



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY · AUSTRALIA



Australian Government

Australia
Council
for the Arts 

The Gender Pay Gap Among Australian Artists: Some preliminary findings

David Throsby, Katya Petetskaya and Sunny Y. Shin
Department of Economics, Macquarie University¹

© David Throsby, Katya Petetskaya and Sunny Y. Shin, November 2020

Throsby D, Petetskaya K and Shin S 2020, *The Gender Pay Gap Among Australian Artists: Some preliminary findings*, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts.

¹ We are grateful to the Research and Knowledge Management Team at the Australia Council for the Arts for their collaboration in the preparation of this paper.

Summary

As artists, Australian women continue to earn less than their male counterparts. In the most recent comprehensive national survey of professional artists' economic circumstances, which was undertaken in 2016-17, the total incomes of female artists were 25 percent less on average than for males, and women earned 30 percent less from their creative work. These differentials were greater than the workforce gender pay gap of 16 percent at that time.

This research aims to investigate the possible causes of the ongoing gender pay gap in the arts by isolating various factors that might account for women's lesser income. Drawing on data from the 2016-17 national survey of practising professional artists, *Making Art Work*, it explores variables such as education and training, experience, creative work hours, socio-demographics, and other factors affecting an artist's career. However, it appears that even after allowing for a range of differences between men and women artists, the gender pay gap remains virtually unchanged. We are therefore left with the conclusion that women artists across all artistic occupations are subject to forms of gender-related disadvantage that reflect discriminatory problems affecting women in society at large, and which may be more serious in the arts than in other areas.

This conclusion is given further weight when the results of this analysis are compared with income for female artists working within remote First Nations communities. In separate analyses using data from the National Survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists, we find that there are only minor differences between the genders in the levels of income earned by First Nations artists living in remote communities in the Central Desert (NT) and APY Lands (SA), and Arnhem Land (NT). It appears that the gender gap that affects incomes of most female artists in Australia is not evident in these contexts.

These results highlight the particularity of the social, cultural and economic conditions likely to affect the gender gap. Further research is needed to identify the sources of gender disadvantage within different contexts, and the impacts of such disadvantage on the careers and working circumstances of professional women artists. Our ongoing work will consider the impact of disability and cultural background on the relative incomes of male and female artists, and the different income relationships for First Nations artists living in different cultural contexts around Australia.

Introduction

The extensive engagement of women in the Australian arts has been well documented. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that women have higher rates of cultural participation than men (37 compared to 25 percent) and are more prominent among arts consumers.² Moreover, it appears that women identify with the arts more strongly than men, being less likely to agree with the statement 'the arts are not for people like me' (22 compared to 35 percent).³ Women also are more aware of the wider importance of the arts in society – for example, a larger percentage of women than men recognise the role of the arts in education (77 compared to 70 percent).⁴

As artists, however, Australian women continue to earn less than their male counterparts. In the most recent comprehensive national survey of professional artists' economic circumstances, which was undertaken in 2016–17,⁵ the total incomes of female artists were 25 percent less on average than for males, and women earned 30 percent less from their creative work – these differentials were greater than the workforce gender pay gap of 16 percent at that time.⁶ Indeed, a gap between male and female earnings for practising professional artists in Australia has been observed in successive surveys since the 1980s.⁷ Despite decades of political mobilisation seeking gender equality, and high rates of female participation, the gender pay gap persists in the Australian arts sector.

This paper reports the results of research into the earnings of male and female artists that we have undertaken in collaboration with the Australia Council. The research aimed to investigate the possible causes of the ongoing gender pay gap in the arts by isolating various factors that might account for women's lesser income. The empirical work utilised data from the 2016–17 national survey of practising professional artists referred to above.

Context

A gap between male and female earnings has long been observed across occupations, industries and whole economies. Much research has been devoted to understanding the reasons for this inequality. However, studies consistently find that, even after allowing for differences between males and females in characteristics such as part-time versus full-time work, education, age and domestic responsibilities, there remains an unexplained pay gap.

