

The
STELLA

C O U N T

2018


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The Stella Count 2018 analysis was written by Melinda Harvey (Monash University) and Julieanne Lamond (Australian National University).

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



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Top-level Findings

Gender parity is the rule, not the exception

In 2018, 49% of all reviews surveyed are of books written by women, up from 40% when the Count started in 2012. **These results suggest that the act of counting actively shifts the gender balance of literary journalism in Australia.**

Other notable statistics from the 2018 Stella Count include:

- **Authors:** In 2018, nine publications out of 12 surveyed have reached or exceeded parity in terms of their representation of women authors.
- **Genre:** Women non-fiction authors have gained more attention in 2018 with 42% of all non-fiction books reviewed in the publications surveyed written by women (up from 37% in 2017). Additionally, in line with the trend across the past two years of the Count, non-fiction is now reviewed equally by male and female reviewers.
- **Reviewers:** In 2016 and 2017, eight publications published more reviews by women than by men. In 2018, that number rose to nine. When it comes to reviewing, however, gender silos continue to be an issue. For this count, there is only one publication in which one gender reviews another gender more than it does its own: *Books+Publishing*.

ABOUT THE COUNT

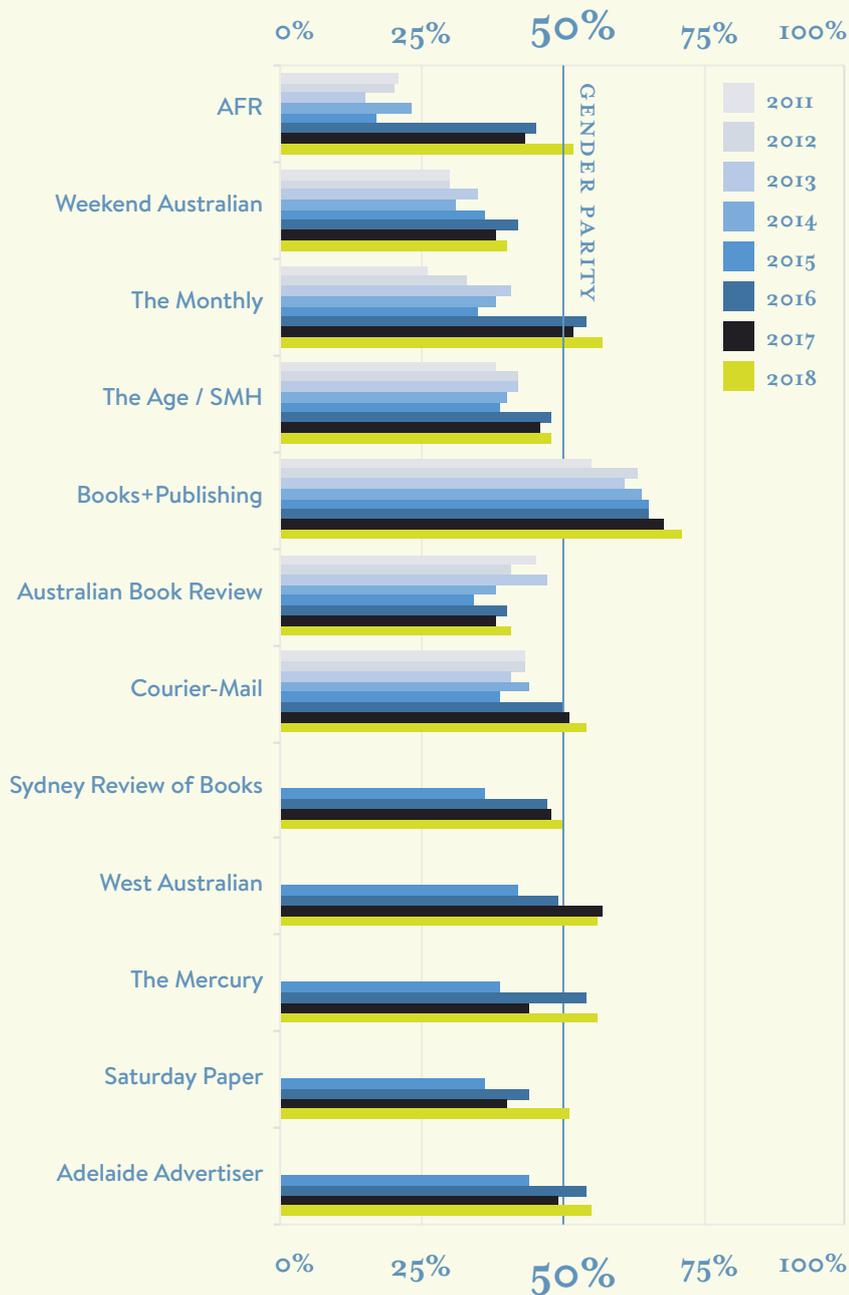
The 2018 Stella Count surveys twelve publications – including national, metropolitan and regional newspapers, journals and magazines – in print and online.

The Count assesses the extent of gender bias 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.



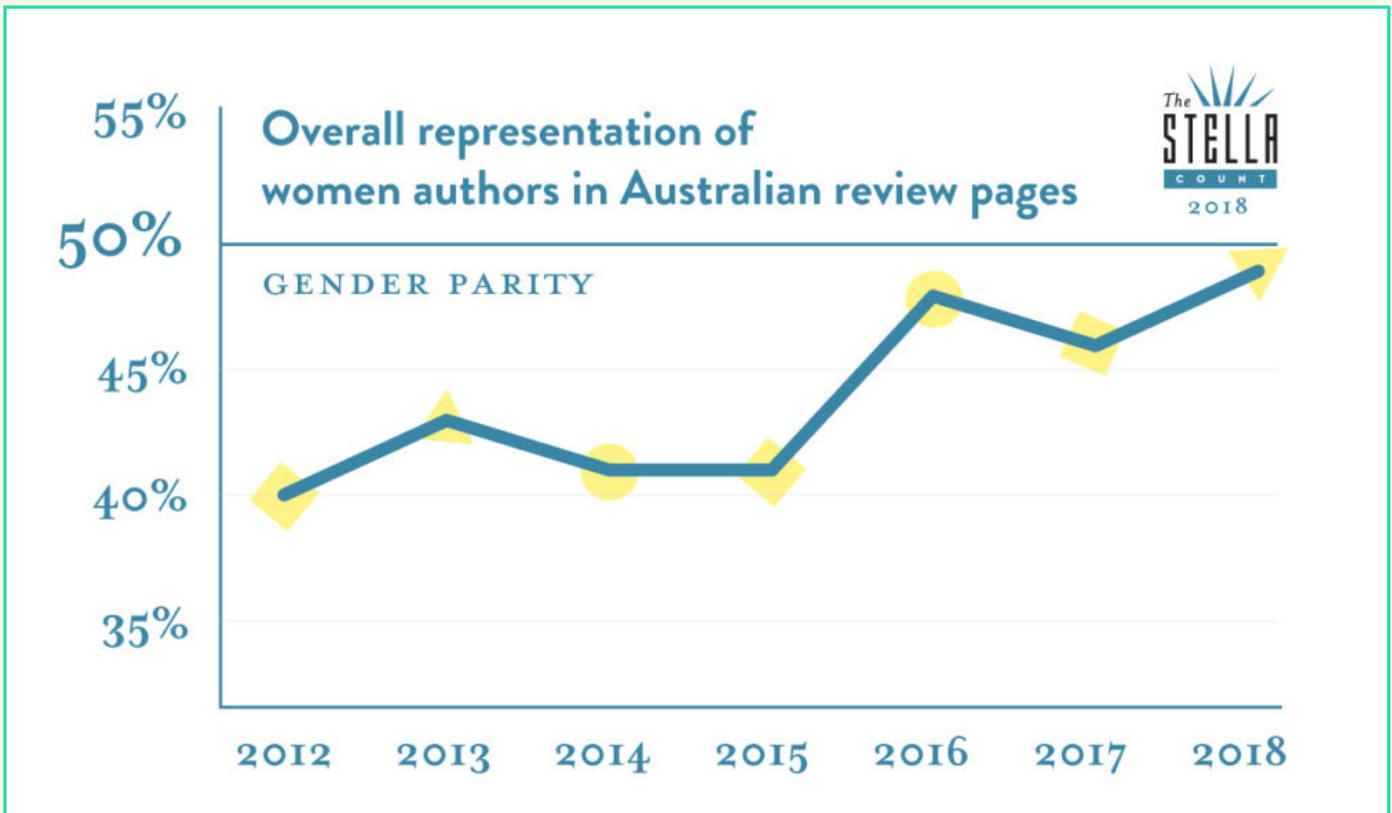
Top-level Findings

Representation of women authors
in Australian review pages



GENDER PARITY IS THE RULE NOT THE EXCEPTION

Top-level Findings



Gender Representation of Australian Authors

KEY FINDING

49% of all reviews surveyed in 2018 are of books written by women, up from 40% when the Count started in 2012.

The 2018 Stella Count statistics prove **sustained and significant advances in the representation of women authors in the reviews pages of Australian periodicals over our seven years of counting**. The authors field as a whole is now almost at parity: 49% of all reviews in the Australian publications surveyed in 2018 are of books written by women, up from 40% when the Count started in 2012. This is a clear indication that the Count is driving change in the Australian literary landscape, and that counting itself is an effective way to hold publications to account for the gender equity of their pages.

