

Impact Case Study

Gender Equity in Creative Industries

Introduction



The history of art continues to reflect the artistic contributions of men disproportionately to the achievements of women. Gender and other forms of discrimination stubbornly remain issues across the creative industries.

This is shown in public recognition and fame associated with artists and creatives in the upper echelons, as well as in the disparities in income, leadership positions and incidences of discrimination affecting cultural and creative workforces in general.

Background



In 1971, Linda Nochlin's ground-breaking ARTNews article *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* explored the institutional barriers to women's success. Over 50 years

later, women's under-representation in cultural industries persists. People typically find it easier to name famous artists and creatives who are men compared to women.

In the cultural and creative industry workforces, along with gender, characteristics such as race, sexuality, religion, age and ability can also impact career outcomes, although movements like #metoo, originating in the film industry, have helped expose the widespread harassment, discrimination and unequal outcomes experienced by women.

The Research



Dr Bronwyn Coate, Gender Equity and Organisations co-theme leader at the Centre for Organisations and Social Change (COSC), has a particular interest in the business and economics of art and culture. She brings this lens to explore gender equity issues in the cultural and creative industries. Dr Coate's body of work in this space is best exemplified by two research projects in particular:

1. Risky business: policy legacy and gender inequality in Australian opera production

This 2023 paper by Dr Caitlin Vincent (University of Melbourne), Professor Katya Johanson (Edith Cowan University), and Dr Coate explored careers for women within Australia's five state opera companies over a 20 year period. The research found women were severely under-represented in leadership roles – comprising only 5% of conductors, 24% of stage directors, 9% of lighting designers, and 21% of set designers, although in the more stereotypically feminised role of costume designer, women's representation rose to 57%.

Interestingly, women's representation rose across riskier productions, such as modern operas, where audience demand is uncertain, compared to more high-prestige, low-risk productions of frequently programmed and popular canonical operas. This reflects a strategic approach to programming that is gendered and preferences men.

As targets around gender become linked to public funding, data relating to hiring practices in publicly funded opera companies needs to be more available and accessible. This information is important to understand women's representation across the entire industry and to gain relevant insights that will inform future policy to help raise women's profiles – particularly when their current representation is more concentrated in riskier, less prestigious and less well-attended productions.

2. Fame, What's your name? Quasi and statistical gender discrimination in an art valuation experiment

Dr Coate and Professor Robert Hoffmann (University of Tasmania) conducted a series of five novel research experiments designed to test how knowledge inferred by gendered first names impacts preferences for visual art.

In each experiment, people were asked to choose preferred works from multiple pairs of paintings, with pairings reflecting works from a range of different styles and periods, by artists who were generally not well known.

Where the artist's name was provided, inferred knowledge of their gender didn't much alter the preferences of a large sample of participants. However, when participants were asked whose work they thought would be more expensive, their responses shifted significantly towards the works by men. When asked which work they thought was by a better-known artist, the participants' shift towards works by men was even more pronounced.

The results are insightful in showing that, at a base level, artists' gender has little impact on the works of art that people prefer. However, preferences for art are not simply about aesthetics. Knowledge about the creator of the art, including gender, affects perceptions. Gender operates as a prompt used to assign fame and worth to art which, the research argues, points to the need to target institutional factors in shifting public perceptions about women artists.

Project outcomes

1. Risky business: policy legacy and gender inequality in Australian opera production

This paper was published in International Journal of Cultural Policy, 16 August 2023

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10286632.2023.2239266>

Media

95% male conductors, 70% ageing classics and zero appetite for risk: what's wrong with elite Australian opera, The Conversation, 17 August 2023.

2. Fame, What's your name? quasi and statistical gender discrimination in an art valuation experiment

This paper was published in Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, Volume 202, October 2022:

- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0167268122002669>

Media

- *Male artists dominate galleries. Our research explored if it's because 'women don't paint very well' – or just discrimination*, The Conversation, 5 September 2022
- *In a Series of Behavioral Experiments, Viewers Preferred Works by Women Artists—But Assumed Works by Men Were More Famous and Valuable*, Artnet, September 7, 2022.

Overview of the impact



1. Risky business: policy legacy and gender inequality in Australian opera production

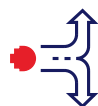
Creative Australia's new cultural five-year policy, *Revive* acknowledges quality data is a first step towards bringing accountability to cultural policy assessment. Dr Coate has played a key role in advocating for quality data to inform evidence-based policy.

In 2022, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts called for Renewed Cultural Policy Public Submissions. Dr Coate was one of a few national academics invited to contribute to the Australia Council for the Arts (now Creative Australia) submission, *Australia Council for the Arts: Joint Submission on Cultural Data Needs*.

2. Fame, What's your name? quasi and statistical gender discrimination in an art valuation experiment

The recognition of women's contributions in the visual arts still has some way to go. The recent National Gallery of Australia exhibition *Know my Name*, presently touring Australia, shone a timely spotlight on the absence of women in discourse about Australian art history. As awareness builds, now more than ever it is necessary to focus on art and artistic achievements by women in galleries, collections, and exhibitions, both public and private.

Next Steps



Dr Coate's research in this field continues. Her current research projects explore the concepts of invisibility and 'passing', and 'male fragility' in the creative industries.

COSC Research Theme

- Gender equity and organisations

This theme examines gendered power relations and identities as related to organisations and organisational life and how gender equality can be advanced through policy and practice change.