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ABOUT THE COUNT

The 2014 Stella Count is the most comprehensive survey of Australian reviewing yet. The data shows the ratio of books by men and women reviewed in 12 major Australian review publications, including national and state newspapers and influential magazines and review journals. This information was compiled by the Stella Prize in conjunction with *Books+Publishing*, with assistance from researchers at Deakin University, as well as Dr Julieanne Lamond at ANU and Dr Melinda Harvey at Monash University.

As in previous years, the 2014 Stella Count has collected information on the gender of authors reviewed and the gender of reviewers. This year, however, the scope of the data collected was also expanded substantially to include the size of reviews and the genres most frequently reviewed (fiction, nonfiction, poetry and children's books).

The result has been a more nuanced data set that has enabled us to identify patterns regarding what sorts of books by male and female authors are more frequently reviewed at each publication.

THE GENDER CARD: Author Gender

As with the 2013 Stella Count, the greatest gender disparity in the authors reviewed was seen in the two major national papers: The analysis of the *Australian Financial Review's* results (which included reviews from the supplement magazines *AFR Magazine* and *AFR Boss*) yielded similar results to previous years, with 77% male authors and 23% female authors reviewed in 2014 (85% male in 2013, 80% in 2012, and 79% in 2011). The other national newspaper, the *Weekend Australian*, reviewed fewer female authors than last year, with 69% male authors and 31% female authors (compare this to 65% male in 2013, and 70% in both 2011 and 2012).

Encouragingly, most major state papers hovered relatively near to equal author gender representation, including the *Sunday Tasmanian* (48% male, 52% female), the *Advertiser* (49% male, 51% female), the *Daily Telegraph* (54% male, 46% female), *The Sunday Age* (55% male, 45% female), the Courier-Mail (56% male, 44% female) and the West Australian (56% male, 44% female). The Saturday review sections of *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, which are syndicated across the two newspapers, reviewed 60% books by men and 40% books by women.

The Monthly and *Australian Book Review* both fell further from gender parity than their results in last year's Stella Count, each reviewing 62% male authors in 2014.

Books+Publishing was the only publication researched that had a significant majority of reviews of books by female authors, with 36% male authors and 64% female authors.



THE GENTLEMEN'S CLUB: Reviewer Gender and Its Effects

The gender proportions of reviewers varied between publications, but most had a fairly even split, or a significant majority of female reviewers. The exceptions were the *Weekend Australian* (71% male reviewers), the *Australian Financial Review* (84% male reviewers) and *The Monthly* (68% male reviewers).

As in the 2013 Stella Count, this year's data showed that, in the vast majority of publications, books by male authors were more often reviewed by men. This was not only in the case of men; a pattern was observed, in which each gender more frequently reviewed authors of the same gender. Conversely, the proportion of reviews by men of female authors was less than 17% across all 12 publications surveyed, regardless of how evenly authors of both genders were reviewed overall.

Men generally reviewed books by men two to three times more often than they did books by women. At *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald*, for instance, 39% of all reviews were by men, of men. 15% were by men, of women, while 25% were by women of women and 21% were by women of men.



GENDERED GENRES: Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry and Children's Books

Examining genre with respect to author gender revealed which types of books are most widely and frequently reviewed. Publications that reviewed more men than women tended to publish a greater number of reviews of nonfiction books than of fiction. For instance, 87% of reviews published in the *Australian Financial Review* were of nonfiction – and 68% were of nonfiction by men. At the *Weekend Australian*, works of fiction and nonfiction by women each drew 12% of the total review coverage; 21% of reviews were of fiction by males and 37% of nonfiction by males.

These statistics point to a trend of proportionally fewer nonfiction works by women being reviewed at most publications. In *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, for instance, while works of fiction by male and female authors were reviewed with similar frequency (25% and 22% respectively of total reviews respectively), the nonfiction reviews showed a stark gender disparity. 16% of the all books reviewed were nonfiction by women, and 33% were nonfiction by men. (The remaining 4% were reviews of children's books; the number of works of poetry reviewed was not statistically significant.)

At *Australian Book Review*, 56% of all books reviewed were nonfiction, the authors of which were more than twice as likely to be male than female (38% of books reviewed by *ABR* were nonfiction books by men; 18% were nonfiction books by women).