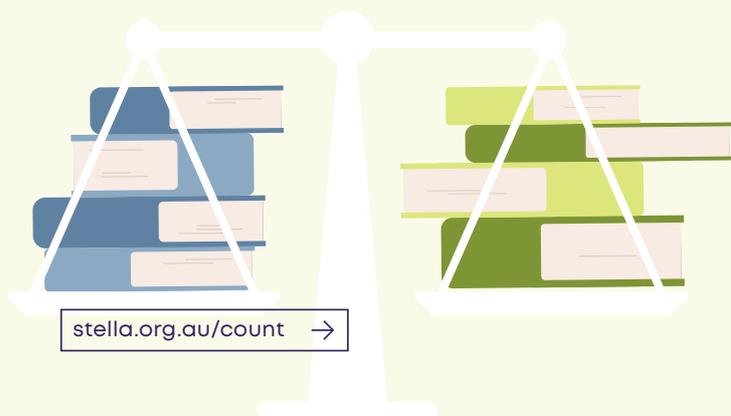
There has also been a substantial increase in the number of individual publications that have achieved gender parity in terms of authors reviewed. Across the period of the Count, this number has ranged from a low point of one publication (out of 14 surveyed) at or above parity in 2013 and 2015, increasing to four publications (out of 12 surveyed) in 2016 and 2017. In 2018, nine publications out of 12 surveyed have reached or exceeded parity in terms of their representation of women authors. These publications are *Books+Publishing* (71% women authors reviewed), *The Monthly* (57%), *The West Australian* (56%), *The Mercury* (56%), *The Advertiser* (55%), *The Courier-Mail* (54%), *Australian Financial Review* (52%), *The Saturday Paper* (51%) and the *Sydney Review of Books* (50%).

Publications that have greater than or equal to 50% representation of women authors in their reviews for the first time in 2018 include the *Sydney Review of Books*, *The Saturday Paper* and *Australian Financial Review*. The largest increases in representation of women authors between 2017 and 2018 are at *The Mercury* (from 44% in 2017 to 56% in 2018), *The Monthly* (from 52% to 57%), *The Advertiser* (from 49% to 55%) and *The Saturday Paper* (from 40% to 51%).

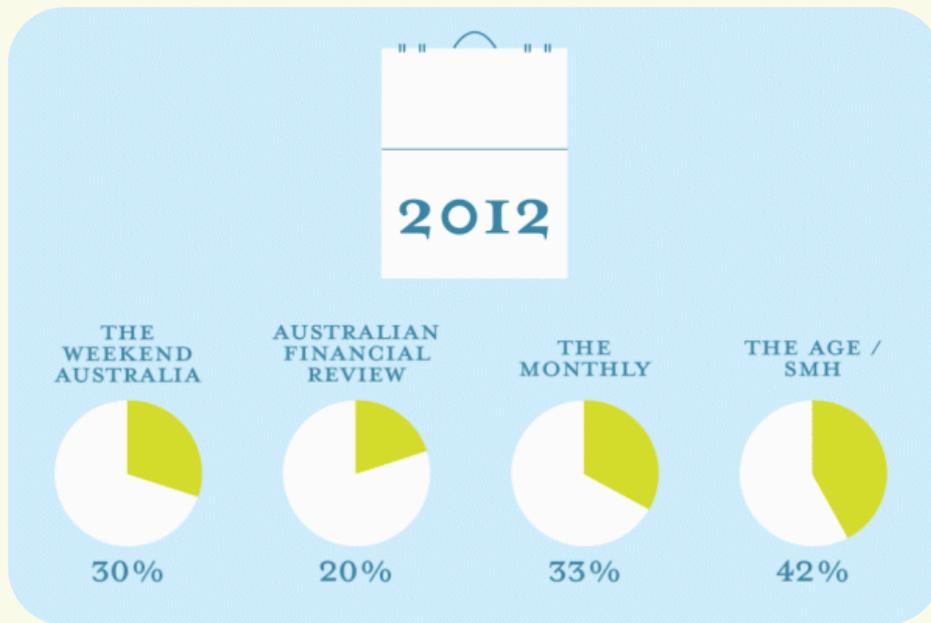
Literary editors should be congratulated for their efforts to improve the representation of women authors in their reviews pages, as we have — for the first time since the Stella Count began — reached a point at which gender parity is the rule rather than the exception.

Only three publications in our survey have never achieved parity in the seven years of counting: *The Weekend Australian*, *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* and *Australian Book Review*. We note, however, that the representation of women authors at *The Weekend Australian* and *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* has been trending upwards since the Count began, and *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald*, at 48%, is very close to reaching the target.

Representation of women authors in reviews remains lowest — as it has been for the past two years of counting — at *The Weekend Australian* (40%) and *Australian Book Review* (41%). *Australian Book Review* is the only publication in which women's representation as authors reviewed trends downwards over the seven years of the Count.



Gender Representation of Australian Authors



FINDINGS

Gender Representation of Reviewers

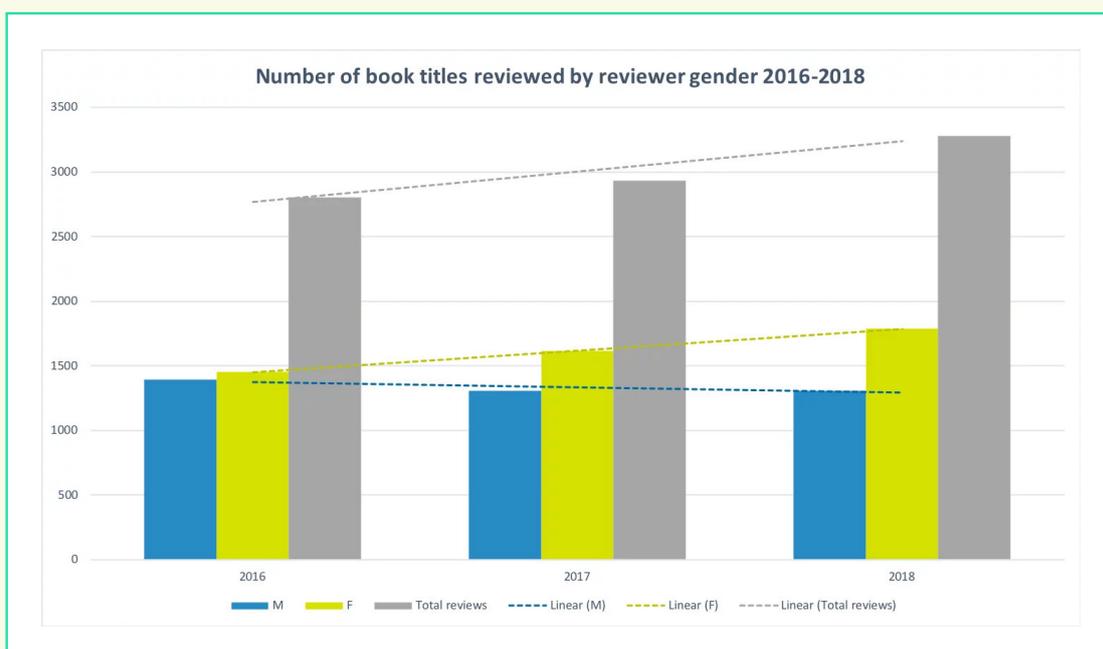
As in previous years of the Count, more book reviews have been written by women than by men in 2018. *Australian Financial Review's* entire suite of reviews are, as in the previous Count, written by women. In 2016 and 2017, eight publications published more reviews by women than by men. In 2018, nine of 12 publications we survey published more reviews by women than by men. The new entrant is the *Sydney Review of Books*, where 56% of its reviews were written by women in 2018 (up from 45% in 2017).

A factor contributing to the rise in women reviewers has been the increasing number of books reviewed in the period 2016–2018. The graph below charts the trendlines for men and women reviewers over the last three years of the Count.

This graph shows that women have been reviewing more books as more book titles total have been reviewed each year. In other words, gains made by women reviewers in 2016–2018 have not been made at the expense of men reviewers, who have, largely, maintained their number of reviews for the period.

KEY FINDING

Only three of the 12 publications surveyed have fewer books reviewed by women than by men in 2018.



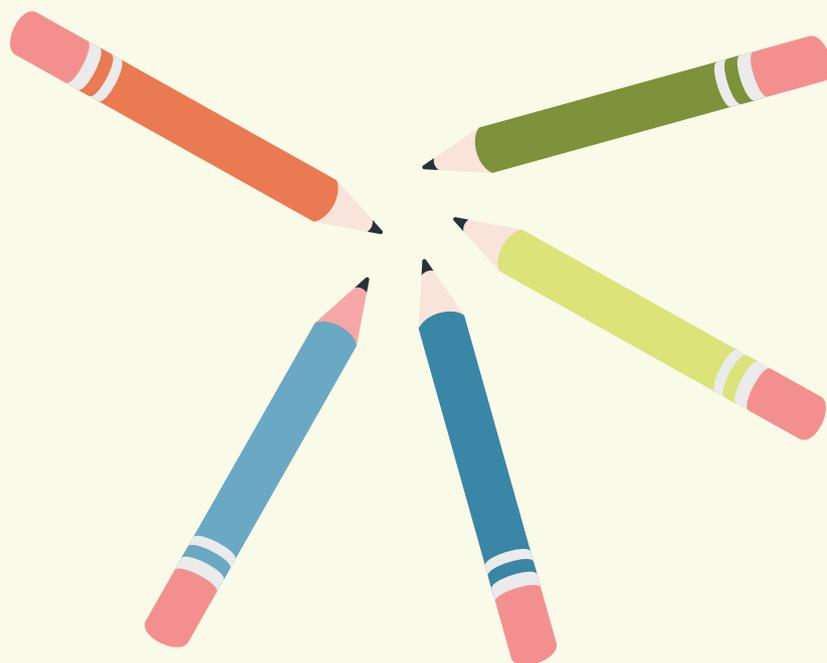
FINDINGS

Gender Representation of Reviewers

Only three of the 12 publications surveyed have fewer books reviewed by women than by men in 2018: *The Weekend Australian* (37%, but up from 36% in 2017), *Australian Book Review* (44%, up from 39%), and *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* (48%, up from 46%). Two of these three publications — *The Age/Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Weekend Australian* — account for 43% of the total number of reviews in our data and therefore are important estuaries in the literary-critical landscape.