Time-series studies show that in most occupations/industries the gender pay gap has been narrowing over time, although this is by no means universally the case. Cross-section analyses between countries generally show that legislative measures such as equal pay requirements and non-discriminatory workplace policies have some effect in reducing gender inequity in the workforce. But even so the discrepancy remains.

2 See the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (ACSPRI) 2019 Survey on Social Inequality which suggests that women have higher rates of participation across both audience and creative participation, i.e. attending live music; making music, art, theatre etc.; listening to music; and/or reading a book, but not for study or work.

3 Australia Council 2020, *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts and Participation Survey*. This finding is also supported by data from ACSPRI's 2019 Survey on Social Inequality, in which men's reasons for not participating in the arts were more likely to be 'because it's not for people like me' and 'because I'm not really interested, while women's were more likely to be 'because it's too expensive' or 'because there is a lack of limited opportunities'.

4 Australia Council 2020, *Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts and Participation Survey*.

5 Throsby D and Petetskaya K 2017, *Making Art Work: An economic study of professional artists in Australia*. Sydney: Australia Council.

6 Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2017, *Gender Pay Gap Statistics February 2017*. Sydney: WGEA.

7 See the series of artists surveys undertaken at Macquarie University with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts, the most recent of which is Throsby D and Petetskaya K 2017, *Making Art Work: An economic study of professional artists in Australia*, the survey from which the data in this paper are derived.

The arts in Australia are no different from this worldwide picture. As we have noted above, in the case of professional artists successive surveys have highlighted the gender earnings gap, observable in most of the forms of income that artists receive, and particularly acute in incomes from their creative practice. As with many other industries, the gap for artists has narrowed over time. But it has by no means disappeared.

To some extent, the gender-based pay gap for artists may be explained by the same sorts of factors that affect female workers across all labour markets, including under-representation in leadership roles, casualised work arrangements, work/family conflicts, discriminatory hiring practices and prejudice. Beyond this, however, there may be a number of reasons why women in the arts earn less than men, other things being equal.⁸ Some of these issues are discussed in Australian industry-level studies, including for musicians,⁹ dancers,¹⁰ playwrights and theatre directors,¹¹ and screen practitioners.¹²

Background: ways to measure the pay gap

Comparing mean or median earnings: the unadjusted pay gap

Comparing mean or median earnings for men and women over a given period can determine the existence of a gender pay gap. When means or medians are used for comparison, the percentage difference between male and female earnings is called the *unadjusted gap*.

The gap, if it exists, is usually expressed as the difference between male and female earnings expressed as a percentage of male earnings, showing proportionally how much less women earn compared to men. Occasionally the gap is measured the other way around, as a percentage of female earnings, showing how much more men earn than women. In the present study we use the former approach.

Methods to account for other factors impacting income: the adjusted pay gap

If a method has been used to standardise incomes by controlling for other factors that might affect earnings, the resulting gap is called the *adjusted gap*. The primary model to determine the adjusted gap uses analysis which assumes earnings are determined by a range of relevant variables, so that the specific impact of gender can be isolated with everything else being held constant. A standard set of such variables is likely to include: hours worked; human capital characteristics of workers (education, training, experience); and socio-demographic indicators such as age, gender, education and family circumstances. Such an analysis can establish the existence and size of a gender pay gap, but does not say anything about the determinants of the gap.

There are several possible approaches to pursuing this issue further. The gap itself may be modelled as a function of a range of variables that might be thought to affect it, so that it can be broken down into various causal factors. This approach has the advantage of providing a direct identification of causes, but is subject to estimation difficulties unless there are very strong causal factors in operation.

