

Mentoring Women to Publish in Order to Thrive in the Academic Patriarchy

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Abstract

It is vital for women to publish their writing for tenure and promotion so that they are no longer underrepresented as senior scholars in academia. Furthermore, it is important that their radical and important ideas are published and not lost to history. For the 2022 Carolyn Wood Sherif Award talk, I focused on five topics: (1) publishing is vital for women in academia; (2) women may not feel entitled to write and publish; (3) women need to learn how to be invited to publish; (4) women may leave academia; and (5) feminist writing is political, radical, and important.

Keywords

academic publishing, feminist writing, feminist academic journals, women and publishing

I am honored to be the recipient of the 2022 Carolyn Wood Sherif Award of the Society for the Psychology of Women (Division 35) of the American Psychological Association (APA). I did not know Dr. Sherif personally, but I certainly knew of her as a feminist leader in scholarship, teaching, and mentorship; in their tribute [Shields and Signorella \(2014, p. 446\)](#) aptly described her as “the model of an ‘engaged scholar.’” The award coincided with the month of my retirement after 16 years as professor of women’s studies at San Diego State University, and before that, 23 years as professor of psychology at the University of Vermont. In those four decades, my own activism focused on mentoring women and members of other underrepresented groups in academia to write and publish. I had two reasons for this activism: I wanted women and other minority groups to survive in academia, where publishing is vital, and I wanted to ensure that their radical and important ideas were not lost to history.

I refer to “women” in this article because the vast majority of my undergraduate and graduate students in psychology and in women’s studies have been women, and many have also been feminists. The same was true for the overwhelming majority of authors, reviewers, guest editors, and editorial assistants for the journals I’ve edited, including *Women & Therapy* (for 12 years), *Journal of Lesbian Studies* (for 26 years), and *Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society* (for 11 years). More recently, a number of students and colleagues identified as gender non-binary or trans* and there were certainly male students and colleagues as well, so the points that follow are not just applicable to women. Still, women represent 75% of undergraduate and graduate students in psychology but only one-third of

full professors in academia; women psychologists publish less than men, are listed less often in the senior author position, are cited less often than men, and appear less often as authors in high-impact journals ([Odic & Wojcik, 2020](#)). My activism has focused on narrowing that gender gap.

In this article, I focus on five topics: (1) publishing is vital for women in academia; (2) women may not feel entitled to write and publish; (3) women need to learn how to be invited to publish; (4) women may leave academia; and (5) feminist writing is political, radical, and important.

Publishing Is Vital for Women in Academia

To a large extent, publications are valued as the only legitimate way that research is disseminated in academia. Receiving grant funding for research, conducting a study, presenting the results at a conference, writing up the results in the form of a thesis or unpublished report, and/or media coverage, are viewed as no more than preliminary stages. Research is not considered to have reached the gold standard until it’s been subjected to peer review and published. As I write this during the Covid-19 pandemic, the media, when describing a new research breakthrough, have become accustomed to adding that this has not yet been subjected to peer

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review. Similarly, academic settings increasingly prioritize publications over all else for tenure and promotion.

Clearly, many academics love research and writing. This is why release time for faculty members usually consists of time off from teaching or even from administrative duties. It's release time for the scholarship. We rarely release faculty from research so that they can teach more; in fact, increased teaching is often regarded as a kind of penalty for faculty who haven't published enough research. In her own Sherif Award publication, Yoder (2018) discussed the hierarchy in academia that prioritizes research over teaching, with men having more time to do research and women allocated more teaching.

However, academic psychologists spend most of their weekdays in the office working on tasks unrelated to research and writing. Their time is taken up with teaching, grading, and preparing for classes; advising undergraduate and graduate students; supervising student theses and dissertations; writing letters of recommendation; attending department and university meetings; interviewing job applicants; reviewing manuscripts submitted to academic journals; and answering phone calls and emails. What really matters for procurement of a tenure-track job, tenure, promotion, large grants, and even to some extent admission to graduate programs, are research articles in high-impact, peer-reviewed academic journals. That leaves evenings, weekends, holidays, and summers as times to work on research and writing. No other profession comes to mind where the major requirements necessary for job retention and promotion are mostly done outside of paid working hours.

