

Women and Research

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this issue

Where are the Female Academics on Film? **P.2**

Lessons From Writing Guest Presenters **P.5**

Lessons From a Graduated PhD Student **P.7**

Mission statement

To foster an active and inclusive research environment in order to enhance high quality research output



Welcome from Angela

Dear Fellow Researchers,

As the 2018 chair of the Women Researcher's Network (WRN), here at RMIT University, it was my great pleasure to host our October Symposium and End of Year Celebration.

WRN seeks to foster career advancement for women researchers through advocating for change in gender equity policy, practice and behavior, fostering a flourishing and supportive environment for women researchers and connecting the university to a wider community of practice in gender equity.

Our annual symposium is a chance for members to share their research interests and ideas, and explore collaborative research initiatives.

This year's event provided a cavalcade of amazing and inspiring presenters. I would like to present just one of the amazing guest presenters I was fortunate to hear on our day together (I plan to feature others in future issues).

Rebecca (Bec) Scott is a social entrepreneur, CEO and Co-Founder of STREAT. Bec suggested that disbelief can create anger and rage, but also awe and wonder. She believes it is these emotions that fuel our desire to see change and leads to discovery.

Bec suggested that the 'work in the cracks and margins' is what is needed to fix our broken world. Bec, and her partner Kate, are working hard at filling in those cracks and giving home and hope at the margins. They pushed out their first little food cart onto

Federation Square in 2010. And since then, they've built a business portfolio of eight businesses, served nearly 2 million customers and provided over 60,000 hours of training to over 900 young people. Check out the STREAT website [here](#).

Bec credits that for the youth they work with, of all the support they provide (things like vocational skills, improved mental health and wellbeing and assistance to find stable housing), of all those things, the most important is they provide a sense of belonging.

Bec also creates a sense of belonging in her audience when she presents. She is a skilled researcher and scientist, before founding STREAT she was at CSIRO. But I think one of her greatest skills is that she is a consummate people-person. Her social enterprise skills are grounded in her ability to collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds and situations. She can inspire with a story, cut to the heart of the matter and lives by the desire to scare herself everyday, otherwise she doesn't feel she is brave enough! Her story could be a blockbuster movie.

Speaking of movies, in this issue, Associate Professor Tom van Laer asks where are the female academics in film. I present some take outs from writing group guest presenters and recent PhD Graduate Dr Maja Golf Papež, offers insights from her studies.

Warm regards,

Angela

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Previous Issues

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Where are the Female Academics on Film?

by Associate Professor Tom van Laer



Associate Professor
Tom van Laer

Female academics have barely appeared as rounded characters in movies

The 2016 science-fiction drama *Arrival*, starring Amy Adams as linguistics professor Dr Louise Banks, was a ceiling-shattering moment for female academics. The film, directed by Denis Villeneuve, presented Adams' character in a race against time to avert a war by finding a way to communicate with extraterrestrial visitors.

Banks' character was groundbreaking because for decades, men have been portrayed as brilliant, heroic academics in American and British films. Movies such as *A Beautiful Mind*, *The Imitation Game*, *The Theory of Everything*, *Good Will Hunting* and *Wonder Boys* are not only all set at a university or in research institutes - and mostly excellent works of art - but are also all dramas of academic masculinity.

In these movies, women are extras who exist only to offer comfort, help, love, lust and support to the great man until they are assaulted, dumped or divorced.

Women make up 49.3% of academia in America, 45.7% in Britain and 45.6% in Australia. Yet female academics have barely appeared as rounded characters in movies.

I still remember my joy and shock at watching Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*, five years ago, in which Sandra Bullock plays Dr Ryan Stone, a medical engineer who is stranded in space after the mid-orbit destruction of her space shuttle. Here was a blockbuster movie starring a complex, female academic character. Yet *Gravity* was not the breakthrough for which I had hoped. A single momentous work cannot, by itself, change things.

The absence of these characters in mainstream film matters, because most women in academia must still fight to tell their own stories and fight against the stories that distort or erase them. And on the rare occasions when women have appeared as academics in Hollywood films, their

depictions have often been awful.

