

CHAPTER 10

Gender issues

There is a long history of disadvantage experienced by women artists. Despite the substantial progress made in reducing gender-based discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere, there is considerable concern within the arts at the continuing difficulties faced by women in pursuing a professional career as an artist. In the reports of our previous surveys this concern was well documented (see especially Chapter 9 of Throsby & Thompson, 1994). In this report we update some of the data concerning the situation of women artists in Australia, in order to assess the current position on a more informed basis.

Demographics

As noted in Chapter 3, there are approximately equal numbers of males and females among Australian practising professional artists, although the gender distribution varies markedly between artistic occupations. Writers, visual artists, craft practitioners, and especially dancers and community cultural development workers are predominantly female, while actors, musicians and especially composers are predominantly male, as was shown in Table 7.

The main demographic characteristics of artists by gender are shown in Table 49. These data suggest that female artists are slightly younger on average than males, and that there are some slight differences in the family circumstances of males and females. However, apart from these minor aspects, there are no significant differences between the genders revealed by these data.

Table 49 Demographic characteristics of artists by gender

Age	Female (years)	Male (years)
Mean	44	47
Median	43	50
Family circumstances	(%)	(%)
Married/with partner, with dependants	26	32
Married/with partner, with no dependants	31	34
Single/widowed/divorced, with dependants	7	4
Single/widowed/divorced, with no dependants	35	30
Total	100	100
Geographic location	(%)	(%)
Urban: capital city	72	76
Urban: regional city	12	13
Semi-rural	12	7
Rural or remote	4	5
Total	100	100
Non-English speaking background (NESB)	(%)	(%)
Proportion from NESB	8	8
Living with disability	(%)	(%)
Proportion living with disability	10	11

Working conditions

If the careers of women in the arts are affected by factors associated with their gender, we could expect this to be reflected in their working conditions, their preferences and their attitudes. In this section we consider gender differences in the ways in which artists spend their time, how various obstacles may have held back their professional development, and what factors they consider most significant in advancing or inhibiting their progress as an artist.

Overall, the proportions of artists working less than full-time at creative or other arts-related work are exactly the same for males and females, as indicated in Table 50. Likewise, among those who are spending some of their working time outside the arts, there is little difference between male and female preferences for more, less or about the same amount of time at arts work. In other words, the great majority (around 80 per cent) would like to spend more time at arts work, regardless of whether they are male or female.

Furthermore, the factors that prevent these artists spending more time at their arts work are broadly similar across the genders. There is a slightly larger proportion of females than males who nominate domestic responsibilities and child care as an important preventative factor, but the difference is barely significant.

Table 50 Factors preventing artists spending more time at arts work by gender

	Female %	Male %
Artists working less than 100% of time on arts work(a)	41	41
Those who would prefer to work(b):		
more time at arts work	80	77
less time at arts work	1	4
about the same time at arts work	19	19
Total	100	100
Factors preventing more time at arts work(c):		
Work in that occupation not available	30	33
Insufficient income from arts work	63	62
Domestic responsibilities/childcare	18	15

(a) Proportions are of all artists in each category (female/male). (b) Proportions are of artists who are working less than 100% of time on arts work. (c) Proportions are of artists who would prefer to work more time at arts work; multiple responses permitted.

About half of all artists say they have had children under their care at some point in their career, as shown in Table 51, and among these there are equal numbers of males and females. However, a substantially larger proportion of females than of males believe that caring for children restricted their careers as an artists; a fact which doubtless reflects differences between the genders as to the amounts of time that having children under care absorbs in the daily or weekly routine. This latter observation is supported by the rest of the data in Table 51.

Of those artists who feel their career has been restricted by having to care for children, it is women more than men who point to lack of time or to the distraction from their work caused by the presence of children as being a restricting factor. It is men more than women who identify having to take on additional work in another field as being a significant child-related restricting factor preventing them working more as an artist.

Table 51 Restrictions on art practice due to caring for children

	Female %	Male %
Children under care at some point during career(a)	52	51
Children restricted work as an artist(b)	77	53
Nature of restriction(c):		
Need to undertake more work to support children	14	29
Ability or time to work	76	64
Ability to concentrate on work	15	10
Caring for children too energy consuming	31	25
Other restriction	12	10

(a) Proportions are of all artists.

(b) Proportions are of those artists with children under care at some point during career.

(c) Proportions are of those artists whose work was restricted by children; multiple responses permitted.

It is useful to look at the data on factors advancing or inhibiting the professional development of artists to see what, if any, gender differences arise. Table 52 shows the most important factors advancing the professional development of artists both throughout their careers and at the present time.

More males than females nominate their own talent as the most important factor advancing their professional development. More females than males nominate support from family, friends or a teacher. But the differences are not great, and are counterbalanced by other factors such as training or the availability of financial assistance, where little systematic difference between the genders appears to exist.

Table 52 Most important factor advancing professional development of artists by gender

	Proportion of artists nominating factor as most important in advancing their professional development(a):			
	Throughout career		At present time	
	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %
Training	21	18	13	14
Talent	29	33	23	29
Financial assistance or lucky break	6	6	9	8
Support from family/friends/teacher	17	13	13	9
Peer recognition	5	8	8	14
Opportunity to publish, perform, exhibit at a critical time	7	5	11	6

(a) Columns do not sum to 100 because not all enhancing factors are included in the table.

In the case of factors inhibiting professional development, as shown in Table 53, lack of work opportunities is the most important for male artists, reflecting the significance of this factor among musicians, composers, and actors where males predominate. It is lack of time for creative work that is the most important for female artists. This is a reflection partly of the child-care responsibilities borne by women discussed above, and partly of the more general domestic responsibilities that tend to be undertaken by females rather than males within families, and that therefore impinge more on their working time.