8 See for example: Hesmondhalgh D and Baker S 2015, 'Sex, Gender and Work Segregation in the Cultural Industries', *The Sociological Review*, 63(S1): 23-36; Miller D L 2016, 'Gender and the Artist Archetype: Understanding gender inequality in artistic careers', *Sociology Compass*, 10(2): 119-131; Lindemann D, Rush C A and Tepper S T 2016, 'An Asymmetrical Portrait: Exploring gendered income inequality in the arts', *Social Currents*, 3(4): 332-348 et al.; Laurie C L, Goetzmann W N and Nozari M 2017, 'Art and Gender: Market bias or selection bias?' *SSRN Electronic Journal* August 25.

9 Cooper R, Coles A and Hanna-Osborne S 2017, *Skipping a Beat: Assessing the state of gender equality in the Australian music industry*, Sydney: University of Sydney Business School.

10 Westle A 2018, *Turning Pointe: Gender equality in Australian dance*, Melbourne: Delving into Dance.

11 Lally E and Miller S 2012, *Women in Theatre: A research report and action plan for the Australia Council for the Arts*, Sydney: Australia Council.

12 Screen Australia 2015, *Gender Matters: Women in the Australian screen industry*, Sydney: Screen Australia.

An alternative if sample sizes are sufficiently large is to estimate male and female earnings functions separately and independently. The advantage of this approach is that it allows unconstrained differential impacts between the genders to be revealed across the full range of explanatory variables included, and this might uncover some effects that might not otherwise be expected.

We investigated all these possible approaches to identifying the causes of the gender gap in this research project.

Analyses undertaken

In the project we used the dataset for all artists from the 2016–17 artists survey reported in *Making Art Work*.¹³ There is clear evidence in the data indicating a gender pay gap for artists, indicated by a comparison of mean and median incomes for male and female artists for 2014–15 (Table 1). **These data show an unadjusted gap in mean creative incomes of about 30 percent, roughly twice the size of the gap for the Australian workforce as a whole at the time of the survey.**¹⁴ The gap for artists falls to about 25 percent when all income sources are taken into account – the difference in creative incomes is offset to some extent by lesser gaps in other income sources.

Table 1: Mean and median incomes of artists by gender 2014–15 (a) (\$ per annum)

	Female	Male	Female/Male (%)
Mean gross income			
Creative income	15,400	22,100	70
Arts-related income	13,900	13,900	100
Total creative and arts-related income	29,400	36,000	82
Non-arts income	12,400	19,100	65
Total income	41,600	55,100	75
Median gross income			
Creative income	4,400	9,000	49
Total creative and arts-related income	15,100	16,500	92
Total income	36,000	50,000	72

Source: David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya (2017), *Making Art Work*, Table 12.8.

13 Throsby D and Petetskaya K 2017, *Making Art Work: An economic study of professional artists in Australia*. Note that we recognise that some people identify as gender diverse, and for over ten years the Australia Council has collected data on the one percent of funding applicants choosing to identify in this way. However, none participating in this survey selected the 'gender diverse' option.

14 Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2017, *Gender Pay Gap Statistics February 2017*, Sydney: WGEA.

Variables used to explore factors that could explain the pay gap

To analyse the nature of the gap in the present study, we identified a range of possible explanatory variables and investigated a number of different estimation methods, including explanations of earnings for all artists combined, and for male/female artists separately. We also explored the possibility for isolating the determinants of the pay gap directly, but no significant results emerged.

In our model of earnings, we used the standard set of explanatory variables: human capital, labour supply and socio-demographics, as detailed further below. In addition, we were aware that in the wide-ranging literature on females in the workplace, attention has been paid to the influence of gender-related psycho-social characteristics that are thought to represent stereotypical differences between males and females, including the proposition that women are more caring, supportive, nurturing and communicative, and are more risk-averse, competition-averse, other-regarding, and less likely to initiate negotiation. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as more assertive, aggressive and self-confident.¹⁵

Our survey gathered only limited data on these characteristics, so it was not fully possible for us to test whether they are relevant in explaining income differences between male and female artists. However, we do have information on some of the factors that respondents believe have advanced or inhibited their careers as artists, and we considered that some of these might be usable as broad proxies for such personal traits. For example, our data show some differences between male and female artists in their self-assessment of their own talent as a factor advancing their career,¹⁶ so responses on this issue might be indicative of an intrinsic male/female difference. Accordingly, we tried including several positive and negative factors affecting career development in our array of explanatory variables.