When we look at the individual trendlines for women reviewers at these three publications over the period 2016–2018 we find that only *Australian Book Review*'s trends downwards. Combined with the fact that attention paid to women authors at this publication is also on a downward trajectory, one might say that *Australian Book Review* is now the outlier in the Australian literary field, as far as the representation of women is concerned.

In the analysis of the last few Counts we have highlighted the problem of gender silos when it comes to book reviewing — i.e. men tend to review men and women tend to review women. Partitioned criticism hasn't gone away in 2018: there is only one publication in which one gender reviews another gender more than it does its own: *Books+Publishing*. Across all publications, author gender matches reviewer gender in 64% of cases (down by only 1 percentage point from 2016 and 2017). For every two books men review by men, they review only one book by a woman. This extends out to a ratio of nearly 3:1 at *Australian Book Review*. Women review men more than men review women across our publications, but nonetheless nearly two of every three books women review are by women authors.



Gender Representation by Review Size

KEY FINDING

In 2017, 66% of all long reviews were written by men. In 2018, this figure has dropped to 51%.

In previous Stella Counts we have noted that, even while the proportion of reviews accorded to women authors has been increasing, these increases have been mostly at the ‘small end of town’ in terms of review size: in small- and medium-length reviews (i.e. reviews of either under 300 words, or between 300–1000 words). The 2018 Count shows that women authors’ share of small and large reviews is shifting.

Firstly, small reviews are now equally distributed between men and women authors when the field is assessed as a whole. Another welcome change has come in the large reviews — that is, the prime real estate of the book pages. In 2017, only 36% of all large reviews published (i.e. reviews over 1,000 words) were of books written by women. There has been a great leap forward in 2018, with 47% of large reviews concerned with women-authored books. In 2017, 14% of all reviews were large reviews of books by men, and 8% of large reviews of books by women. In 2018, this has moved to 16% and 14%, respectively. This means that the proportion of large reviews published has increased in 2018, and with that the gender gap has become less pronounced. In previous years of the Count we have noticed that men dominated large reviews as reviewers — this has also changed. In 2017, 66% of all long reviews were written by men. In 2018, this figure has dropped to 51%.

We’d like to think that these improvements mean that the majority of publications we survey now understand that addressing gender bias requires a variety of interventions: the number of reviews devoted to women authors matters, but so does the column space that their books receive.

Two publications that buck the general trend towards parity in terms of review size are *The Weekend Australian* and *Australian Book Review*. 64% of *The Weekend Australian*’s total number of reviews are large, but only 39% of these are of women’s books (up, however, from 36% in 2017). 42% of *Australian Book Review*’s reviews are large, but only 31% are of books by women (up from 27% in 2017).



Gender Representation by Genre

The fact that men have dominated non-fiction as authors and reviewers has been a constant feature of the Count since its inception. 2018 sees women non-fiction authors gaining more attention: 58% of all non-fiction books reviewed in the publications surveyed are male-authored (down from 63% in 2017). In 2018, in line with the trend across the past two years of the Count, non-fiction is now reviewed equally by male and female reviewers.

Several publications have increased the proportion of non-fiction by women that they review. In 2017, *Books+Publishing* was the only publication with more reviews of non-fiction by women than by men. In 2018, six publications out of twelve surveyed publish more (or an equal number of) reviews of non-fiction books by women than men: *Books+Publishing* (79%), *The Monthly* (55%), *Sydney Review of Books* (55%), *The Mercury* (54%), *The Saturday Paper* (51%) and *The West Australian* (50%). This is a substantial improvement, especially for *The Mercury*: in 2017, 30% of its reviewed non-fiction was authored by women. In 2018, it has risen by 14 percentage points.

Significant disparities in the reviewing of non-fiction continue at *Australian Book Review*, the *Australian Financial Review* and *The Weekend Australian*, the latter continuing to review more than twice as many non-fiction works by men than by women (69% men, 31% women).

The gender split for fiction reviewed in 2018 has changed only slightly since the previous Count. Works of fiction by women are reviewed more than works of fiction by men: 54% of all fiction reviewed is authored by women, up 2 percentage points from 2017. Women continue to review more fiction than men: 66% of fiction reviews are authored by women in 2018, an increase of 3 percentage points from 2017.

KEY FINDING

The fact that men have dominated non-fiction as authors and reviewers has been a constant feature of the Count since its inception.

2018 sees women non-fiction authors gaining more attention: 58% of all non-fiction books reviewed in the publications surveyed are male-authored (down from 63% in 2017).

Some further gender splits are evident in the genres of children/YA's literature and poetry. Women continue to dominate the genres of children/YA's work as authors reviewed (72% women, 28% men) and as reviewers (76% women, 24% men).

Poetry is an interesting case: in 2017 we referred to it as 'the most equitable of genres'. While the number of men and women poets reviewed is almost at parity (52% men, 48% women) in the 2018 Count, men have reviewed significantly more poetry than women (68%/32%). This is largely because the two publications that publish the majority of poetry reviews in the field are *The Weekend Australian* and *Australian Book Review*, which publish fewer poetry reviews written by women than most: women reviewers are responsible for only 20% of the poetry reviews at *The Weekend Australian* and 36% of the reviews at *Australian Book Review*.

Conclusions

KEY FINDING

Over the past seven years of the Stella Count it has become clear that what we choose to count matters.

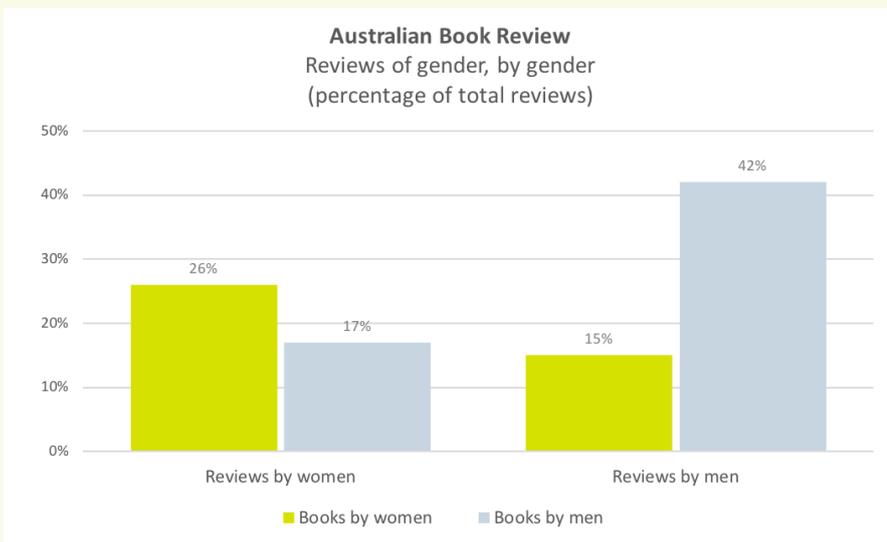
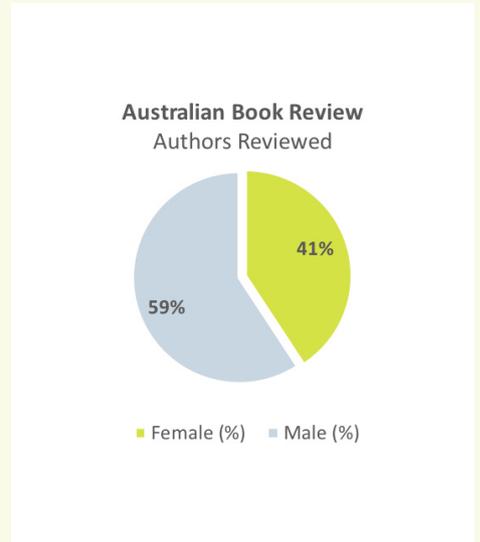
The results of the 2018 Stella Count suggest that the act of counting is actively shifting the gender balance of literary journalism in Australia. Compared with the American, British and European publications included in the annual VIDA Count, it would also appear that Australian publications are now leading the world in terms of the representation of women writers in their pages.

Over the past seven years of the Stella Count it has become clear that what we choose to count matters. By going beyond a simple count of author gender and paying attention to details such as the length of reviews, the genre of titles reviewed and reviewer gender, we have been able to go some way towards understanding the complexity of gender bias as it is at work in these publications, and pinpointing aspects for improvement.

