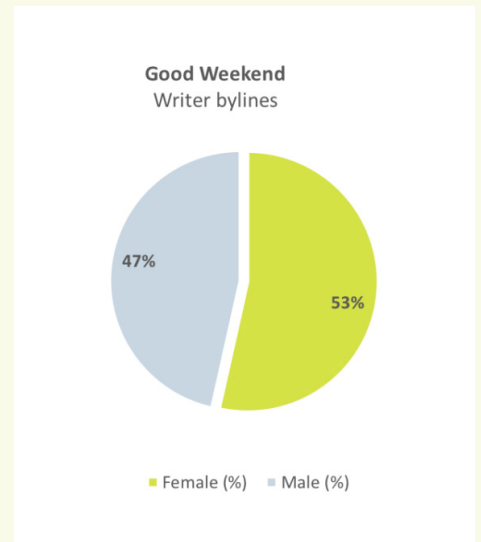
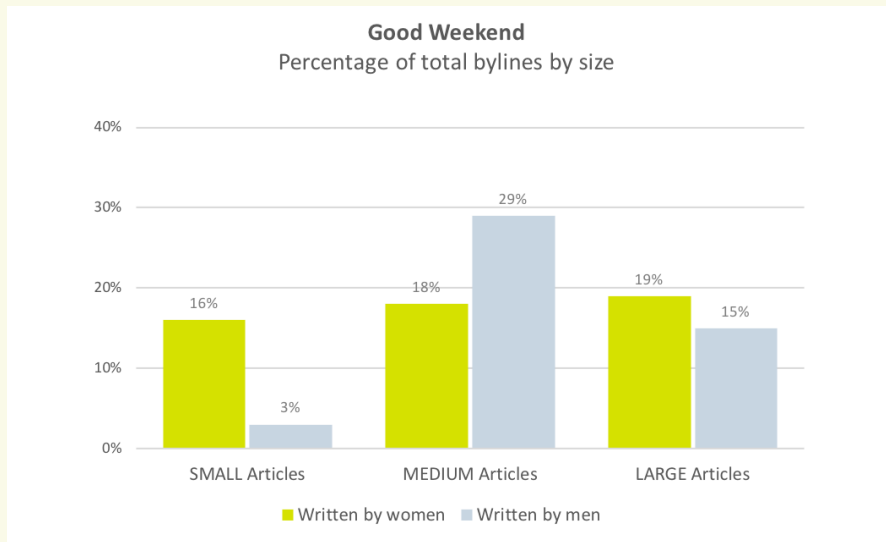


All reviews published by *Books+Publishing* are classified as 'small', so no chart has been produced to track the size of the publication's reviews.

Courier Mail

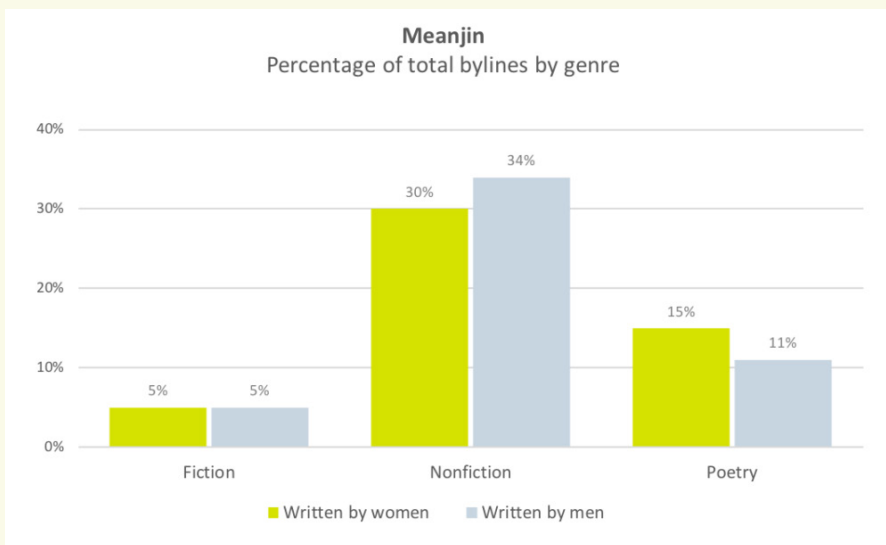
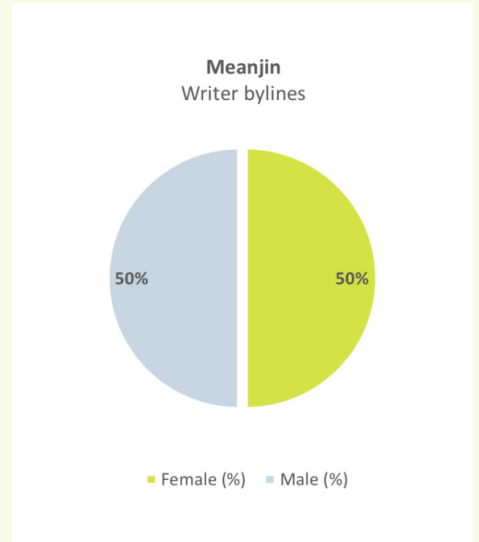
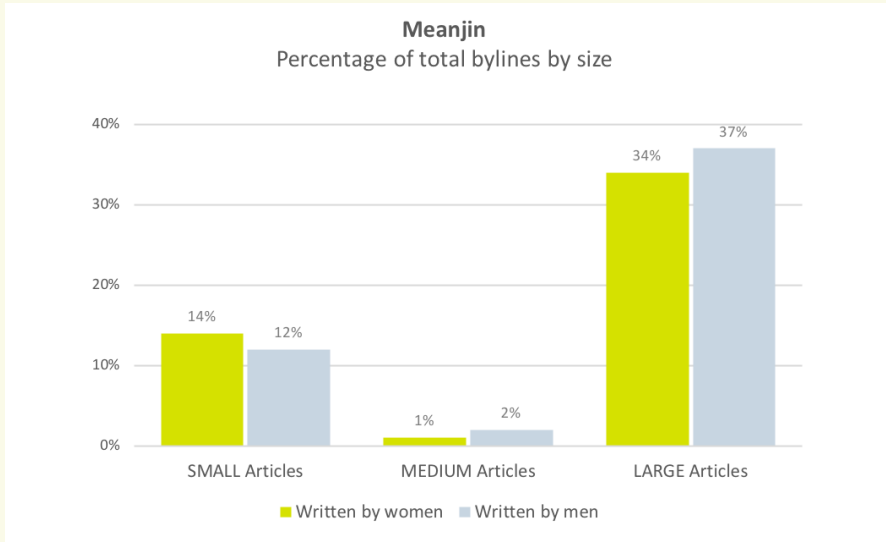