SIZE DOES MATTER: Small, Medium, Large

For the first time in its three-year history, the 2014 Stella Count has compiled data on the approximate size of each review, classifying them as small (capsule reviews under 200 words), medium (300–900 words), or large (longer-form reviews of over 1000 words).

This has revealed which size of review is most often assigned to which author gender by each publication. While some publications (notably the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Advertiser*, and the *Sunday Tasmanian*) had relatively equitable results, most others appeared to favour medium and large reviews of books by men over those of books by women.

For instance, *Australian Book Review* reviewed 62% male authors and 38% female. Despite the ratio favouring males overall, their small reviews were almost equally distributed among books by male (11%) and female (12%) authors, and books by men only slightly outperformed those by women in medium-sized reviews (26% and 19% respectively). However, in large reviews (and, hence, those generally afforded greater prominence) the gender disparity was far more marked: just 7% of the total were large reviews of books by men.

The Age and Sydney Morning Herald's results by size were largely consistent with their overall results of 60% male and 40% female authors reviewed, while their small and medium-sized reviews were weighted towards male authors slightly more often (24% of the total reviews were small ones of books by women and 31% were small reviews of men; 13% were medium reviews of women and 19% of men), the large reviews focused on books by men more than three times as often as they did books by women (10% were of books by men, but just 3% were of books by women).

The Sunday Age's results told a similar story. While small reviews were split fairly evenly (33% female authors; 30% male authors), medium reviews were more than twice as likely to be devoted to male authors (24% male; 11% female). In the Weekend Australian, large reviews were three times as likely to cover books by male writers (15% male, 5% female), and medium reviews were twice as likely to do so (48% male, 23% female).



CHANGES OVER TIME:

Observations and Speculations

Many publications had a slightly more pronounced gender disparity than was shown in the 2013 Stella Count, dropping several percentage points lower in their coverage of women authors in 2014. These included the Weekend Australian, the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, The Sunday Age, The Monthly and Australian Book Review.

The scope of this study is not to speculate on what has caused these fluctuations. However, the 2014 Stella Count does show the ways books by men and women are often treated differently when several factors are taken into account – the gender of the reviewer, the size of review and the genre of the book reviewed – all of which are cause for concern.

A book of nonfiction by a woman has half the chance of being reviewed by *The Age* or *SMH* than one by a man. Perhaps this is because women are publishing fewer books of nonfiction, or perhaps those they do publish are less likely to engage with topics that are considered for review. We do know that gendered reading habits, established early in life, can become entrenched and lead to the kind of unconscious bias that may disincline a male reviewer to choose a book by a female author, or cause an editor to commission a male reviewer over a female reviewer for a certain book.

Full data for every publication surveyed is available by clicking through to individual pages via the pie charts above. The 2014 Stella Count analysis is intended to generate conversation and draw attention to areas of Australian literary reviewing where a lack of gender diversity and equitable representation is demonstrated by publications in some aspect of their reviewing. Many media outlets are publishing a commendable and wide variety of reviews, and contributing positively to the ongoing development of a rich and diverse Australian critical culture.



Percentage of each publication's reviews that were of books by women

The 2014 Stella Count Redux

The 2014 Stella Count Redux focuses on two new publications whose weekly book reviews generate much public interest, but which have not been included in previous Stella Counts: *The Saturday Paper* and *Sydney Review of Books*. It was compiled with assistance from Books+Publishing.

The Saturday Paper's book reviews section has been the topic of heated debate since the paper's inception in 2014. The decision to employ fabricated pseudonymous initials in place of the names of reviewers, has been a particular target for controversy, attracting praise and criticism in equal measure. This factor was also the major reason why *The Saturday Paper* was excluded from the main 2014 Stella Count, released in August; without knowing the gender of reviewers, little meaningful data could be collected. However, for this Stella Count Redux, *The Saturday Paper* volunteered the necessary data, including the gender of their reviewers.

Sydney Review of Books is the first online-only publication to be surveyed in the Stella Count. Its inclusion recognises that a great deal of significant Australian literary criticism takes place in non-traditional spaces, and beyond the boundaries of the major printed newspapers and review publications.