The expectation of writing and publishing during evenings, weekends, summers, and holidays, of course, assumes that academics don't have young children, aging parents, or other family obligations. There are several books about the tension that women in academia experience between work and family life, such as *Mama, Ph.D.: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life* (Evans & Grant, 2008); *Professor Mommy: Finding Work-Family Balance in Academia* (Ghodsee & Connelly, 2014); *Academic Motherhood: How Faculty Manage Work and Family* (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012); and *Mothers in Academia* (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013). There are no corresponding books for fathers, and interestingly, the books for mothers seem to assume that fathers just aren't present to share the workload. In their book *Failing Families, Failing Science: Work-Family Conflict in Academic Science*, Ecklund and Lincoln (2016) recommended providing affordable childcare on campus. But childcare is not going to be available on holidays and weekends, or even probably during evenings and summers.

Over the years I have conducted numerous workshops with Ellen Cole, my first co-editor of *Women & Therapy*, entitled "Writing for Publication: Learn to Love Your Rejection Letters." Likewise, the editors of *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *Sex Roles*, *Feminism & Psychology*,

Women's Reproductive Health, and other journals usually conducted roundtables about publishing at the annual conferences of APA (as part of Division 35) and the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP).

When I give workshops for my students and junior faculty colleagues on how to publish, I focus a lot on finding time to write. I remind them that the urgent is rarely important, and the important is rarely urgent. All those urgent tasks—preparing for the next class, reading a report for the next meeting, buying groceries, sending a birthday card to a niece—are necessary, but we won't remember these tasks five years from now. Meanwhile, buried under all the papers on our desk might be a post-it note that says "write up dissertation for publication." It's not urgent because there is no deadline, but it's important. Somehow, we need to get away from all the so-called urgent items and ponder the important. One way to do that is to have a three-year plan to focus on writing and publishing. Another strategy is not to get hooked on department or institutional politics, which seem urgent at the time, create lots of negative emotions, and can take up lots of time. I urge workshop participants to ask themselves if the issue is one they are likely to remember five years from now; if not, I suggest that they avoid getting hooked.

I also recommend that women collaborate on research and writing. I have a theory that some people are starters and others are finishers. I happen to be a finisher—I like nothing better than seeing printouts of my research results, and, even more, reading pdfs of the page proofs of my articles. I don't like starting new projects—they just take up space on my desk. I dislike writing grant proposals because those describe the start of research. To me, they read like fiction about future scientific research ("science fiction," really). It's the final article about the research results that's fascinating—what the authors did, what they found, and what the implications are. Journal editors focus on the finished project, the end result. Luckily for me, a lot of people are starters, and I look for them when I collaborate on projects. And, of course, as an editor, I have the privilege of reading work that has been completed.

The fact that most highly cited academic journals are published in the U.S. and the U.K. can be a challenge for researchers in non-English speaking nations who want to publish in these journals (Moletsane et al., 2015). When authors who are not native English writers submit articles to my journals that are not well written, I suggest that they find a U.S. graduate student living in their country to edit the writing and serve as the second author. This has two benefits—the author does not need to pay for this task, and the student gets an academic publication, often with a leading author in that country.

Due to the increasing focus on feminist participatory research that involves members of community organizations in the research design and publishing process, authors and co-authors may not have prior publishing experience. In

two cases, when I was editing books that included feminist activists who had little time or experience for academic writing (*Feminist Foremothers in Women's Studies, Psychology and Mental Health*, Chesler et al., 1995; *Everyday Mutinies: Funding Lesbian Activism*, Gartrell & Rothblum, 2001), I asked if they wanted to co-author their article with a feminist graduate student. The student interviewed the activist, wrote up the article, and then sent it to the activist for her comments and edits.

There is a gender difference during the Covid-19 pandemic, with editors noticing that submissions by women decreased and those by men increased (Naqvi & Russell, 2020). The pandemic has highlighted the ways in which women do most of the childcare and other domestic labor. In addition, Berheide et al. (2022) found that faculty members who were women, people of color, or gender non-conforming spent more time engaged in emotional labor during the pandemic, such as helping students feel better about themselves or deal with stress, than did cisgender white male faculty. Thus, finding time to write and publish is an even bigger challenge for women faculty at the present time.