Good Weekend

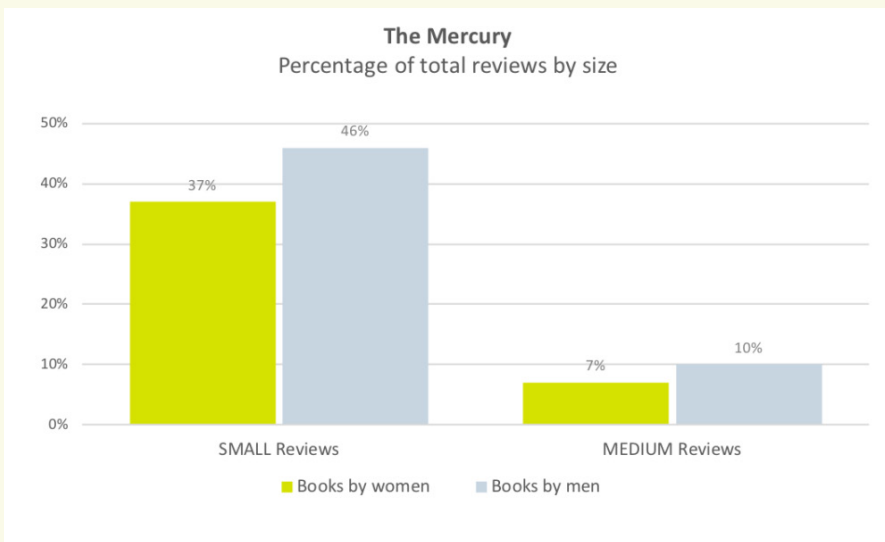
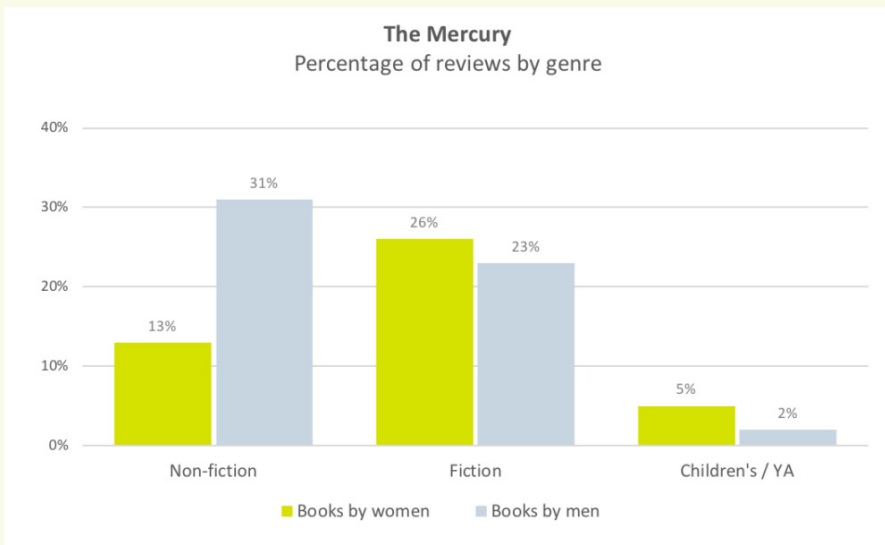
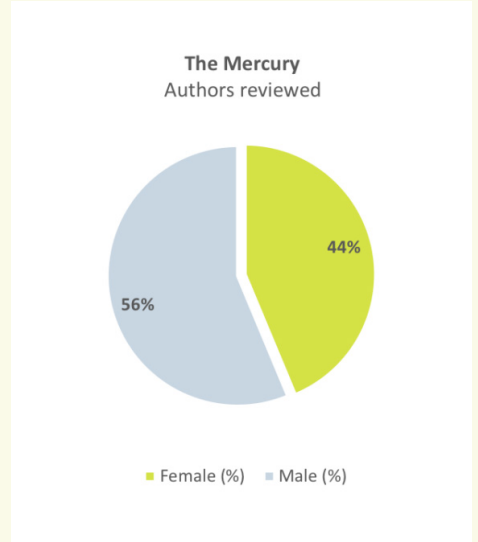
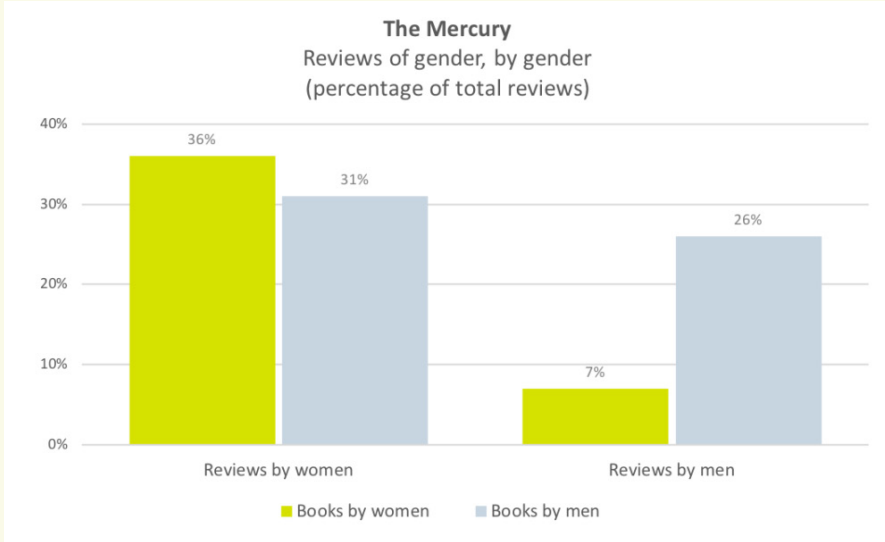