The most notorious examples are characters such as the naive paleontologist, Dr Sarah Harding (Julianne Moore) in *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, or worse, the talented PhD student Hannah Green (Katie Holmes) in *Wonder Boys*, who lusts after her male supervisor.

While Dr Harding is ostensibly an intelligent academic, in *The Lost World* she more accurately serves as a damsel-in-distress. Ironically, it is Dr Harding's supposed intelligence that puts her in distress in the first place. (Bring the baby *Tyrannosaurus rex* aboard the mobile home? Sure mommy, the nine-ton predator will never smell a baby or hear its cries in there!) When Dr Harding's scientific shortsightedness leads to trouble, she proves she can wail on par with any princess in jeopardy.

The *Wonder Boys'* Hannah Green is the ideal student for hyper-masculine academics. She is beautiful, brilliant, and innocent. She lives for her studies. And she has a crush on her male professor. Moon-eyed, she gushes:

I was thinking it's like all your sentences seem as if they've always existed, waiting around up there, in Style Heaven, or wherever, for you to fetch them down.

In short, she is the perfect muse.

Women wince at these unrealistic portrayals. They hurt because many viewers will take these stereotyped depictions and transfer them to any female academic they later encounter.

The brilliant women who deserve movies

One solution to all this is to change how and what stories are told. So here are my picks of women with brilliant minds who deserve blockbuster movies of their own.

- ❖ Hypatia, the Egyptian astronomer who built an astrolabe, the first instrument for calculating the position of the sun, moon, and stars at any given time. She taught astronomy and philosophy in ancient Alexandria and her classes were always popular. Students and other scholars would crowd in to hear her explain that you must reserve your right to think - for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all.
- ❖ Maria Reiche, the 20th century German archaeologist who found that hundreds of mysterious lines etched into the dry Peruvian desert, called Nazca Lines, actually correspond to the constellations in the night sky. She flew helicopters and planes to map the lines and used so many brooms to clean them that some people thought she was a witch.
- ❖ Ada Lovelace, the British mathematician who in 1843 wrote the first computer program in history, way before modern computers were invented!
- ❖ Grace Hopper, the American computer scientist. Thanks to the programs she wrote for the first computer, called Mark I, US forces were able to determine how to detonate atomic bombs.
- ❖ Marie Curie, the scientist who found out that some minerals are radioactive, give off powerful rays and glow in the dark. Born in Poland in 1867, she moved to France to study. She discovered two new radioactive elements - polonium and radium - and won two Nobel prizes for her work. She died in France in 1934 due to exposure to radiation.
- ❖ Jane Goodall, the British primatologist who has discovered that chimpanzees have rituals and use tools, that their language comprises at least 20 different sounds, and that they are omnivores.
- ❖ Maria Montessori, an Italian physician and educator who lived from 1870 to 1952. Instead of applying old teaching methods, she watched children to see

how they learnt. Her innovative teaching method is applied in thousands of schools and it helps children all over the world grow independent and self-sufficient.

- ❖ Mae C. Jemison, the first African-American woman in space. She graduated in African-American studies, chemical engineering, and medicine and learnt to speak Japanese, Russian, and Swahili. After becoming a doctor and volunteering in Cambodia and Sierra Leone, she then applied to NASA to become an astronaut. Dr Jemison was selected and sent into space on board the space shuttle. She carried out tests on other members of the crew. Since she was not only an astronaut but also a doctor, her mission was to conduct experiments on weightlessness and motion sickness. When Dr Jemison came back to Earth, she realised that her true passion was improving health in Africa. So, she quit NASA and now runs a company that uses satellites to do just that.

Signs of progress

Filmmakers continue to produce movies with male actors (The Martian), with academic characters played by male actors (Doctor Strange) and with research institutes led by men (Interstellar).

Nevertheless, the developments since Arrival are encouraging. 2017 saw Hidden Figures, the movie about the three brilliant African-American women at NASA - Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe), and Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer) - who served as the brains behind one of the greatest operations in history: the launch of astronaut John Glenn (Glen Powell) into orbit. It was a stunning achievement that restored the US's confidence, turned around the Space Race, and galvanised the world.