Women May Not Feel Entitled to Write and Publish

Women's self-doubts about writing may arise from disparaging comments by peers and mentors. As Ahmad (2020) wrote in the article "A survival guide for Black, Indigenous, and other women of color in academe," challenges to publishing happen well before an article or book is submitted for publication. She suggests that students find supportive "aunties" in order to survive the "vipers" who mock their early ideas or drafts as unscholarly.

By the time students enter graduate school in psychology, they have probably read many published research articles but have little experience in writing such articles themselves. For example, most of their class readings were selected by the instructor, and so I find that students are used to evaluating such readings without needing to summarize their content. Students then find it challenging to write a literature review with enough detail for readers to understand the sample, method, and results of prior studies. Also in my experience, student papers and classroom discussions often focus on critiquing assigned readings rather than emphasizing their contribution to new knowledge. Thus, when students are writing their own articles for publication, they worry about how their writing will be criticized by reviewers and editors, and this interferes with their productivity.

So how do students learn about academic writing and publishing? "Mainstream" academic psychologists often begin publishing in collaboration with their senior advisors. They may be funded by a professor's research grant or decide to focus their dissertation on a spin-off of a professor's research.

Their professors often are knowledgeable about the academic publishing process in their roles as reviewers, editorial board members, and editors, and model this process when they invite students as collaborators. In my experience, students and junior colleagues who want to focus their research on areas that are unrelated to those of their professors (such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and emerging topics, often of great interest to students who are members of under-represented groups) encounter a lack of mentoring on how to write and publish. They are going it alone.

My early research focused on academic procrastination (Beswick et al., 1988; Rothblum et al., 1986; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984) found a gender difference in self-reported reasons why students procrastinate about writing, with women more likely than men to report fear of negative evaluation from others, high levels of perfectionism, and low self-esteem, a cluster we called fear of failure. Consequently, when collaborating with someone who has evaluation anxiety, I write the first draft myself and then ask them to edit it—people who are self-critical about writing are often very good at improving other people's writing. Our research that followed high and low procrastinators as a deadline approached (Rothblum et al., 1986) found that low procrastinators experienced anxiety about the task early on, which motivated them to begin work on the task earlier. High procrastinators don't feel anxiety until very close to a deadline, often too close to have enough time for high-quality work. Consequently, I send out repeated reminders to keep high procrastinators aware of time passing.

Some psychology journals (such as *Psychology of Women Quarterly* and *Feminism & Psychology*) encourage senior scholars to co-review manuscripts with graduate students or junior colleagues, viewing this as an important learning tool for exposing new writers to the academic publishing process. I also urge graduate students to contact editors of academic journals, asking to be put on their guest reviewer list. There is no routine way for editors to learn about the scholarship of graduate students other than that of their own students (my first solo review as a graduate student was for *American Psychologist* because my dissertation advisor was an associate editor of that journal). The journal review process is important for three reasons. First, it is something students can list on their c.v. under editorial experience and doesn't take that long to do. Second, it often shows students just how mediocre most submitted research is and so my hope is that it will make them feel more empowered to submit their own work. And third, students are often in the vanguard of new topics, so they are just what editors are looking for. For many years, I knew that if I declined a request to review an article about lesbians, for example, it would probably be sent to another reviewer who was less familiar with the topic. (I remember a reviewer of a prestigious journal once began a review about lesbian mental health with the statement "while I am unfamiliar with, and uninterested in, lesbian studies..." and then proceeded to

write a four-page review!). In addition to the three academic journals I've edited, I have served on the editorial board of 17 journals. I've also served as guest reviewer for 121 additional academic journals, often many times. I enjoy being a reviewer—it's my way of thanking all the anonymous reviewers who paid careful attention to my own work over the years.