In this Count, we have tracked the cover-to-cover bylines of articles published in *Good Weekend*. *Good Weekend* does not run reviews.

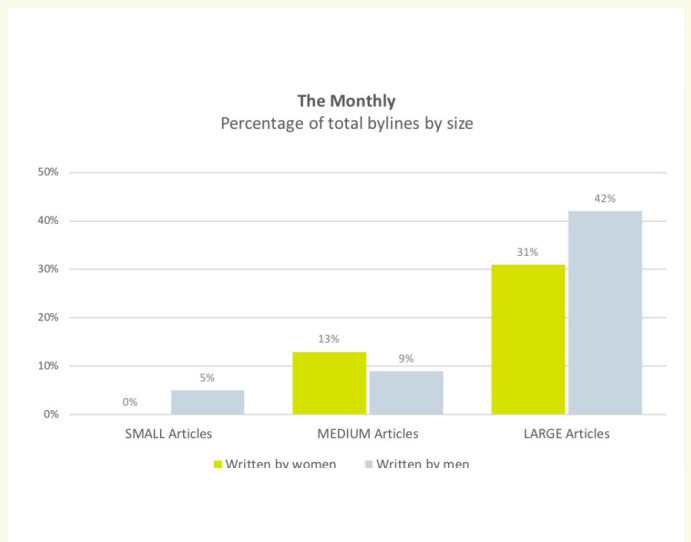
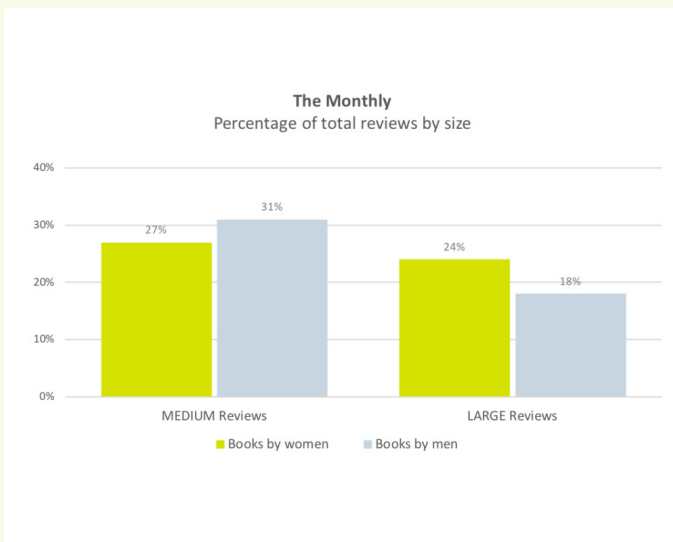
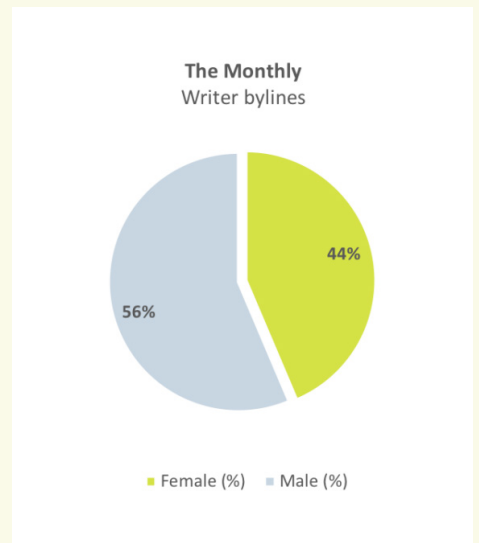
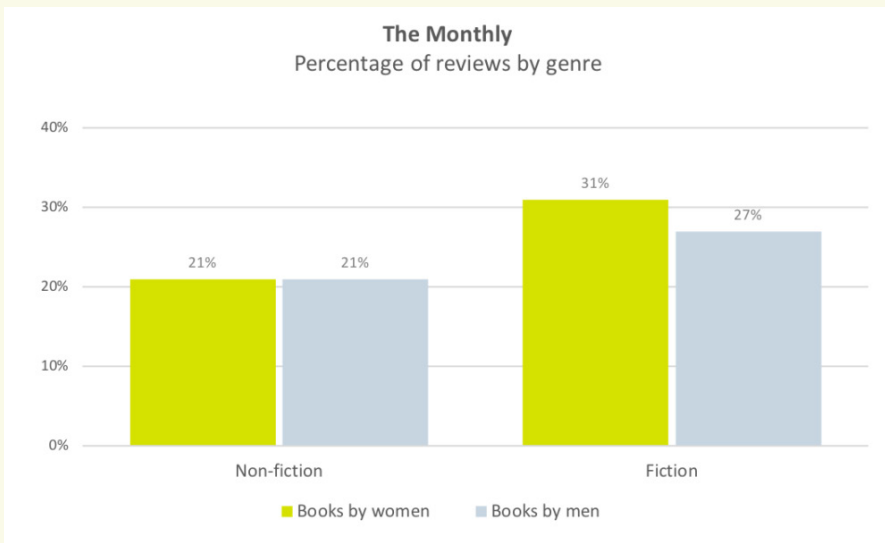
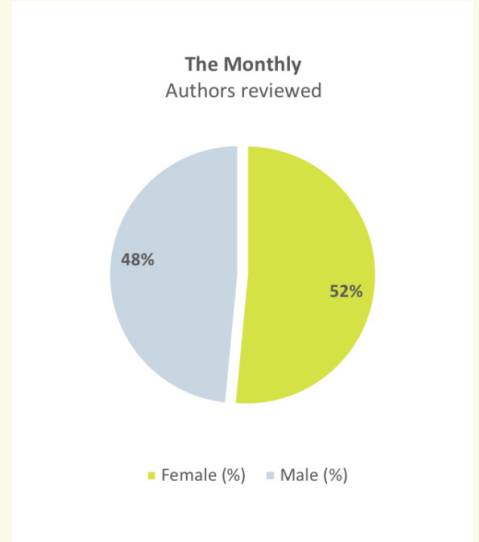
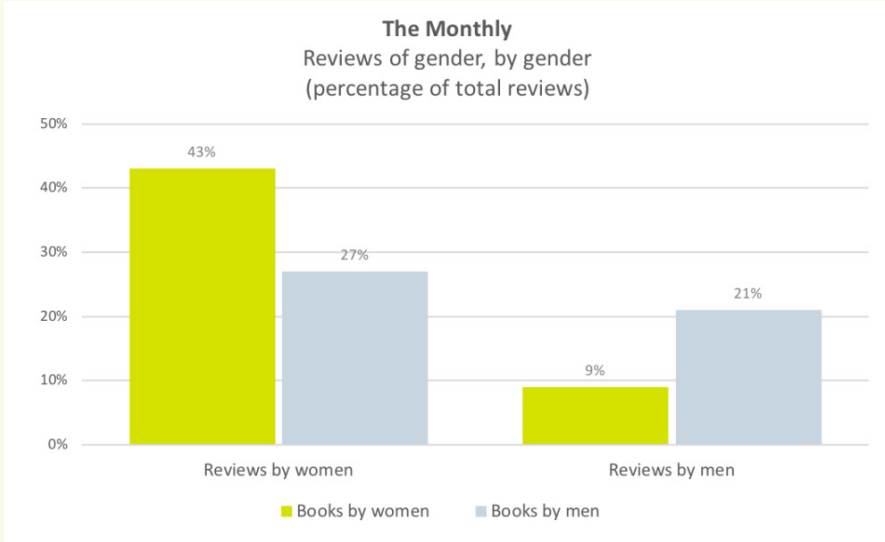
Meanjin