The full set of explanatory variables that we explored in estimating earnings functions were:

Gender

- Female/male

Human capital: education/training

- No university degree
- Bachelor degree
- Postgrad degree
- Formal training
- Private training

Human capital: experience

- Beginning/starting out
- Becoming established
- Established
- Established but working less
- Interstate experience
- Overseas experience

15 Bertrand M., 2011, 'New Perspectives on Gender', in Card D and Ashenfelter O (eds.), *Handbook of Labor Economics*, Vol. 4B, 3143-3259, Amsterdam: Elsevier.

16 Throsby D and Petetskaya K 2017, *Making Art Work: An economic study of professional artists in Australia*, Table 12.3.

Labour supply

- Creative work hours

Socio-demographics

- Non-capital city
- Non-English-speaking background
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Age
- Disability
- Married/living with partner
- Children

Factors affecting career

- Lack of support from family and friends
- Wrong temperament/lack of self-confidence
- Insufficient talent or not prepared to take risks
- Support from family and friends
- Finding market niche
- My talent

To capture non-linearities in relationships with some variables such as work hours and age, logs or squared terms were introduced in some estimations.

Results

In the following discussion we refer to some of the results obtained so far in this study. Note that the results in this report are derived from a range of different models and estimates. These investigations were designed to identify tendencies that are consistently evident and can act as a basis for drawing tentative conclusions.

Adjusted earnings pay gap

We turn first to the initial estimates of the gender pay gap derived from earnings explanations for all artists, and for male/female artists separately. Different models result in slightly different estimates of the adjusted earnings gap.

From the most comprehensive models for separate male/female earnings, we have estimates of the **adjusted earning gap ranging from around 27 percent to around 32 percent for artists' creative incomes**. Since these estimates span the unadjusted earnings gap noted above, it appears that controlling for a series of plausible factors that might help to explain the gender gap in artists' earnings does little to reduce the apparent gap – some factors turn out to have non-significant effects with others operating to counter each other.

We can conclude that there remains a substantial difference between the incomes for men and women artists that cannot be explained by obvious gender differences such as work arrangements and family circumstances. This suggests that gender inequity in the artistic workplace must ultimately be reflective of more fundamental issues relating to the treatment of women in society. It remains for more detailed research to explore these issues further.

To place our gender-gap discussion in a more tangible context, we can illustrate the differences in creative incomes for a given male or female artist with identical characteristics, by calculating predicted incomes from one of our models.

Consider a male or female artist with the following characteristics:

- he/she has a bachelor degree, no postgrad degree
- he/she has formal training but no private training
- he/she has interstate but not overseas exposure
- he/she is established, aged 50 years, and works 25 hours per week at his/her creative occupation
- he/she lives in a capital city, is from an English-speaking background, is non-First Nations and has no disability
- he/she is married/partnered and has (had) children under his/her care.

Controlling for other variables, we calculate that a male artist with the above characteristics would have earned a creative income of \$24,198 in 2014-15, whereas an identical female would have earned \$17,502, a gender earnings gap of 27.6 percent.

Gender related differences of explanatory variables on creative income

Our estimates show up gender-related differences in the impacts on creative incomes of different variables. In the following paragraphs we discuss some of the broad implications that emerge from these results, bearing in mind that there is a lot of unexplained variation in the data, making it difficult to establish firm relationships in some cases. The results below should therefore be treated as tentative, pending more detailed analyses in due course.