Scholars who want to focus on topics that are politically sensitive, traumatic, and/or of personal relevance may then have self-doubts about writing and publishing. Feminists have written extensively about the need to describe their own social position in their research, understanding that no research is value-free (c.f. [Davis & Khonach, 2020](#)). Among many examples, [Campbell \(2001\)](#) described the emotional difficulty in talking to survivors about rape, and [Wilson \(2009\)](#) wrote about being a Black, fat, and sexual minority woman conducting research on health promotion. Members of minority communities may expect that researchers are members of the group they are studying, to reduce the power difference between the researcher and the participants (c.f. [Kitzinger et al., 1996](#)). On the other hand, the academy may expect researchers to be "objective" and "impartial"; the term "me-search" (e.g., [Gardner et al., 2017](#)) has been used, often pejoratively, to describe researchers who are motivated by personal self-interest.

I tell students that in academia it's important to have thick skin—the skin of a grapefruit, I say, instead of the skin of a peach. I hold on to reviewers' comments and now have a slide show of some of their remarks, so I can point out to students the level of sexism, racism, homophobia, and fat phobia embedded in these comments. It is important that students are aware that everyone's scholarship gets rejected, even that of tenured professors.

Women Need to Learn How to Get Invited to Publish

I put a lot of focus in my publishing workshops on how to be invited to publish. Students and junior colleagues may be unaware that editors of academic journals and books are often in need of authors or certain kinds of topics. These editors need to know who is out there doing that kind of work. When I'm invited to review an article or book proposal that is outside my areas of expertise, I like to recommend someone else. It's great when I can recommend one of my students who are doing work in that field.

One way to connect with colleagues who are engaged in similar work is to join professional organizations, which usually have electronic newsletters that cover emerging issues in the field, and that also include calls for proposals for contributions to edited books or thematic journal issues. Student memberships are much less expensive than the cost of joining these organizations after one has a terminal degree, and there may be options for paying less for low-

income members. I also remind students that if they cannot find an organization that fits their scholarship well, that may indicate that it is also going to be difficult to publish articles in that area of scholarship. They may be better off trying to publish a book on that topic—academic book publishing companies are often more willing to take risks with new topics than academic journals. I also warn students of the many "predatory" journals that promise quick publication, do not send manuscripts out for review, and then charge large fees. APA publishes a handout on how to avoid predatory publishers (<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/04/predatory-publishers>), and a current list of predatory journals can be accessed via <https://beallslist.net/>.

I encourage students to email authors whose work they admire and to include a brief mention of their own scholarship. Most people who write academic books and articles rarely hear from readers. These authors may also then refer media and editors to the student if they themselves are booked up.

An important arena for being invited to publish is to submit proposals to academic conferences. The work involved in submitting a conference proposal is minimal, and conferences accept a much higher rate of submissions than academic journals. The conference topic does not have to be a major breakthrough. The most popular talks at conferences are often discussions or informal workshops. Students can propose topics such as being a queer person of color, moving to a new area with a same-sex partner, or isolation in academia, among others. Women are often not socialized to initiate social interactions, so I urge students to ask others to join them for coffee when they are at the conference. Many people are shy and would love to have some company during a conference. The worst that can happen is that they say that they already have plans for that time. I also tell students that, once the conference is over, they should email presenters whose talks they admired and send them a copy of their own work in progress. And I tell students that when they see a call for proposals for an upcoming conference, to email the conference organizers to see whether they need help with the reviewing process. Students should include a paragraph about their own background and interests, so that the proposals they receive for review are a good fit. This takes very little time and students can list it on their c.v. as a guest reviewer for a conference. I regularly urge my graduate students to do this and they are often accepted for this role.

It may appear from these examples that I'm asking students to engage in uncompensated labor. However, in my experience, these types of activities do often lead to publications, often with senior co-authors. I want to describe two events in my own life that began at conferences, involved little work, and yet had major implications for my scholarly career. Here is the first, which resulted in my first edited book as a graduate student. My graduate program in clinical psychology in the 1970s had only one woman core faculty

member and there were no women supervisors in my clinical internship program. The other women graduate students and interns became my mentors. In a similar vein, [Turner Kelly and Fries-Britt \(2022\)](#) have written about peer mentoring as an important avenue for Black women to succeed in the academy, even today. Five of us women interns submitted a proposal to a regional psychological association conference ([Rothblum et al., 1980](#)), each focusing on our own area of research and speculating on why women predominated in that area of mental health. For our discussant, we invited Violet Franks, an adjunct professor at my graduate program who taught the one course on women in therapy. Violet was the editor of a book series about women at Springer Publishing Company and invited me to co-edit a book with her based on our talks at that conference. In addition to chapters by my fellow interns, we invited other psychologists conducting mental health research on women, something that was quite rare at the time. Our resulting book, *The Stereotyping of Women: Its Effects on Mental Health*, came out in 1983.