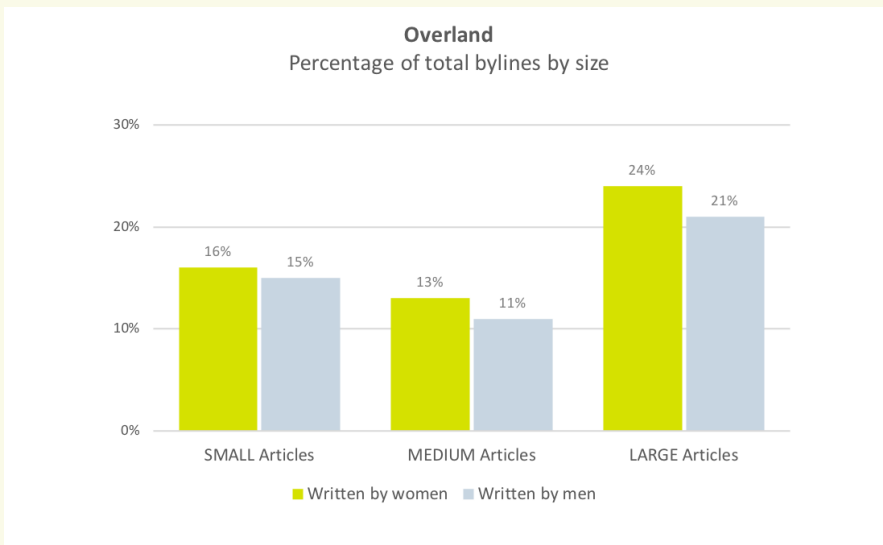
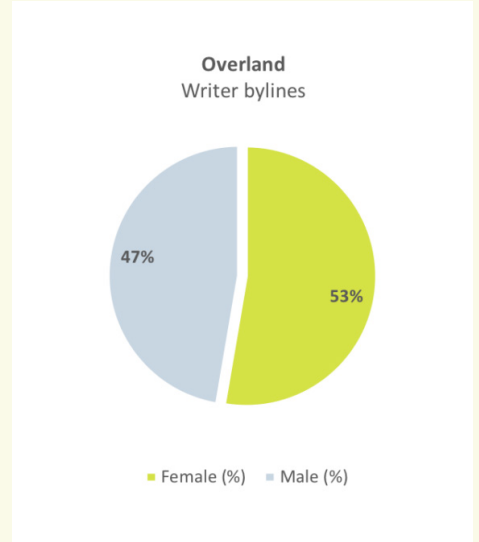
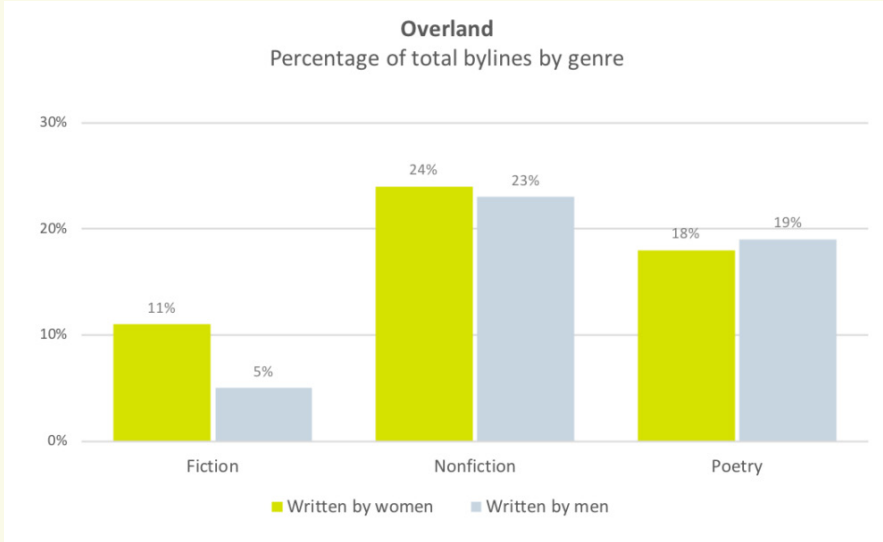
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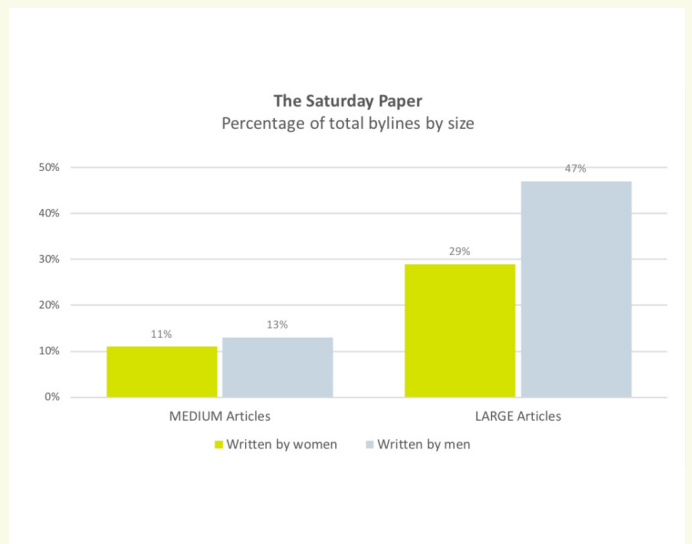