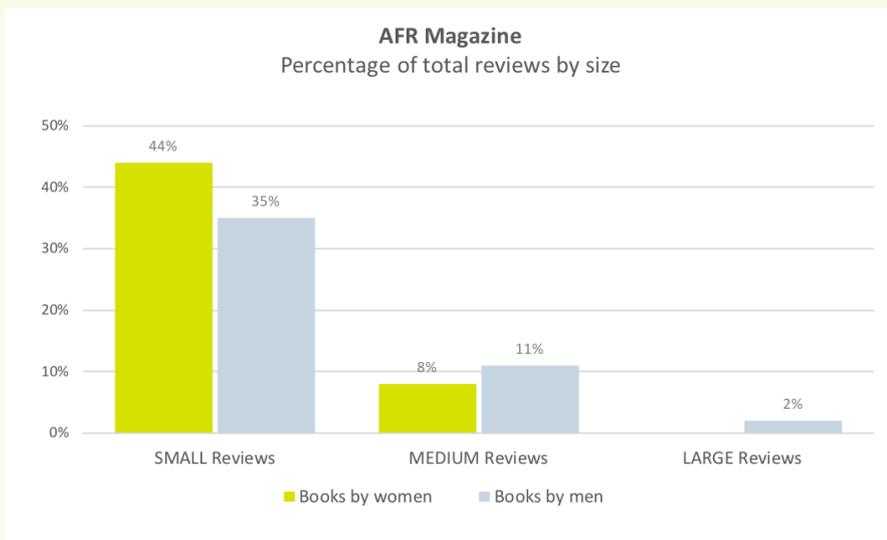
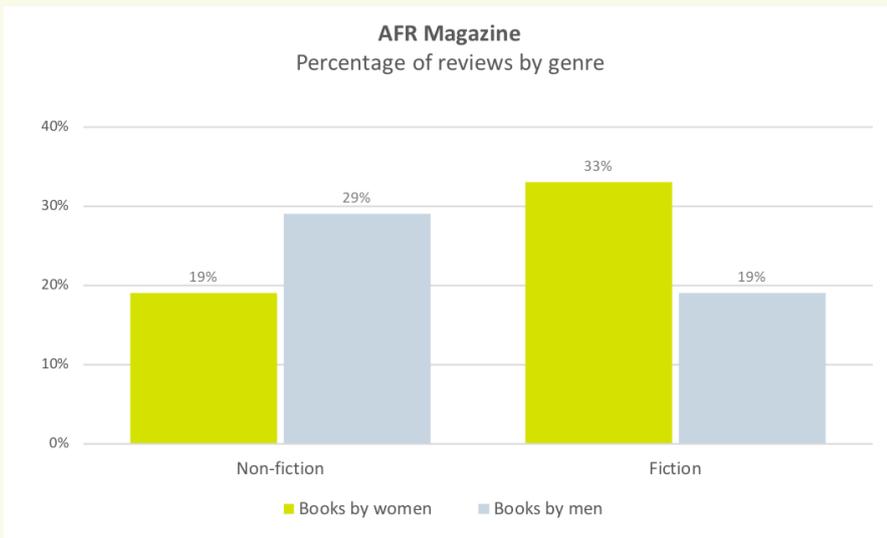
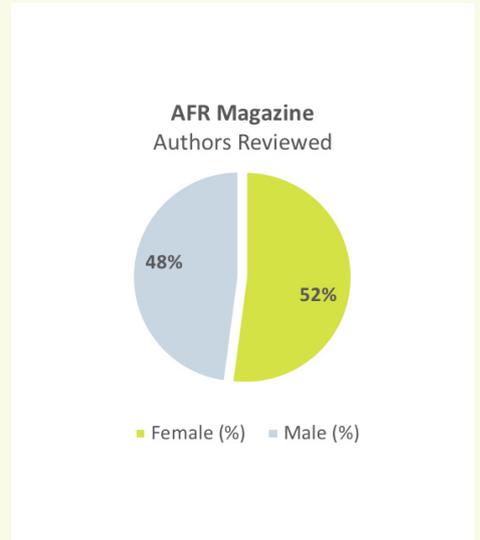
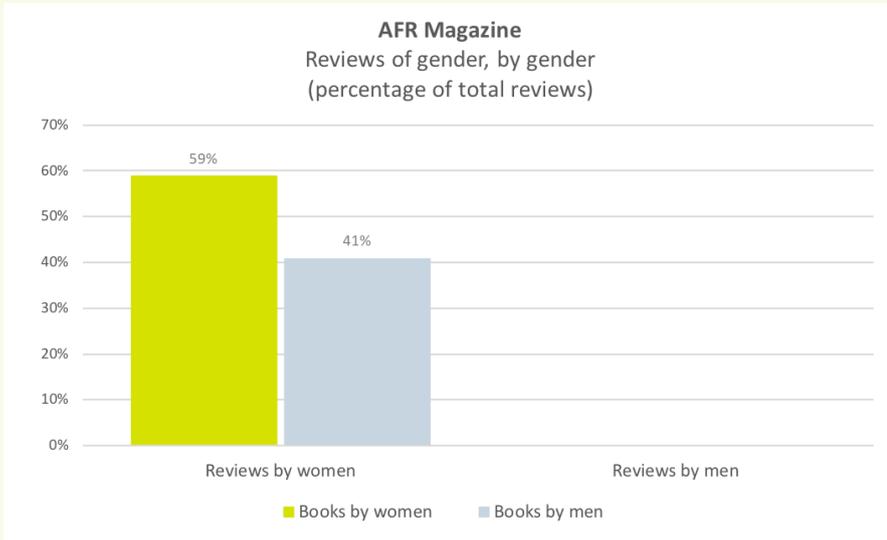
But we must also think about what we are not counting, and might or should count. Much more work is left to be done to enable the Stella Count to reflect the diversity of literary production and reception in Australia: to acknowledge gender identities beyond the gender binary and also register gender's intersection with race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability.

Historically, feminist counts have come and gone: they have jolted some recognition, made some small gains, but then have been largely forgotten. The Stella Count has lasted seven years. This is a significant achievement, given the labour, time, money and good will it takes to produce it. The task for us now is to ensure that the Stella Count can continue to work as a lever for lasting and meaningful change in the Australian literary landscape.

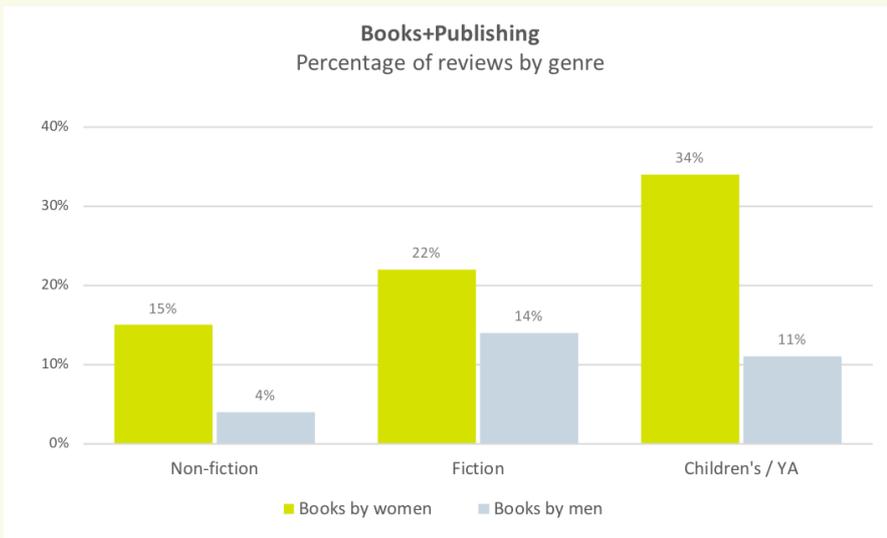
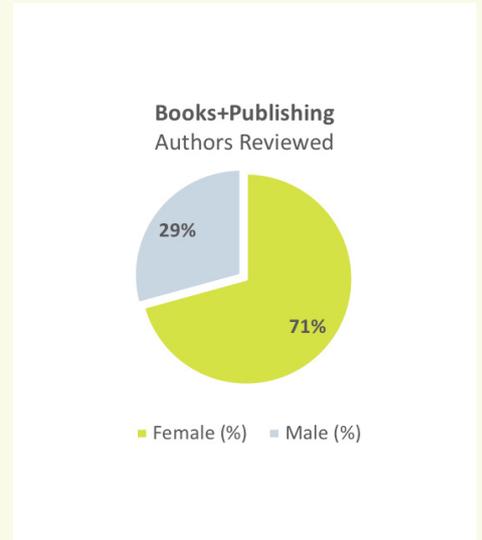
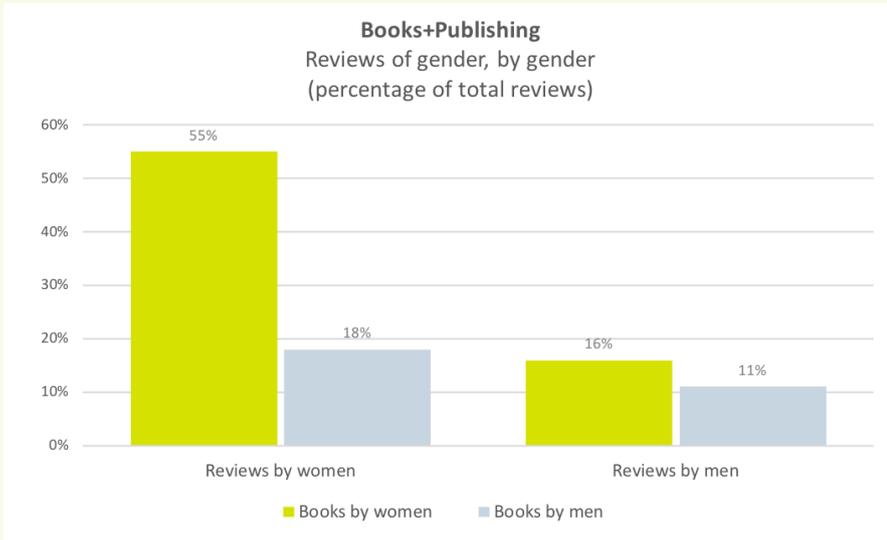
Australian Book Review