Here is the second event, which resulted in my role as an academic journal editor while still in my twenties. During my post-doctoral fellowship, I attended a regional conference that had a writing workshop. As we introduced ourselves at the workshop, the half dozen or so women hesitantly mentioned what they hoped to write about. I suggested that we each write our article and I would contact the editor of the new journal *Women & Therapy* to see whether we could do a special issue. Everyone was taken aback. They had expected to find support with writing; publishing was not on anyone's radar (another example of women not feeling entitled to publish). It's a new journal, I added, and new journals are desperate for articles. That journal special issue eventually came out in print ([Haworth Editorial Submission, 1982](#), with seven co-editors) and as a result, the editor, Betts Collett, invited me to serve on the editorial board of *Women & Therapy*. At one point an author whose submitted manuscript had been rejected by Betts wrote to every member of the editorial board, complaining that the submission process had been unfair. I replied to the author, with a cc to Betts, that the peer review process was the only feminist part of academia, in the sense that academic peers were the major evaluators of submitted manuscripts. Betts had wanted to step down as editor and so invited me to succeed her. But Betts was also concerned that I was not a practicing clinician and asked me to find a co-editor; I invited Ellen Cole and we had a wonderful collaboration for many years.

Both of these activities were a lot of fun and also unrelated to my more "mainstream" research at the time. I find that my students often mention similar kinds of fun events, only loosely related to their own thesis or research, as the highlights of graduate school and the reason they decided to become professors. It is events such as these that illustrate the ways in which scholarship can be fun and exciting and

that connect them with peers and role models. These kinds of extracurricular activities only work when people have a bit of extra time to dig out from their usual menial tasks and focus on the larger picture. [Whitaker \(2021\)](#) refers to this as "precrastination"—completing tasks quickly and ahead of time.

In sum, the writing and publishing process is often viewed by students and junior colleagues as burdensome and rejecting, but it can be fun and easy. Academic publishing may be trivialized as simply a matter of "publish or perish," with no regard to the long-term impact of research and scholarship. Yet publications are vital for the transmission and permanent archiving of new knowledge. In a recent article about right-wing attacks on academic freedom, [Reichman \(2021\)](#) lists the freedom to do research and the publication of research results as a core pillar of academic freedom.

Women May Choose to Leave Academia

In an early article entitled "How to discriminate against women without really trying" (1979), Jo Freeman defined the "null environment" as one that is neither positive nor negative for students. She added that such an environment discriminates against women given the lack of support they received from family and friends outside academia. Thus, faculty who fail to support any students discriminate against women without really trying. More recently, [Cardel et al. \(2020\)](#) pointed out that a lack of mentoring is an obstacle to women's career development and that faculty without mentoring report less research productivity.

How do women manage the various roles necessary to obtain and maintain an academic position? This includes all the demands of paid labor (research and writing, teaching, advising, administration, etc.); uncompensated labor related to research, writing, and publishing (conference travel, networking with colleagues, journal reviewing, etc.); uncompensated labor unrelated to scholarly productivity (planning department functions and parties, being available for students in distress, etc.); and additional uncompensated domestic labor (childcare, housework). For some women, the solution to manage these conflicting tensions is to leave academia voluntarily.