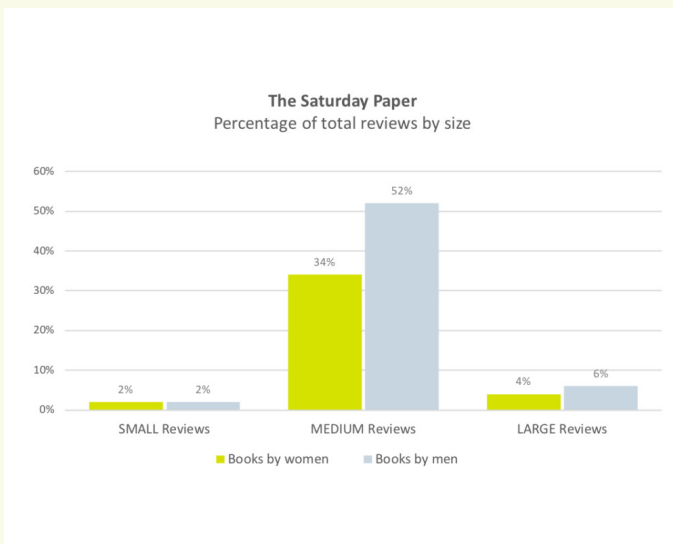
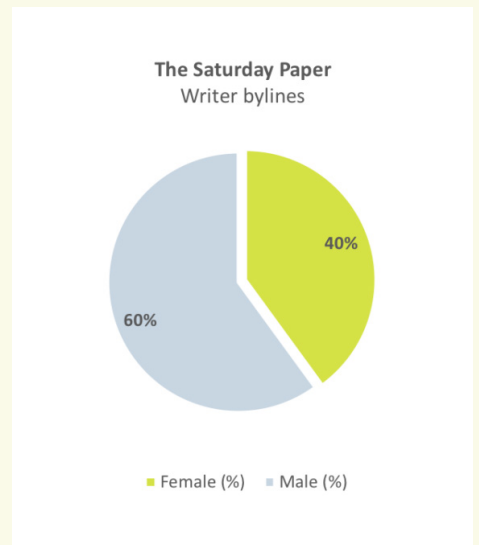
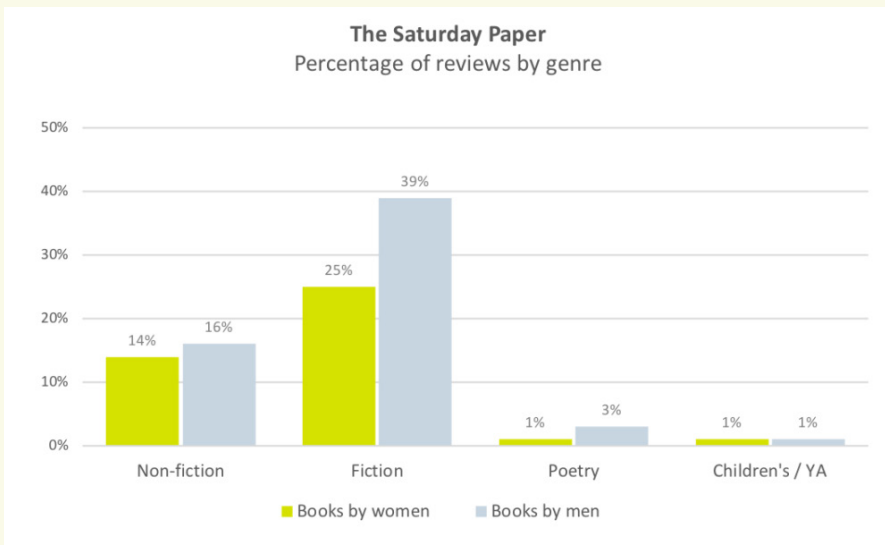
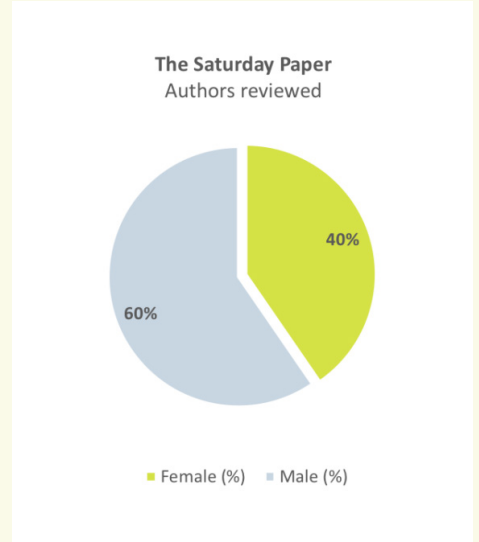