And this year, Annihilation was launched. Based on Jeff VanderMeer's bestselling Southern Reach Trilogy, the movie stars

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One solution is to change how and what stories are told

If Gravity chipped the ceiling for female academics; Arrival appears to have finally smashed it

Natalie Portman (as a cellular biologist), Jennifer Jason Leigh (as a psychologist), Tuva Novotny (as an anthropologist), Tessa Thompson (as a physicist), and Gina Rodriguez (as a paramedic). If Gravity chipped the ceiling for female academics; Arrival appears to have finally smashed it.

If Arrival does succeed in transforming how filmmakers perceive and represent women and female academics, it is due not only to this one movie being good and profitable, but also to the long, slow work by female and male actors, agents, directors, producers, researchers, writers and others that has gone before it. For decades, people have been researching gender representation in media and advocating for equal representation of women.

Still, Arrival should really have been just a science-fiction drama about a linguistics professor, who happens to be female, leading an elite team of investigators. Yet, with so few movies about female professors, or female

humanities scholars, or female lead investigators, or female academics in general, it became highly symbolic.

The real test of how far things have progressed will be when a female academic has the luxury of being the star of a bad movie. That is one measure of equality - the right to be bad and not suffer for it, rather than the demand, placed on female academics and actresses, to be exceptional just to be seen.

This article was updated to reinstate 'blockbuster' in its discussion of women who should have films made about them. This was inadvertently removed during editing.

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*"We're not hibernating this year.
Too much cultural change to keep up with."*

What I've Learned From Guest Presenters About Writing

by Associate Professor Angela R. Dobeles

For the last few years, I've been organising writing boot camps. For two or three days, a small group of us leave our campus and write all morning and most of the afternoon. Each day concludes with a guest speaker. During a recent office clear out (where did all this clutter come from!) I came across the notes I had made from those guest presenters. Here are my take outs.

General points from guest speakers on writing

1. Common mistakes in writing are that the material is presented adequately, but the message is unclear. What's the overall purpose and why is that something the reader should care about? The paper is technically detailed and brilliant, but you need to hone in on the argument.
2. Don't make the results section too long. You want it punchy enough to get the message across. It is the discussion section that is the most important. That's where you make your mark.
3. What makes an A* or Q1 paper? It's not just the introduction, literature review, methodology, result and discussions. Sometimes it's not even a conclusion. A top article is more than the sum of these parts. What's the message? You should know the message before you start writing.
4. If you are publishing from a thesis, put the thesis aside when writing the journal paper. Use the thesis only as a data source, not for the writing. Ditto if you are trying to recraft a rejected manuscript to another journal, put it aside and start afresh, with the target journal in mind.
5. Think about your headings very carefully. Great headings are shorter rather than longer, make the value of the section clear, focus on the who and grab attention. Headings are signposts for your reader, so make them good ones.
6. Your primary goal, for everything you

write, is clarity. Clarity of structure and expression, clarity in your argument (it's the purpose after all) and value of what you've done. Be concise and precise.

7. Start writing your paper earlier than you think you should. You will not know if you have enough to write until you write it down. Then you can be specific about filling in the holes.

Tips on Journals

1. Select your target journal up front. Know this ahead of time. The presentation of your paper can be sorted out towards the end, but you should know the direction (related to your target journal) going into the writing.
2. Ultimately, journal editors want to offer new material. The literature you review must be the jumping off point. Not the be all and end all of your paper.
3. Use the language of the journal.
4. Regardless of the journal, editors all want a clear message, proof or argument, new knowledge or contributions and theory as a foundation.

Tips on the endings

1. So what? You need to tell the audience the so what message. You have given them all this well-written information, but so what? It's not enough to say that scholars and practitioners can use it. Show them why it is relevant. And build that relevance through the whole piece, don't just tack it on to the end.

Tips on the peer review

1. Get your ideas out there amongst trusted colleagues early and often.
2. It's great quality control. Your research has to show something, are you advancing the field, informing future research, confirming or disproving a finding? If so, get it read by your peers

An overarching key for good writing: think clarity

Clarity of purpose
Clarity of structure
Clarity in word choice

Endings are critical

It's your chance to tell your readers the 'so what' of your work

It's important to enjoy your writing

Writing is at the crux of our jobs

to make sure your writing is achieving your paper's purpose.