Table 53 Most important factor inhibiting professional development of artists by gender

	Proportion of artists nominating factor as most important in inhibiting their professional development(a):			
	Throughout career		At present time	
	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %
Lack of work opportunities	20	28	23	30
Lack of financial return from creative work	28	26	22	23
Lack of access to funding or other financial support	9	5	7	6
Lack of time for creative work due to other pressures and responsibilities	22	18	27	19
Difficulty accessing training, materials, markets, etc.(b)	7	7	9	6
Personal issues(c)	7	7	5	6
Gender discrimination	*	-	-	-

(a) Columns do not sum to 100 because not all inhibiting factors are included in the table.

(b) Includes difficulty accessing education, equipment, promotion.

(c) Includes lack of support from family and friends, living with disability, wrong temperament, insufficient talent, past peak as an artist.

* indicates less than 1%.

- indicates nil response in this sample.

It is noteworthy that gender discrimination is barely mentioned as a difficulty experienced by artists. Only 4 per cent of all artists in our survey mentioned experiencing gender discrimination during their career, and virtually no one (as seen in Table 53) nominated gender discrimination as the most important inhibiting factor at any time.

Financial circumstances

A critical test of disadvantage affecting women artists is in the incomes that they earn. Are the financial circumstances of female professional artists worse than those of men? Table 54 shows mean and median incomes earned by male and female artists in 2000-01.

The data in the table paint a very bleak picture. In all categories of income, women earn significantly less than men. Although their arts-related expenses and their minimum income needs are less than those of their male counterparts, these differences are nowhere near sufficient to offset the substantial income disparity.

Table 54 Mean and median incomes and expenses of artists by gender, 2000-01

	Female \$	Male \$
Mean income		
Creative income	13,100	21,500
Arts-related income	6,400	7,900
Total arts income	19,500	29,400
Non-arts income	9,200	15,600
Total income	28,700	45,000
Median income		
Creative income	4,500	9,400
Total arts income	12,000	20,000
Total income	23,600	35,000
Expenses related to art practice		
Mean	6,900	9,600
Median	3,800	4,500
Minimum after-tax income required to meet basic needs		
Mean	26,500	30,400
Median	25,000	26,000

Why are the earnings of female artists so much lower than those of males? There seems no plausible reason to suppose that women are less productive than men, if productivity is measured in terms of the amount of output produced (by writers, craft practitioners, visual artists, composers) or in terms of the amount of performance undertaken (by actors, dancers, and musicians) over a given period of working time.

A partial explanation lies in the concentration of women in the occupations of visual arts, crafts, dance and community cultural development work, all occupations where, as we have observed, incomes are lower. However, we have no independent test of whether these occupations earn less because they attract more females, or whether women earn less because they undertake these occupations; in other words, the direction of causation is indeterminate.

However, although both female and male artists spend on average about 60 per cent of their working time on creative work, women tend to work 10 per cent fewer hours per week overall. The data also show that a smaller percentage of women (37 per cent) have their work always or sometimes represented by an agent than do men (45 per cent). These factors would help to explain the lower female earnings.

Nevertheless, analysis of data from previous surveys shows that even after factors such as artform, amount of time worked, location, age and other possible influential factors are accounted for, there still remains a downward bias in women's earnings that cannot be explained.

Such a result is also found in other occupations. Notwithstanding progress towards gender equity in pay scales, and after allowing for part-time/full-time differences, women continue to earn less than men for what appears to be the same work. In addition, the distribution of incomes across individuals reveals, as would be expected, that females are clustered in the lower income ranges, and males are more strongly represented in the higher brackets. These results are summarised in Table 55.

Table 55 Artists earning less than \$10,000 and more than \$50,000 by gender, 2000-01

	Female %	Male %
Artists earning less than \$10,000 from:		
Creative work	56	43
All arts work	38	29
All work (arts and non-arts)	17	10
Artists earning more than \$50,000 from:		
Creative work	6	12
All arts work	7	19
All work (arts and non-arts)	13	32

There is one consolation in these results. A comparison with results from our 1993 survey suggests that the gap between male and female earning in the arts is narrowing a little over time. In 1992-93, mean female creative incomes were 52 per cent of male creative incomes, and the total arts incomes of females were 60 per cent of those of males. In 2000-01, these percentages had risen to 61 and 66 per cent respectively. However, the ratio of female to male total incomes (from all arts and non-arts work) has not changed (64 per cent) over the period covered.

Is there gender discrimination in access to financial assistance from federal, state or local government agencies, or from private foundations or other bodies? Table 56 shows that significantly more females than males applied for funding assistance between 1996 and 2001, from each of the funding sources identified; overall, the numbers of artists who were successful are similar between the genders, suggesting there is no bias in favour of men or women in accessing funds. Note that due to multiple applications/multiple successes, the data in Table 56 cannot be used to calculate success rates for individual applications to any single source.

Table 56 Access to financial assistance by gender

	Female %	Male %
Artists who applied for assistance between 1996–2001		
from one or more of the following(a):		
Australia Council	21	17
State/territory arts departments	22	17
Local government	13	7
Private foundation	10	6
Arts organisation, body or company	19	9
Did not apply for funding from any source	52	66
Applicants who received assistance between 1996–2001		
from one or more of the following(b):		
Australia Council	40	45
State/territory arts departments	64	58
Local government	60	54
Private foundation	46	55
Arts organisation, body or company	46	41
Did not receive funding from any source	38	39

(a) Proportions are of artists in each category (female/male).

(b) Proportions are of artists in each category who applied for assistance from each source. Note that because of possible multiple applications/multiple grants received, these data cannot be used as an indication of success rates for individual applications to any single source.