Authors

Findings from a Macquarie University survey of Australian authors, published this month, show that women make up two-thirds of book authors. And yet, at both the *Sydney Review of Books* and *The Saturday Paper*, the gender of authors reviewed is an almost exact inversion of the overall gender ratio of authors in Australia. At the *Sydney Review of Books*, 64% of reviews were of male authors; while at The Saturday Paper, 63% of reviews were of male authors.

Reviewers

As was the case with many other publications discussed in the 2014 Stella Count analysis, in the *Sydney Review of Books* and *The Saturday Paper*, male reviewers were far more likely to review books by male authors than they were books by female authors. At *The Saturday Paper*, the gender breakdown of reviewers was 60% male, 40% female. Exactly two-thirds of *The Saturday Paper's* reviews by male reviewers were of books by male authors, to one third of books by female authors (40% and 20% of the total reviews, respectively).

At the Sydney Review of Books, 59% of reviewers were male, and they were more than three times as likely to review male authors as they were to review female authors (reviews by men of books by men comprised 46% of total reviews, while men reviewed women just 13% of the time). Female reviewers made up 41% of the website's reviewer base, and the authors they reviewed were more evenly distributed: 23% of the total reviews in the publication were by female reviewers of female authors; while 18% were by female reviewers of male authors.

Genres

The figures yielded by a study of genres reviewed were skewed towards male writers. At *The Saturday Paper*, 32% of reviews were of nonfiction books by males, while just 12% were of nonfiction books by females. Reviews of male fiction writers constituted 32% of the paper's total reviews, while female fiction writers still lagged significantly behind, making up 23% of the total reviews

The genre breakdown of *Sydney Review of Books* reviews was similarly lopsided. 33% of total reviews were of nonfiction by male writers, while 12% were of nonfiction by female writers. Fiction reviews were more evenly matched (19% female; 24% male). *Sydney Review of Books* also had the greatest proportion of poetry reviews of any publication surveyed in the 2014 Count: 7% of their total reviews were of works by male poets, while 5% were of works by female poets.

Size

At *The Saturday Paper*, large reviews were more than two and half times more likely to focus on books by men than by women (23% and 9% of the total reviews, respectively). The paper's medium reviews were also skewed towards books by male writers, though less severely: 40% of the total reviews published by *The Saturday Paper* in 2014 were medium reviews of books by men, compared to the 28% that were medium reviews of books by women.

Overall

Like many other Australian review publications surveyed in the 2014 Stella Count, both *Sydney Review of Books* and *The Saturday Paper* publish more reviews written by men about books by male authors, and privilege coverage of nonfiction by men over that of women.

2014 STELLA COUNT The Advertiser





2014 STELLA COUNT The Age/Sydney Morning Herald



2014 STELLA COUNT Australian Book Review







2014 STELLA COUNT Australian Financial Review



2014 STELLA COUNT Books+Publishing





NB: Data on review size has not been depicted in pie form for Books+Publishing, as the publication's reviews are all small.

2014 STELLA COUNT **Courier-Mail**





25%

18%

Medium reviews of female titles

2014 STELLA COUNT Daily Telegraph







2014 STELLA COUNT The Monthly







2014 STELLA COUNT REDUX **The Saturday Paper**



- Poetry by females Children's titles by females
- Fiction by males Poetry by males
- Nonfiction by males Children's titles by males

- Small reviews of female titles Medium reviews of female titles
- Large reviews of female titles
 Small reviews of male titles
- Medium reviews of male titles
 Large reviews of male titles

2014 STELLA COUNT The Sunday Age







2014 STELLA COUNT Sunday Tasmanian





32%

2014 STELLA COUNT REDUX Sydney Review of Books





2014 STELLA COUNT Weekend Australian







2014 STELLA COUNT West Australian







The Future of the Stella Count

We intend to expand the Stella Count still further in 2015, and to broaden our scope to collect data about race, disability, non-binary gender identification, and sexual orientation. It is our hope that this will enable us to accurately identify the extent to which these elements affect the review coverage received by authors from different backgrounds, particularly marginalised groups

Notes on the data

The Saturday Paper published its first edition on 1 March 2014; this count, therefore, surveys its book reviews from 1 March to 31 December 2014.

Books with two authors or an author and illustrator 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.

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. This Count surveyed print publications only.

We welcome 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