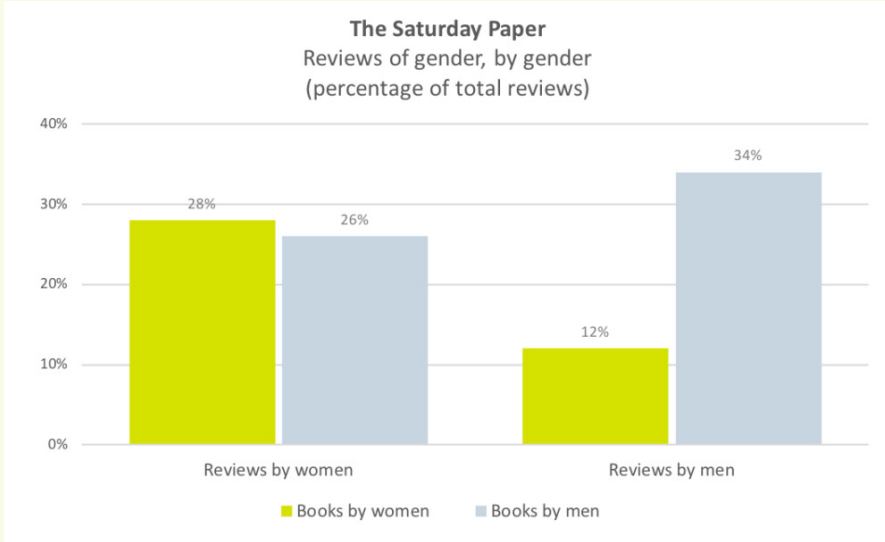
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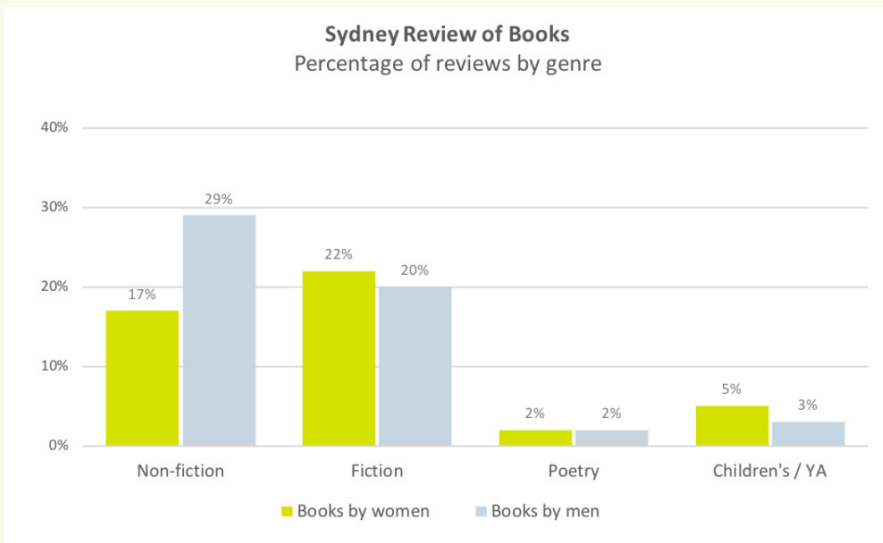
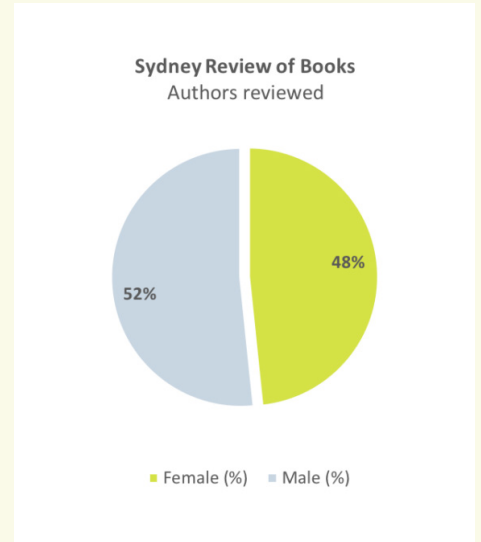
Overland