Australian Financial Review

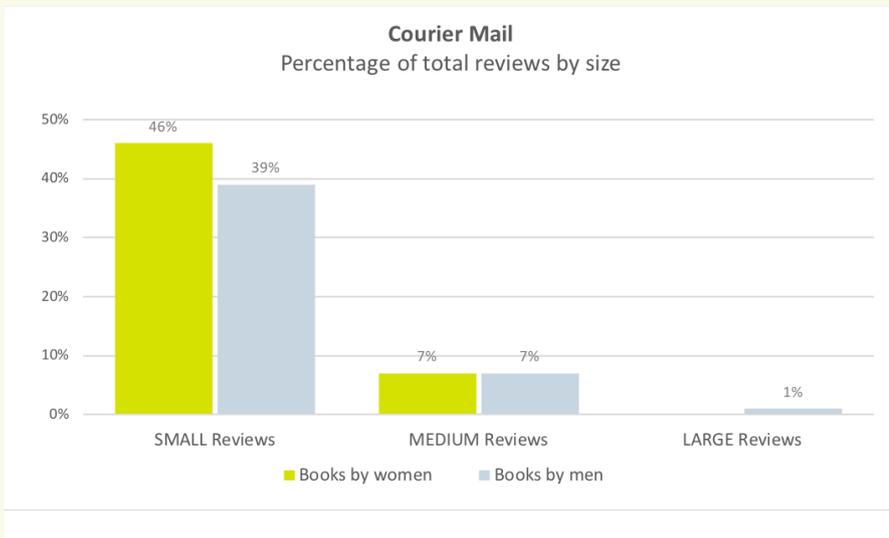
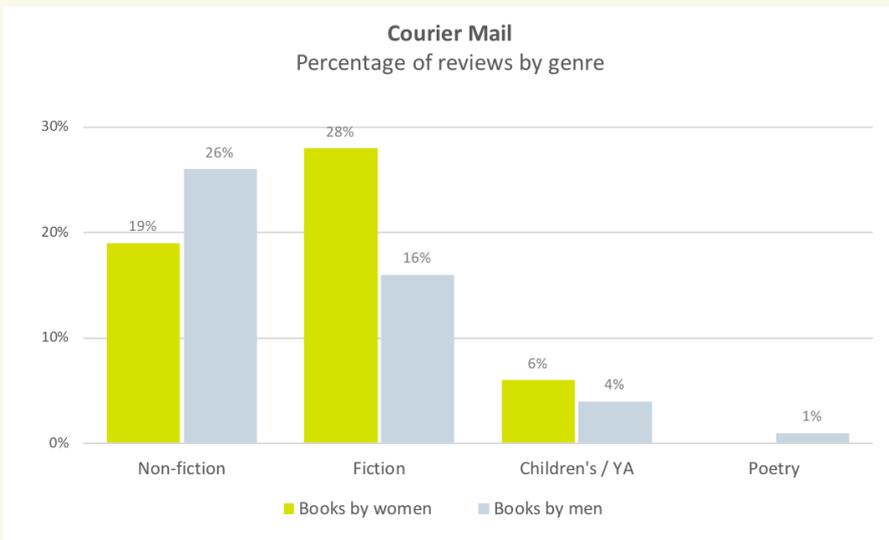
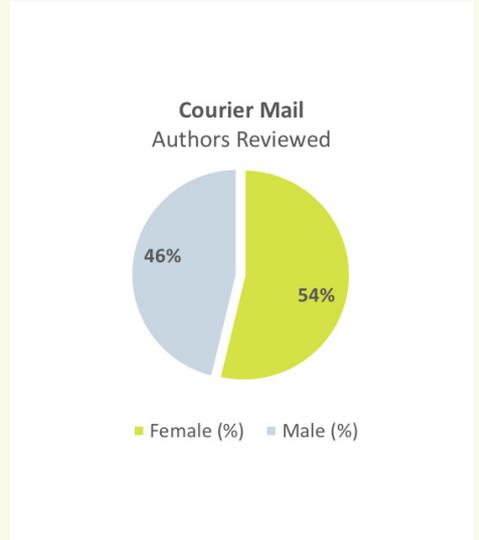
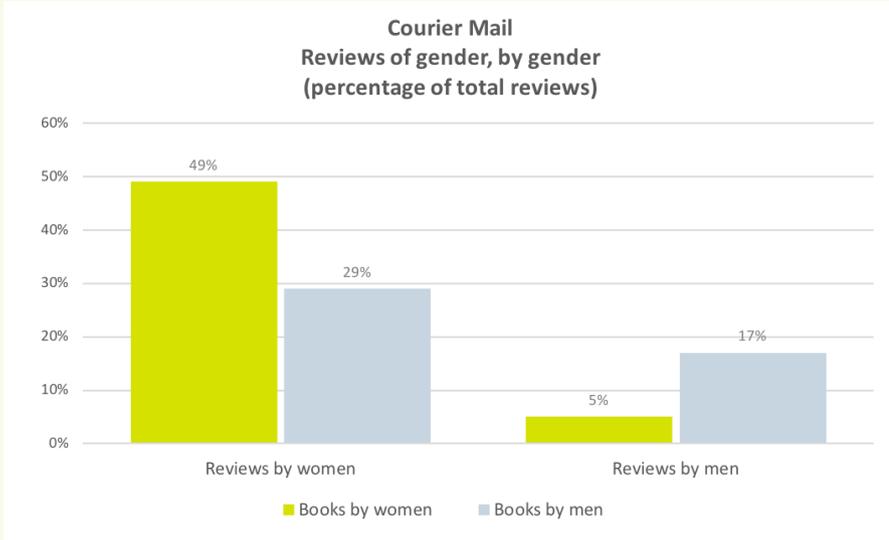


Books & Publishing

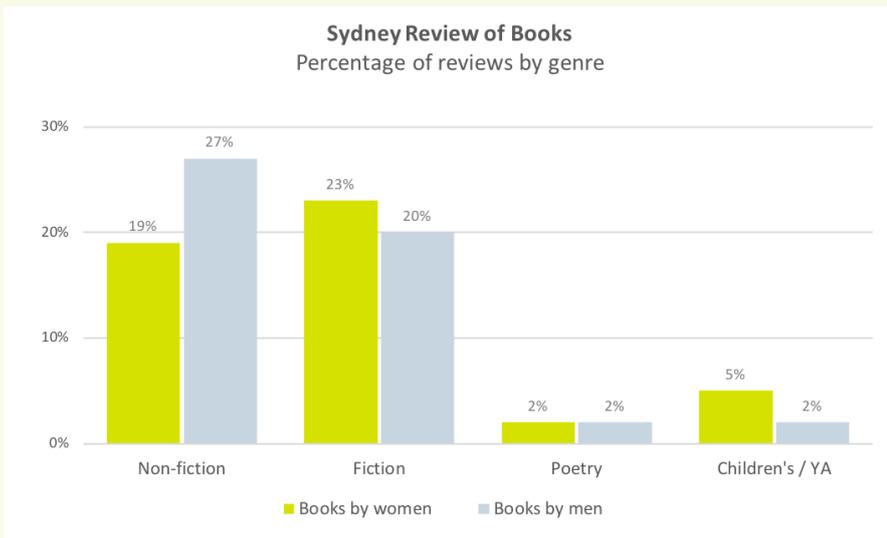
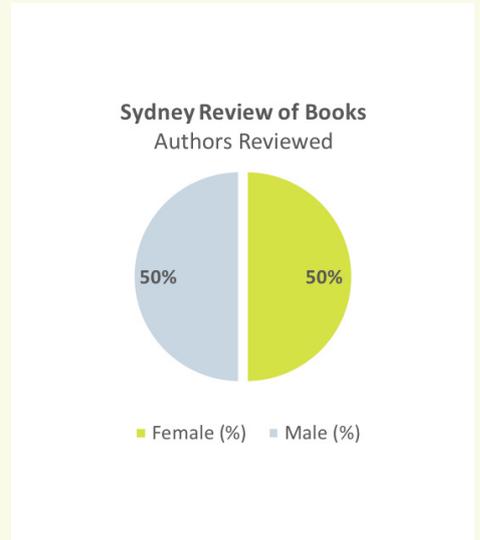


All reviews published by Books+Publishing are classified as 'small', so no chart has been produced to track the size of the publication's reviews.