3. Be aware that peer review is a human process, and there are disadvantages to that. The reviewer may not approve or accept your new idea, the line between 'crackpot' and 'brilliant' could be blurry. Don't let one bad review put you off. If you believe in your work, keep pushing to make it better and go to another friendly reviewer.

Tips on journal responses

1. Accept without revision: wow! Congratulations! This almost never happens so shout it from rooftops, bask in glory, smug walk for a week and then figure out what you did so you can replicate it (and please tell me).
2. Accept with minor revisions: Here you are being asked to make changes, but the paper's acceptance isn't conditional on you making them. Ask yourself if they will improve the paper?
3. Accept on condition of minor revisions: you are being told they want your paper, but you have to attend to what they want you to rewrite or change first. So take this opportunity to move your paper to an acceptance.
4. Major revisions required: some significant changes are being requested. Make the changes and your paper starts over in the review process, but perhaps

the better for the revisions and with perhaps a better shot of moving towards acceptance.

5. Desk rejections: look on the bright side, these are usually fast. Was the problem a poorly targeted journal? Identify why the paper was rejected and learn from this, for example, do you need to improve your scoping or writing skills? Then, pull yourself up by the bootstraps, recraft your paper as needed and get it back out there and under consideration somewhere else.
6. Rejected after reviews: ok, deep breath. Wait a few days and then work through the reasons for the rejection. Work through each one and take what you can. Improve the paper and then get it back out for review s quickly as you can.

And at the end of all this, enjoy your writing. We have a very unique job where writing is the crux. There's something very wonderful about writing up the results of research or signposting new ways of thought or practice that I love.

The writing retreats I run conclude with a notion I borrowed from science fiction, fantasy author Jane Yolen: we need to exercise our writing muscle every day, (academic) writers are like dancers, like athletes. Without the exercise, the muscles seize up.

Happy writing. :-)



"We need someone with an overview of the situation."

Five Lessons From a Freshly Graduated PhD Student

by Dr Maja Golf-Papež

A week ago, I successfully defended my PhD. As a lifelong learner I could not pass up the opportunity to reflect on some of the things I have learnt along the way.

1. Hard work is rewarded

With more hard work. Most of my life I thought that the key to success was to push myself beyond my capacities.

I was the first to arrive in the office and the last to leave. I took my work to bed, to social gatherings and to holidays to the Cook Islands. And I got weird satisfaction from meeting impossible demands or deadlines.

While I was going the extra mile in the hope of working less, I soon realised that the reward for my hard work was the opportunity to do more work. The more I read, the longer my reading list became. The more exams I marked for the faculty, the more marking requests I got. The more committed a tutor/teacher I was, the heavier my teaching load became. While these opportunities helped me to become a well-rounded scholar, they also forced me to introduce into my vocabulary a previously rarely used word: NO.

I figured out that if I want to complete my PhD (and keep my husband) I could not say yes to every opportunity that came my way. I learnt the hard way that if I did not prioritise my (PhD) life, someone else would. I realised that it is not about working hard and getting more things done, it is about working smart and getting the right things done.

2. Procrastination is just fine

When I was not working hard or smart, I was procrastinating. Never in my life have I been such a productive procrastinator.

I organised my pantry in alphabetical order. I sorted out my sock drawer. I searched for an explanation for the missing socks on Google Scholar. I started paying attention to

American politics. And of course, I made a thorough review of the literature on procrastinating and task management software. I procrastinated when I had a lot to do, simply because I felt overwhelmed and did not know where to bite. And I procrastinated when I had very little to do, because “hey, it is not a lot to do, I can do it tomorrow”. I felt extremely guilty. A failure.

However, with time I realised that some procrastination is just fine and that some time wasted is actually time invested. During my procrastination endeavours I did many tasks that would have to be done anyway and some of my best ideas came when my mind wandered away from where it ‘should’ be.