Human capital: education and training

None of the education and training variables had a significant impact on the creative incomes of artists taken as a whole. However, we did observe a difference between men and women artists in the effect of a postgraduate degree. Having a postgraduate degree appears to be a way to increase the creative incomes for female artists but the reverse can be observed for male artists – postgraduate degrees seem to have a negative impact on male artists' creative incomes.

Human capital: experience

The effects on artists' creative incomes as they move through the career stages – from starting out to established and then not working so intensively – are highly significant. The strongest effect is when artists become established, and then there is a diminished effect as the artist's work/time/output declines. These effects are similar for both men and women. Likewise, there is a significant positive relationship between creative incomes and both interstate and overseas exposure. Again, this is broadly similar between male and female artists.

Labour supply

As expected, increasing the hours spent on creative work has a significant impact on creative incomes, although the rate of increase declines with more hours being spent on creative work after a certain point. This effect is similar between males and females. However, it should be remembered that many artists would like to work more at their creative occupation but are unable to do so because of external constraints on their time or their income-earning opportunities. No significant difference is observed in the time spent on creative work between males and females. However, the rate of return to these hours is higher for male artists, holding other influences constant, which implies potential gender discrimination in the labour market.

Socio-demographics

Judging from a range of estimates obtained in this study, the impact of age on creative incomes is positive for younger artists. However, beyond a certain age the positive impact of ageing begins to decline. Estimates are not robust enough at this stage to enable us to calculate the point at which this change occurs.

Nevertheless, we can say that there appears to be no significant difference between male and female artists with respect to age and its impact on creative incomes. Many of the other socio-demographic variables had impacts but were not statistically significant. For example, living outside a capital city, being of non-English-speaking background, or living with a disability, all reduced creative incomes. Having had children is associated with higher creative incomes, less so for women than for men.

Factors affecting artists' careers

The results show that relationships between creative incomes and factors advancing/inhibiting career development were mostly not significant when measured across all artists. Nevertheless, there were a few notable differences between men and women that emerged.

Women's self-evaluation of their talent as an important factor advancing their career was strong and significantly greater than for men. On the other hand, male artists who reported finding a market niche as important in advancing their career were more likely than women to have higher creative incomes. This finding might be seen as consistent with the psychological/sociological stereotype of women tending to look inward to explain their successes or failures, whereas men seek causes more often in external factors.

Another interesting finding came up around support that artists receive from their families and friends as an advancing factor in their career development. Female artists who believe that receiving support from family and friends has helped them in advancing their career appear to have higher creative incomes on average, holding all other variables constant. For male artists however, focusing on support from family and friends in advancing their career is associated with declining creative incomes.

It appears that male artists who are self-aware of having wrong temperament, a lack of self-confidence, insufficient talent or not being prepared to take risks as restricting their career on average, still enjoy higher creative incomes. However, being aware of having the same set of restricting factors has a negative impact on the creative incomes of female artists.

First Nations women artists

In separate analyses using data from the National Survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists, we found that there are only minor differences between the genders in the levels of income earned by First Nations artists living in remote communities in the Central Desert (NT), APY Lands (SA), and Arnhem Land (NT).¹⁷ In these communities, the gender differences in mean work incomes are so small as to be statistically insignificant. However, in the Central Desert and APY Lands, women's income from non-work sources is about twice that of their male counterparts. As a result, on average the total incomes from all sources for female artists in the region are greater than for male artists.

It appears that the gender gap that affects incomes of most female artists in Australia is not evident in these remote First Nations communities. Collection of further data in Western Australia and Far North Queensland, planned for 2020 and 2021, will complete the national database, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of the relationships between gender and income for remotely located First Nations artists.

Other researchers have also studied gender differences among First Nations artists. For example, using data from the 2014–15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and a statistical model to control for a range of socioeconomic and cultural factors, researchers at the ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research found that First Nations women are more likely to participate in First Nations arts than First Nations men. However, there was no gender difference in economic participation, except for among First Nations women aged 65 years and over. Older First Nations Australians are more likely to participate in, and earn income from arts, and this applies to women in particular.¹⁸ However, this study did not look at how much First Nations women earn compared to men.