Courier Mail

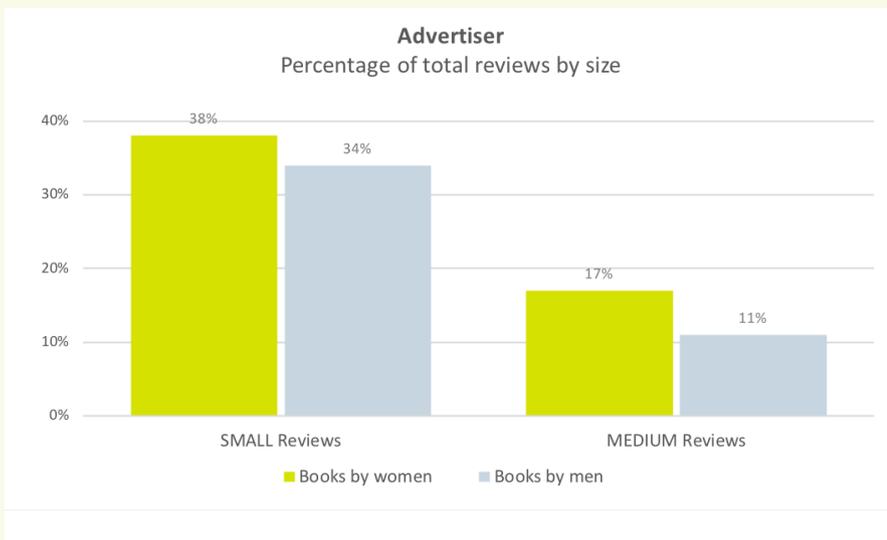
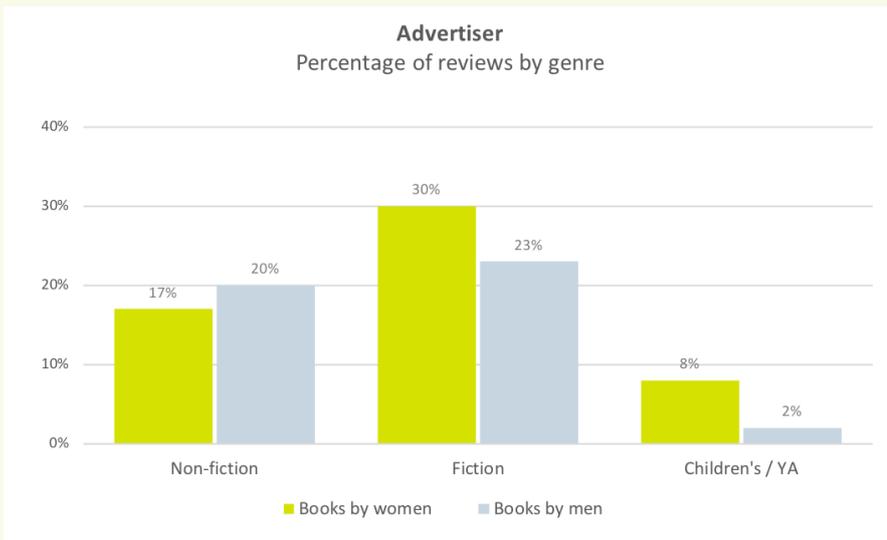
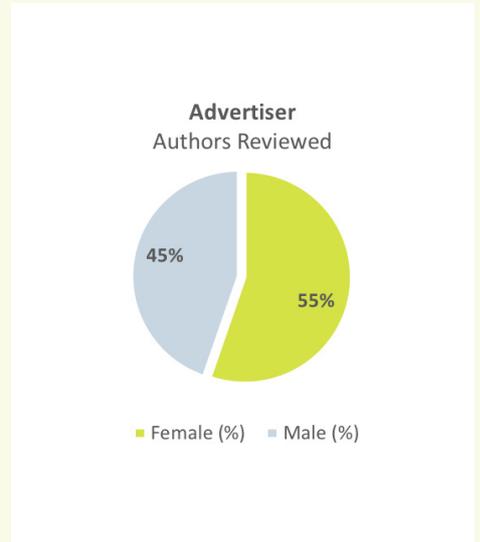


Sydney Review of Books

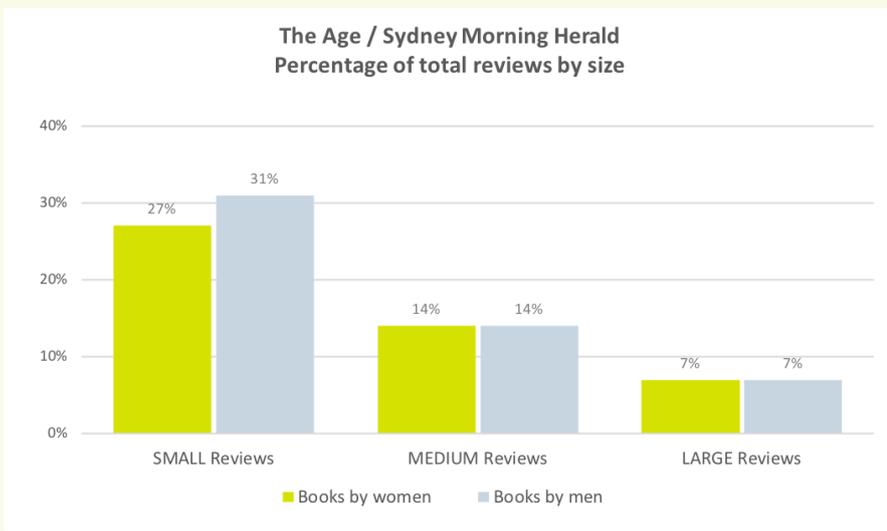
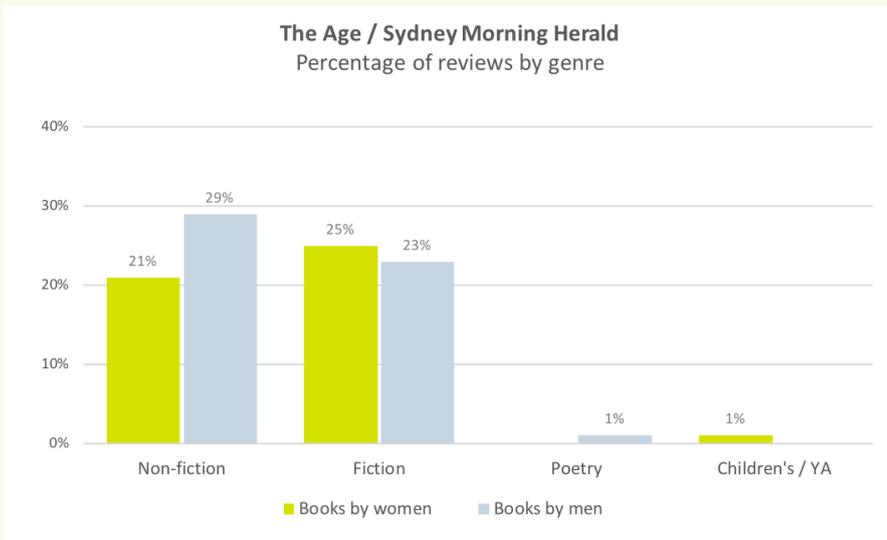
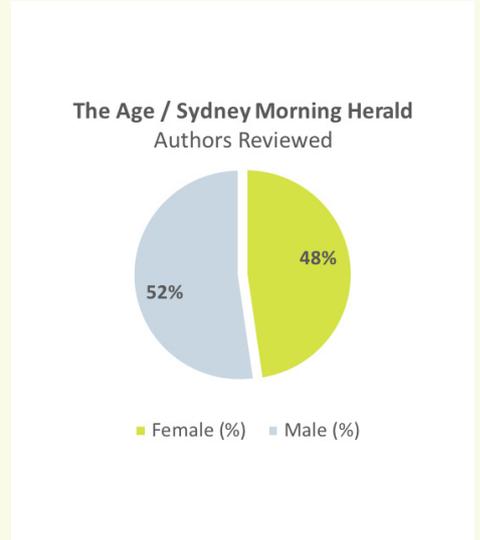
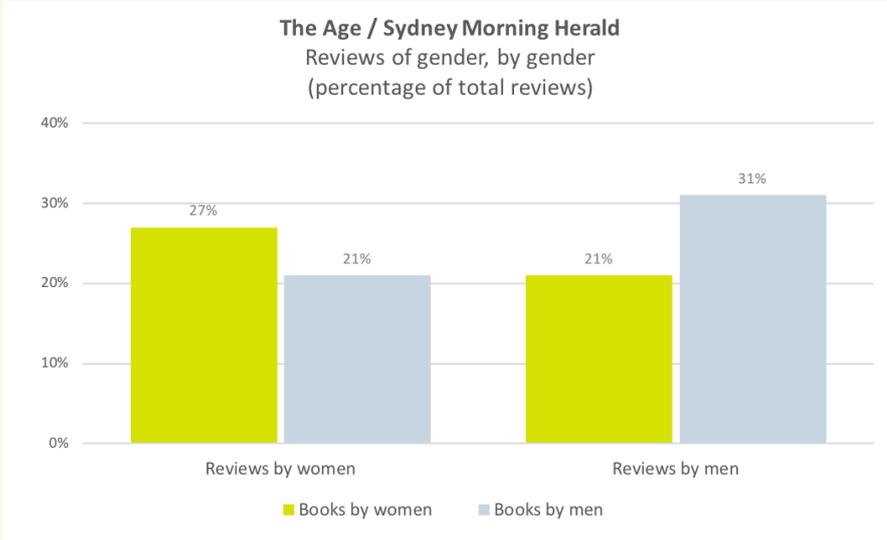


All reviews published by the Sydney Review of Books are classified as 'large', so no chart has been produced to track the size of the publication's reviews.