The Saturday Paper

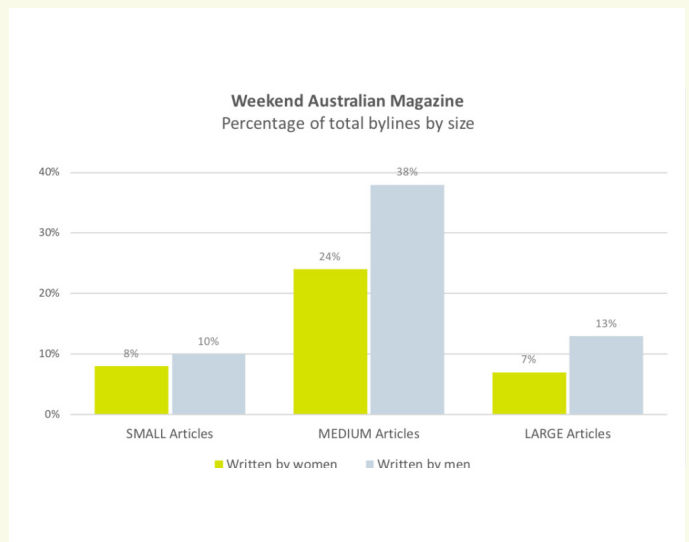
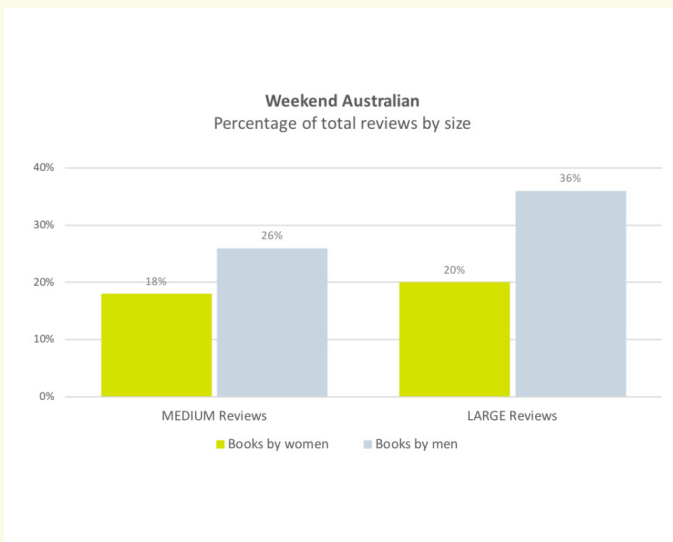
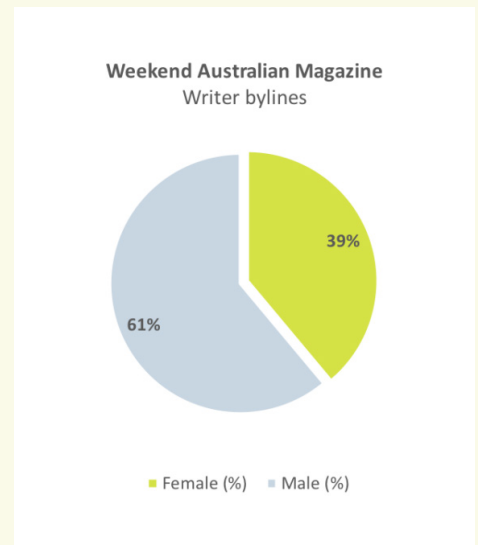
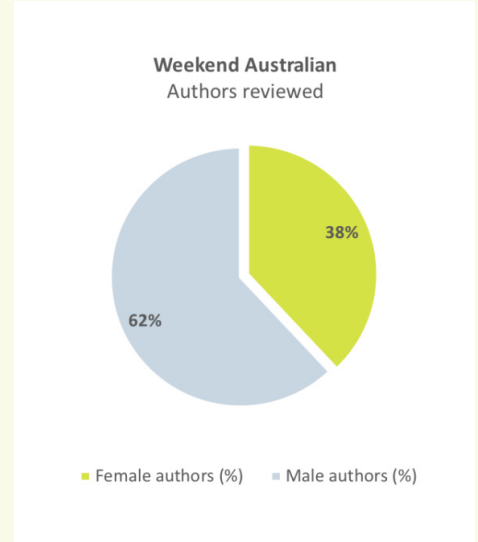
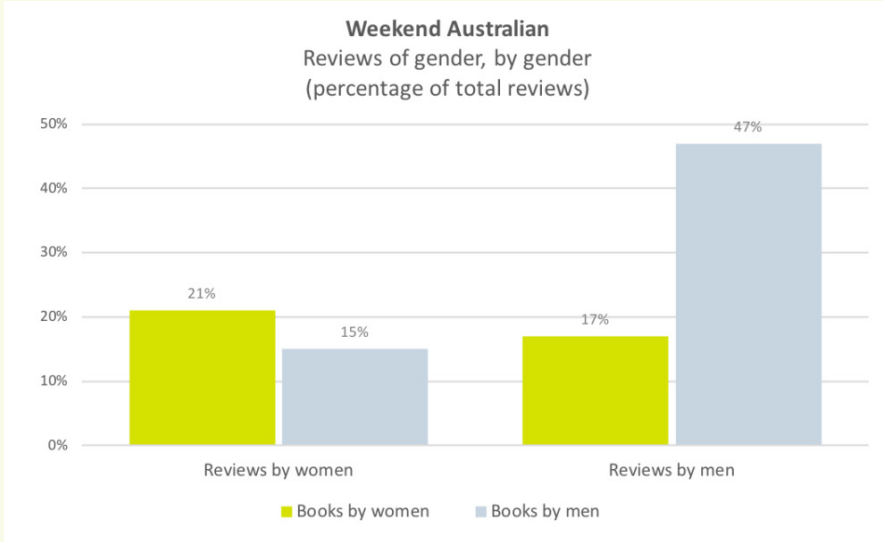