Earlier research by the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation found that despite there being more female First Nations visual artists, the average value of art sales was lower for women – the average artwork sale between 2008 and 2012 was \$661 for male First Nations artists and \$414 for females.¹⁹ However, highly productive female artists received a higher average value for art products.²⁰

17 Throsby D and Petetskaya K 2019, *Integrating Art Production and Economic Development in the Central Desert (NT) and APY Lands (SA) and Integrating Art Production and Economic Development in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory*, Macquarie Economics Research Papers 1/2019 and 3/2019 respectively.

18 Full details of the analysis are published in Biddle N and Crawford H 2017, *Indigenous Participation in Arts and Cultural Expression and the Relationship with Wellbeing: Results from the 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, CAEPR Working Paper No. 117/2017. The Australia Council for the Arts provided funding support for this project, and collaborative work to conceptualise the paper and select the variables for analysis.

19 Snapshot of the Art Economy in Remote Australia and Art Centres and Funding in Remote Australia, Infographic.

20 For female artists producing over 399 art products, average sales are more than 50% higher than for equivalent male artists. Woodhead A and Acker T. 2015. *Productivity, Income and Gender: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists*. CRC-REP Research Report CR012. Alice Springs: Ninti One Limited.

Ongoing research

We are continuing our research on gender issues among artists in several directions. First, there is more to be done in investigating the determinants of male/female earnings differentials in the data from the *Making Art Work* survey dataset. In particular we are looking at issues of disability as they affect the relative incomes of male and female artists. Another important aspect of artists' personal characteristics concerns the cultural diversity of the professional artist population – to what extent are gendered income differences related to the cultural background of artists? We have sufficient data in this dataset to be able to test some interesting hypotheses about these issues.

In addition, we are beginning to look more closely at the data from the National Survey of Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists. The determinants of earnings among remote First Nations cultural practitioners are likely to be somewhat different from those for artists in the rest of Australia, and we will be able to explore the extent to which there are gender-based differences in these data. We would therefore expect a different picture of income relationships to emerge for remote First Nations artists in comparison with other artists. Moreover, there may also be differences within the overall population of First Nations artists because of recognised cultural differences between different regions in remote Australia.

Conclusions

The research undertaken so far in this project has highlighted the difficulties in isolating causal factors that may explain the earnings gap between men and women artists. It appears that even after allowing for a range of differences between men and women artists, including work circumstances, domestic responsibilities and career stage, the gender pay gap remains virtually unchanged.

We have been able to identify several specific impacts on creative earnings that differ between the genders, but none is sufficiently strong to comprise a significant determinant of the gap. We are therefore left with the conclusion that women artists across all artistic occupations are subject to forms of gender-related disadvantage in pursuing their creative practice that reflect discriminatory problems affecting women in society at large, and which may be more serious in the arts than in other areas.²¹

This conclusion is given further weight when the results of this analysis are compared with income for female artists working within remote First Nations communities. These results highlight the particularity of the social, cultural and economic conditions likely to affect the gender gap. Further research is needed to identify the sources of gender disadvantage within different contexts, and the impacts of such disadvantage on the careers and working circumstances of professional women artists.

21 To illustrate the power of unconscious gender bias in the arts, research in the US has shown how orchestral auditions behind a screen make it 50 percent more likely that a female will advance to the next round (see Rice C 2013, 'How blind auditions help orchestras eliminate gender bias,' *The Guardian*, 14 October 2013). In Australia, the implementation of blind orchestral auditions with candidates auditioning from behind a screen has led to there now being a gender balance or close to it across Australian orchestras (see Crooks M 2016, Foreword to *Equal Arts*, Victorian Women's Trust).