Looking back, I do not feel sorry for all the time I procrastinated - after all, how would I otherwise know that an average person loses more than 15 socks per year and that people who enjoy washing lose fewer socks (Tamblyn, 2010). Mind-blowing, right?

3. Feeling stupid is part and parcel of being a student/academic

I started my PhD in the hope that I would become smarter. What I did not know is that in order to become smarter I would first need to feel stupid on a regular basis.

Reading difficult papers, being surrounded by highly intelligent people, discovering the undiscovered, and taking hours to write one sentence made me feel dumb. That this might actually be the case was also raised by the reviewer(s) number two who kindly highlighted my obvious misunderstandings and flaws in thinking. With time I got used to feeling stupid.

In fact, I realised that stupidity and beginner’s mind are necessary points on every journey to understanding. As Albert Einstein said: “If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn’t be called research”. I learnt that it is okay to feel stupid as long as it is by choice.

I learnt the hard way that if I did not prioritise my (PhD) life, someone else would



Dr Maja Golf-Papež

Never underestimate the power of small steps

The main thing the PhD experience taught me:

It really is not just about the destination...

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4. Some academics have it all together

But most of them, only on the outside. I have been in awe of other scholars who seem to be inspiring teachers, publishing several A* papers in a span of one year, getting massive grants, leading their own research labs, giving excellent media interviews, impressing with every Tweet and at the same time they managed to find the time to go to yoga, to make a home-made granola and to meet with friends over kombucha.

Witnessing their perfect lives makes you feel you are a mess. That perception does not always match reality became clear when other students started approaching me saying that they admire my ability to work on my PhD, teach, publish papers, have a husband, and take care of a newborn. I was called “a goddess of time-management” and “a super-human”.

A friend even drew a photo of “Planet Maja” with three inhabitants: a unicorn, sunshine, and rainbows. Well, let me get the story straight. My PhD journey has been way less magical than some expect. I have had my struggles. I sobbed. I cried. I overate. I pitied myself. I thought that I am just not cut out for it. There came a time when I was considering quitting my PhD and moving back to my mum’s flat.

Through these experiences, I learnt three things. First, everyone - including people who seem to have it all together - have their own struggles.

Second, do not compare yourself with others - someone’s else success does not diminish your success. Third, never underestimate the

power of small steps. Just show up and repeat to yourself that it always seems impossible until it is done.

5. It is more about the journey, than about the destination

In many ways, my PhD was an exercise in sustained suffering. When the long-awaited day of submission arrived, I did not feel a blooming thing. A couple of days after I started feeling empty and confused. As my viva approached, I experienced Stockholm syndrome, thinking of different plans to sabotage my viva and extend my PhD studies.

What was wrong with me? Instead of worrying about how to memorise for my oral defence what epistemology and ontology is, I was annoying myself and others with figuring out who I am now and who do I want to be.

I did not have the answer to these questions on the day of the viva but for sure this was one of the happiest days of my life. What a relief! Suddenly I felt 10kg lighter... unfortunately the reality once again did not match the perception.

After two days of floating on air, life just got back to normal. I realised that this whole PhD experience really was not just about the destination and that I seemed to have enjoyed the journey itself.

On this journey I learned a lot about my topic, but this cannot compare to what I have learned about myself.

PhD, so long and thanks for all the fish.

Associate Professor Angela R. Dobe is an academic research professional with a passion for word of mouth (wom) marketing, from traditional face-to-face through to social media and electronic wom. Her research interests extend to marketing education and education issues including academic workload and student performance.

Angela is an experienced quantitative and qualitative researcher who has published 50+ papers. In the field of wom, she has contributed to the understanding of the key drivers of positive wom and the organisational strategies that facilitate it. She is currently developing a framework to assist commercial marketers improve the effectiveness of blogs and micro-blogs: building on co-creation and collaboration to communicate with loyal and passionate community members.

In the field of education, Angela is currently working with Griffith University’s Professor Sharyn Rundle-Thiele to develop an understanding of the full impact of ERA and the differences in academic workload and performance on promotion.

Angela has developed strong links with industry with a commitment to bridging the relationship between practitioners and academia. Her current industry projects involve research into tourism, life insurance and blood donation.