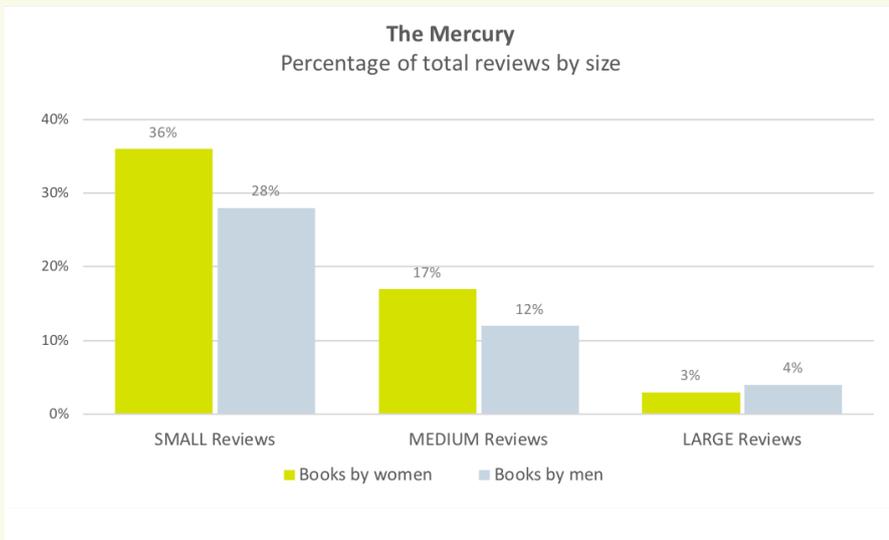
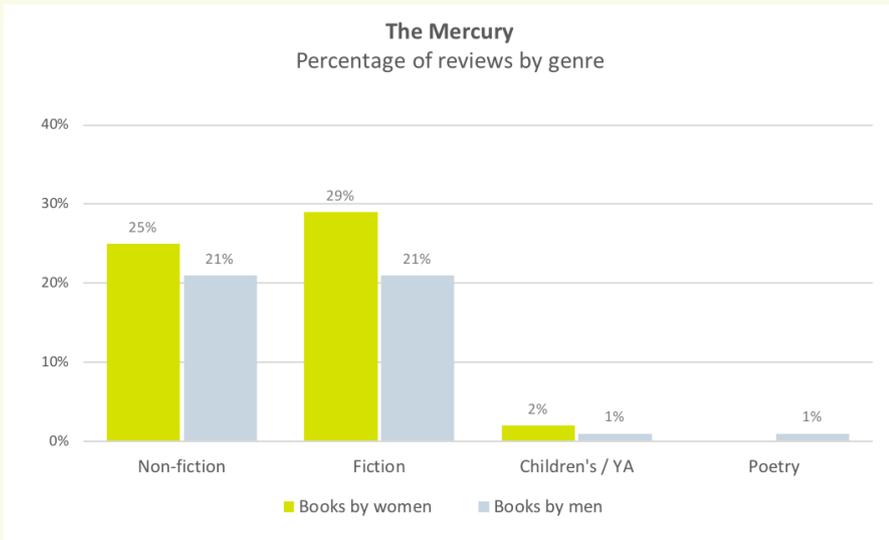
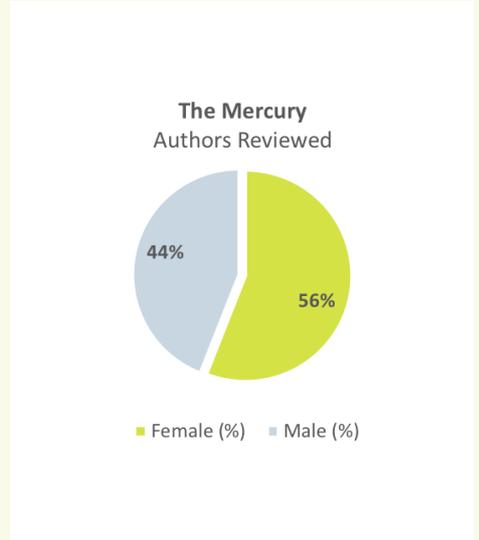
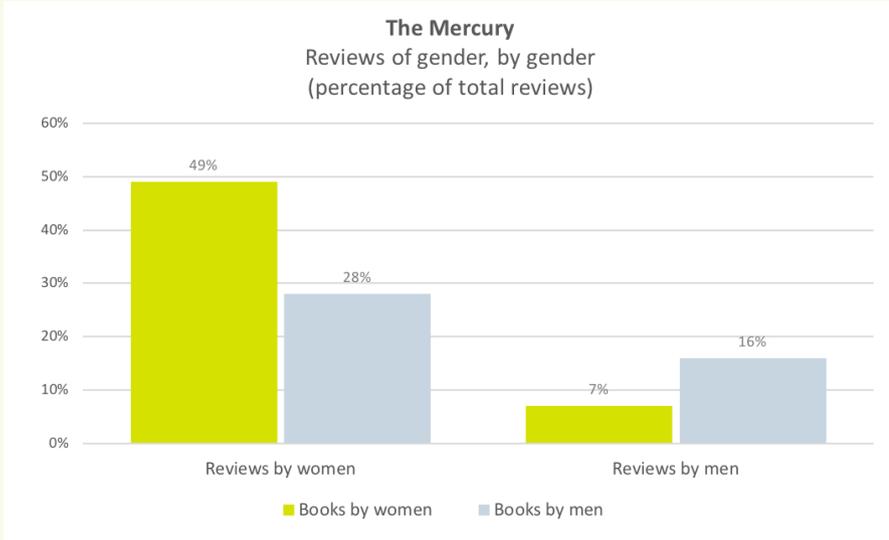
The Advertiser



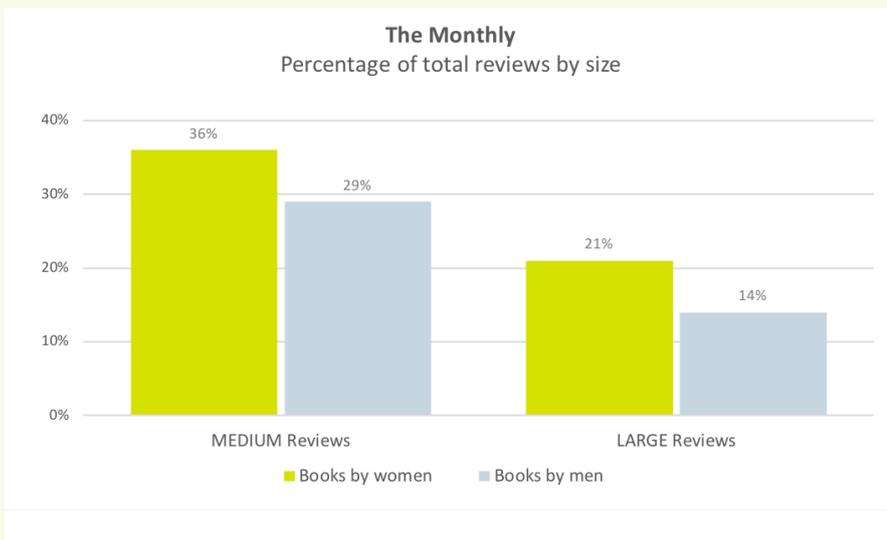
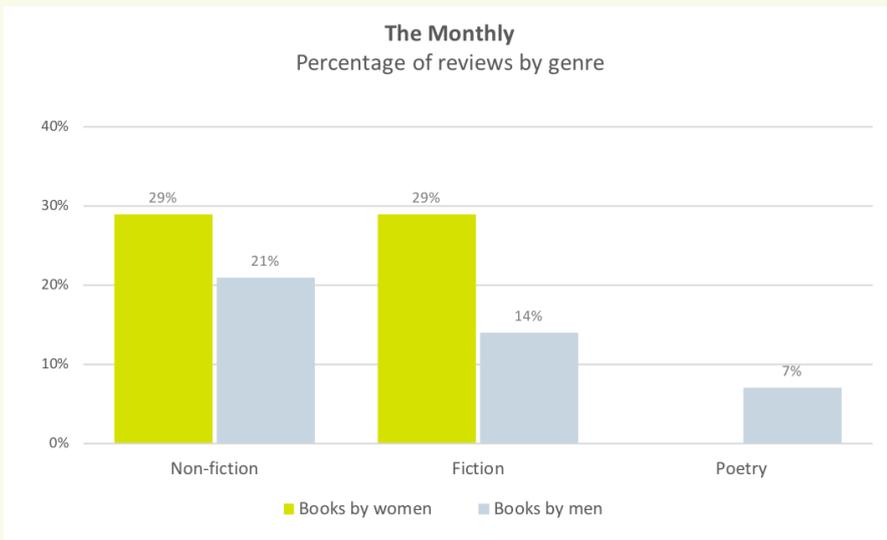
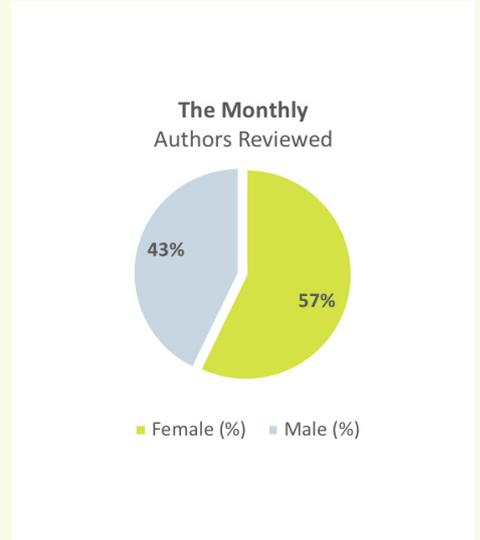
The Age/Sydney Morning Herald