Sydney Review of Books

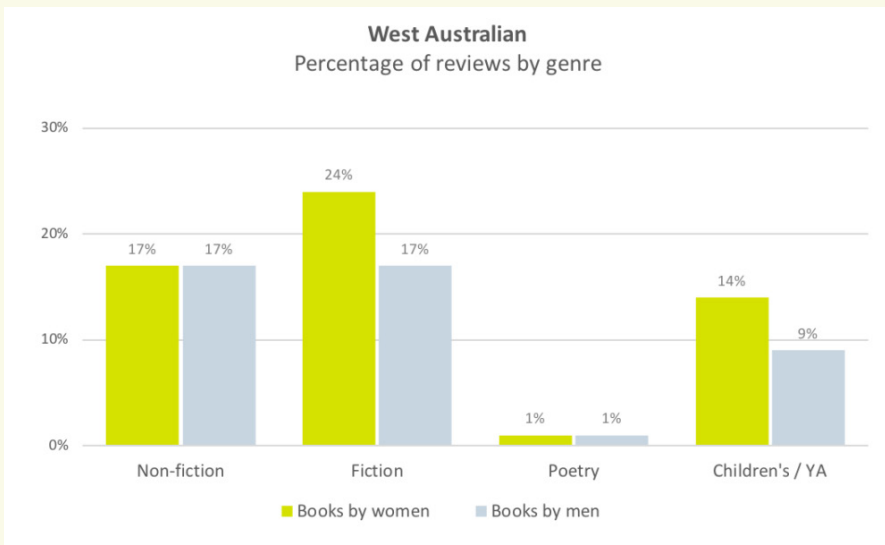
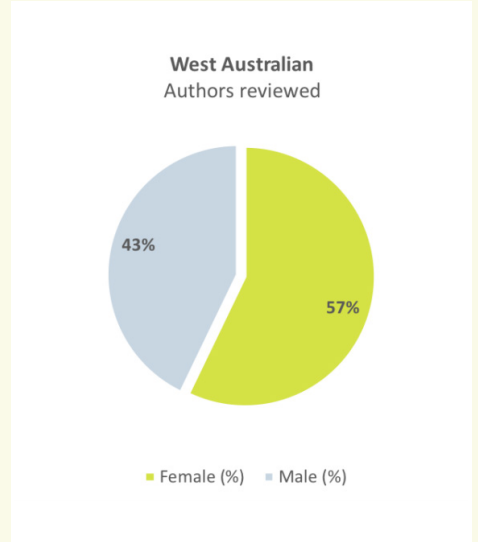
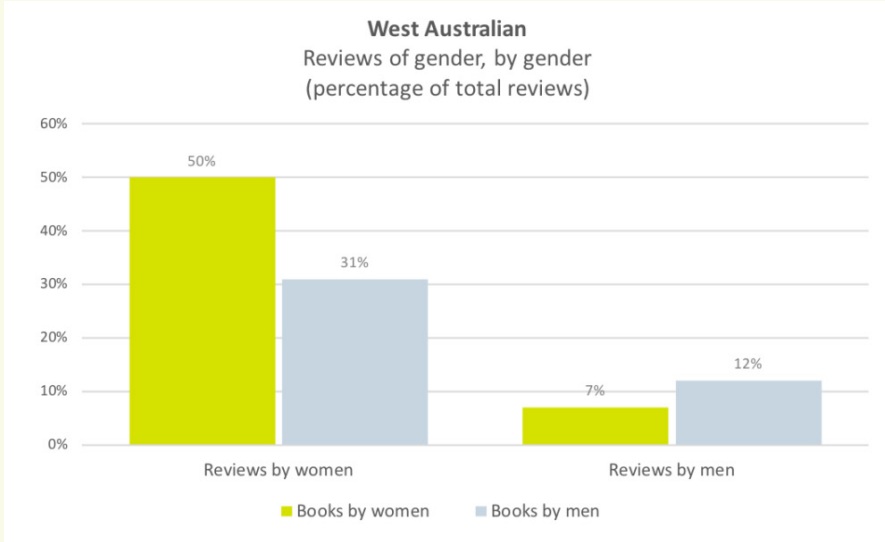


All reviews published by the *Sydney Review of Books* are classified as 'large', so no chart has been produced to track the size of the publication's reviews.

Weekend Australian



West Australian



Addenda

Notes on the Findings

Books with two or more authors or authors and illustrators of the same gender were included in this Count and logged under their shared gender. Anthologies and other books with both male and female authors or more than two authors were excluded from this Count. In all cases, they made up less than 1% of the total data.

Stella acknowledges that the current iteration of the Count does not encompass the full spectrum of gender identification of Australian writers and reviewers. The Stella Count is a constantly evolving project that, like most statistical analyses, has its limitations. In future, we hope to capture further information about the gender of authors and by-lines for inclusion in the collected data in order to enable an even more nuanced understanding of the role that gender plays in the coverage of Australian literature.

Every effort has been made to ensure these statistics are accurate, and any publication for which we were unable to obtain sufficient or reliable data has been excluded from the Count.

We welcome any corrections or comment from publications, editors or reviewers. Individuals and organisations who wish to view the raw data of this Count can arrange to do so by emailing info@stella.org.au

Correction: 19 June 2018

Stella has become aware of an error in the 2017 Count graphs that affected three publications within the byline gender category. Corrections to *Meanjin*, *Overland* and *Good Weekend*, as well as to the overall results in this category, have now been made.

These corrections were necessary due to a version control error during the data presentation. Unfortunately, a small proportion of the charts (3 out of 67) supplied to the Stella Prize were based on the previous year's data rather than on the data shown in the accompanying tables. All charts have since been triple-checked and we are confident that all the 2017 graphs now accurately represent the 2017 data.

As above, we welcome any corrections or comment from publications, editors or reviewers. Individuals and organisations who wish to view the raw data of this Count can arrange to do so by emailing info@stella.org.au