When I was a graduate student in the 1970s, most of my male and female classmates from our research-focused program in clinical psychology received tenure-track job offers. But a few years later, many of the women had left academia voluntarily. I noticed the same phenomenon among my own women graduate students who had accepted academic positions. They perceived academia as unappealing and were not willing to make the personal sacrifices to succeed and get tenure. Around that time, I wrote about factors contributing to women voluntarily resigning from academic positions in psychology ([Rothblum, 1988](#)). This included a range of institutional, interpersonal, and psychological factors, such as women's primary responsibility for

housework and childcare, greater demands on women faculty for student contact and support, and a hostile academic workplace. A more recent review by [Cardel et al. \(2020\)](#) still indicates that women in academia are rated as less competent, receive poorer teaching evaluations, are cited less often by scholars, are recipients of fewer federal grants, publish less, and earn lower salaries, than men.

The Covid pandemic has highlighted the pressures on women to combine work and family obligations. [Davis et al. \(2022\)](#) pointed out that women's academic productivity in the form of publications and grants fell off during Covid compared with that of men, so the risk of women leaving academia is greater. This is coupled with the fact that universities suffered tremendous financial losses during Covid due to closed dormitories and cancellations of meal plans, parking fees, and athletic tickets. As a result, the academic job market for tenure-track positions is even tighter now, with more temporary or adjunct teaching positions. In contrast, academic psychologists who leave academic jobs—or don't bother applying for them—may be desirable employees for a host of careers in mental health, public health, telehealth, epidemiology, computer science, and software development, all of which increased rapidly during the Covid pandemic.

Psychology has benefitted tremendously from feminist foremothers who managed to write and publish even when not occupying full-time academic jobs. Feminist clinicians such as Laura Brown ([Mena & Pittman, 2022](#)), [Nanette Gartrell \(2020\)](#), and [Marcia Hill \(2014\)](#), among many others, managed to combine clinical practice and social activism while publishing their work. They were early role models at a time when few women had tenure-track academic jobs.

Feminist Writing Is Political, Radical, and Important

In conclusion, it is important for women to publish. When something appears in print, generations will have access to that writing, long after our lifetime. Think of all the writings done by women in the form of private letters and diaries that were not published; we will never have access to them. I love the quote by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1881, cited in [Villard, 1920](#)) about her collaboration with Susan B. Anthony: “She supplied the facts and statistics, I the philosophy and rhetoric, and together we have made arguments that have stood unshaken by the storms of thirty long years.” I remind students that this work has lasted far longer than 30 years, and even longer than a century.

In particular, feminist scholarship has taken the field of psychology into important new directions. Qualitative methods have allowed researchers to probe more deeply into the lived experiences of respondents. Participatory research enables members of an organization or community to have more control over important questions. The

published results of such studies have upended existing paradigms.

It is increasingly difficult to destroy the published word. Thanks to the second wave of the women's movement, over 500 feminist and lesbian books and magazines appeared between 1968 and 1973 along with the opening of many women's bookstores ([Adams, 1998](#)). Although most of these publications and bookstores were short-lived, they in turn led to academic journals and books specifically about feminist topics. As Adams wrote (p. 136): “The Women in Print movement challenged the publishing establishment and, in the process, changed what counts as knowledge.”

With the rapid pace of advances in technology, it's hard to predict the future of academic publishing. Will there be an app that conducts statistical analyses and then automatically writes up the results for publication? Will voice-activated software obviate the need to teach reading and writing in school? Certainly, online trolls abuse and harass women authors, as well as other writers, who are not considered “mainstream” ([Jankovicz, 2022](#)).

Regardless of what the future brings, here are some givens, in my opinion. Women and members of other minority groups in academia often feel isolated and rarely receive recognition for breaking gender or other demographic barriers in their academic departments (c.f. [Cardel et al., 2020](#); [Mintz & Rothblum, 1997](#)). Related to that, it is important to feel angry and to write about injustice. It is important to take risks. Finally, it is important not to be silenced.

For feminists of younger cohorts than my own who may be feeling that much of what I have stated does not speak to their own experiences, take heart. If there is no published material available on the topics that interest you, you need to ensure that somehow your words get spoken or published even as institutions tell you that there is no audience interested in your topic. You need to take the most radical assumptions of my generation of women in academia and use them as your starting point for changing the very models, or paradigms, of our current thinking. The feminist revolution has a long way to go, and we're counting on you to get there.

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