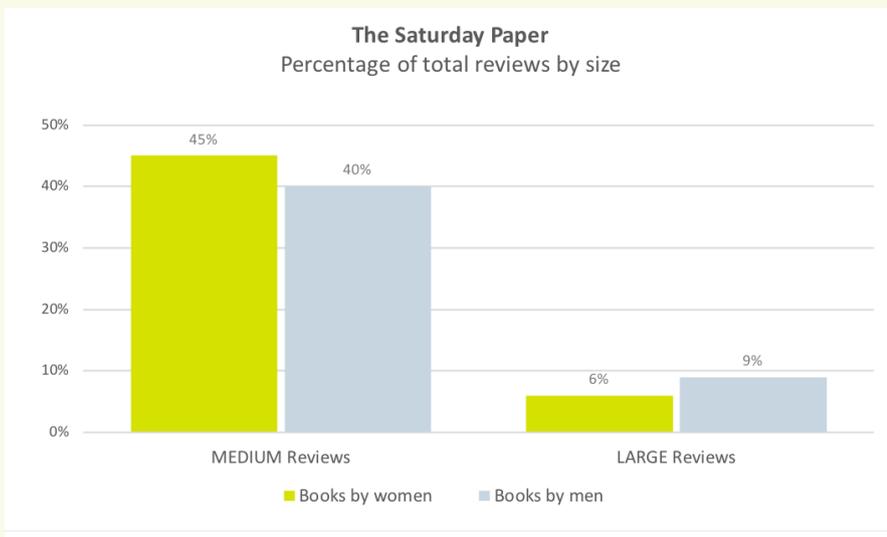
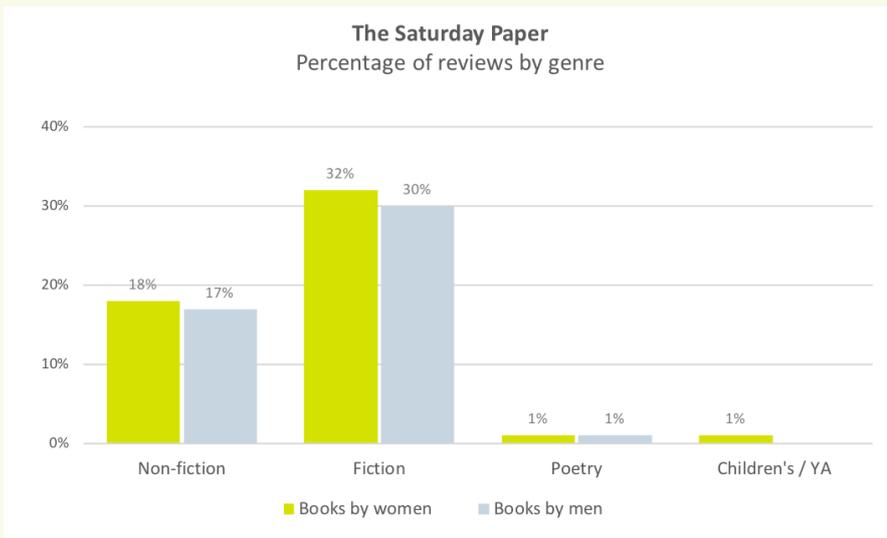
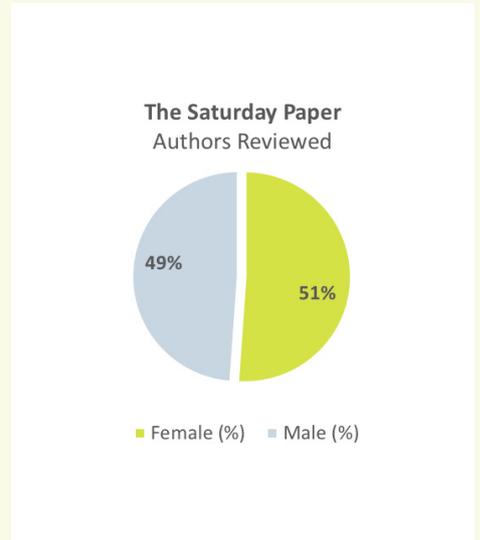
The Mercury



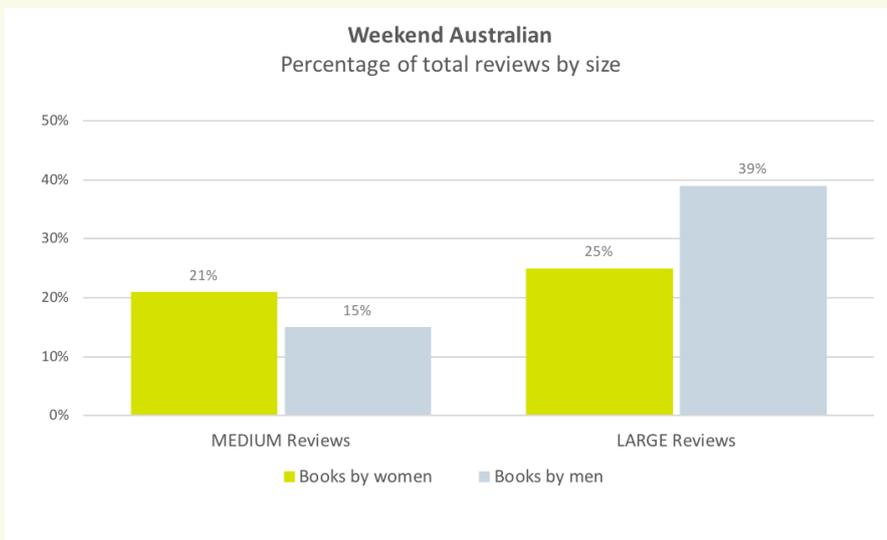
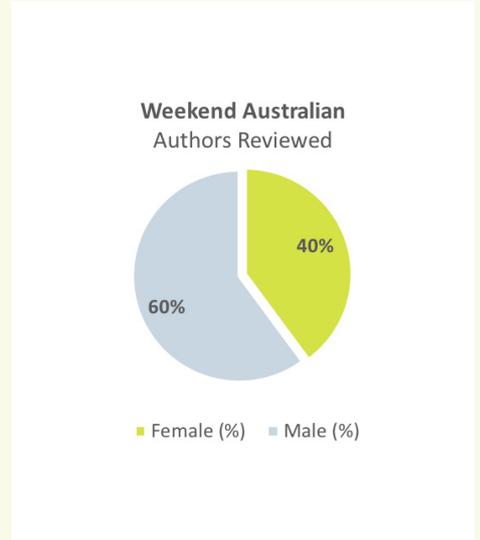
The Monthly



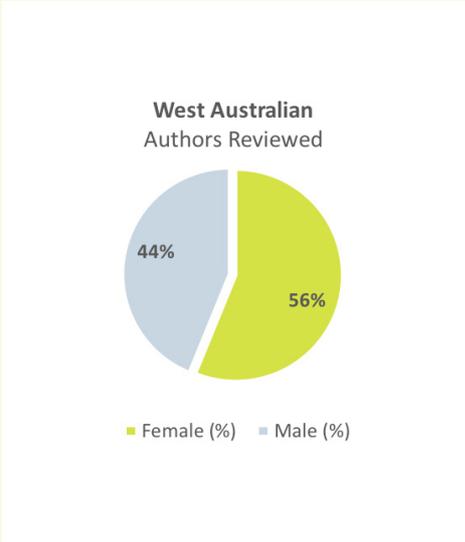
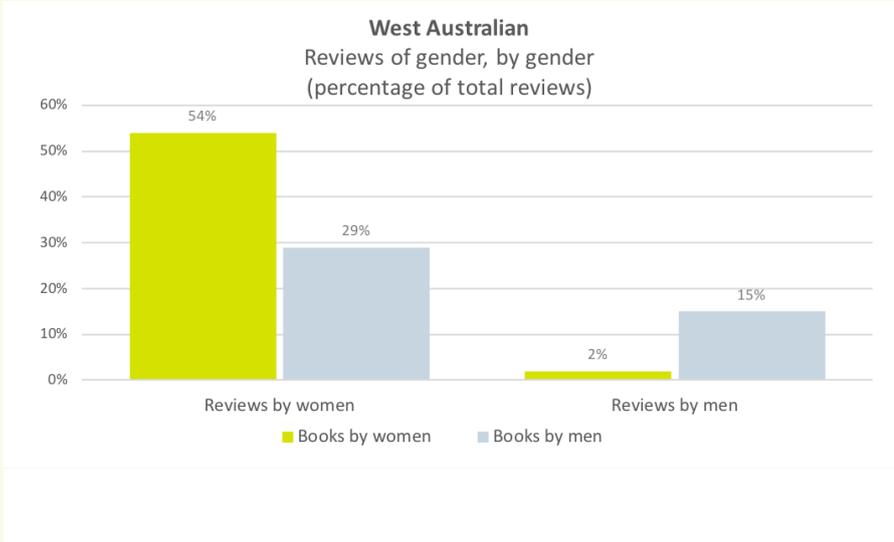
The Saturday Paper



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 approximately 3.8% 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.

