

# Report on Gender and the American Society for Environmental History

## Sponsored by the Women's Environmental History Network (WEHN)

### *Prepared by:*

Julie Cohn, University of Houston  
Sara B. Pritchard, Cornell University

February 23, 2017

## I. Introduction

Despite decades of advances in terms of degree attainment, overall employment, and research undertaken, women still face gender-based discrimination across academia, as do other historically underrepresented groups. A sampling of recent studies underscores the problem. In 2016, the American Association of University Women released the findings of a study of women in leadership positions across American society.<sup>1</sup> The study found “Despite women’s impressive gains in education, and the workplace over the past 50 years, men greatly outnumber women in leadership, especially in top positions. From corporate boardrooms to the halls of Congress, from universities to the courts, from religious institutions to philanthropic organizations, men are simply much more likely than women to be leaders.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, researchers published findings in *BMJ* (originally called the *British Medical Journal*) regarding the position of female authors on published medical research papers.<sup>3</sup> This study found that “The representation of women among first authors of original research in high impact general medical journals was significantly higher in 2014 than 20 years ago, but it has plateaued in recent years and has declined in some journals.” These researchers noted that women comprise anywhere from 33 percent to more than 50 percent of active physicians around the world. In the field of International Relations, “women are systematically cited less than men,” and also tend to cite themselves less than men.<sup>4</sup> A recent political science working paper titled “Gender in the Journals” documents “longstanding and continued underrepresentation of women in the pages of many of the discipline’s journals.”<sup>5</sup> In 2015, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported in its “Almanac of Higher Education, 2015-2016” that for undergraduate teaching faculty “men reported a higher number of

---

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Hill, Kevin Miller, Kathleen Benson, Grace Handley, *Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Hill, et al., *Barriers and Bias*, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Filardo, Briget da Graca, Danielle M Sass, Benjamin D Pollock, Emma B Smith, Melissa Ashley-Marie Martinez, “Trends and comparison of female first authorship in high impact medical journals: observational study (1994-2014),” *BMJ* 2016; 352:i847.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Maliniak, Ryan Powers, and Barbara F. Walter, “The Gender Citation Gap in International Relations,” *International Organization*, 67, no. 4, pp. 889-922.

<sup>5</sup> Dawn Langan Teele, Kathleen Thelen, “Gender in the Journals,” working paper provided to Julie Cohn by Brett Ashley Leeds, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, Rice University. P. 1.

publications at all three faculty ranks.”<sup>6</sup> This reflects a gendered “productivity” gap across disciplines in academia.<sup>7</sup> These kinds of findings prompt immediate concern about how women fare in the history profession generally, and in our particular field of interest, environmental history.

Given ASEH’s long-term leadership in the field of environmental history, the newly organized Women’s Environmental History Network (WEHN) hopes that ASEH will also take the lead in exploring these gender issues by initiating a survey about publishing and other professional opportunities. Our organizers conducted a cursory review of relevant publications and found striking anomalies regarding the number of journal articles, book reviews, and reviewed books published by men and women, with women falling significantly behind in every category. As an organization, the American Society for Environmental History has provided access, support, and opportunity for male and female scholars alike, and for individuals who experience discrimination based on difference. The current President and Executive Director are female, as is the editor of *Environmental History*, the organization’s affiliated academic publication. ***ASEH is ideally situated to initiate an investigation of the nature of inequities in the field of environmental history, while continuing to implement activities and policies that will advance the professional endeavors of all scholars regardless of gender or other differences.***

To this end, the Women’s Environmental History Network requests that the ASEH Executive Committee consider four steps:

1. Share this report with ASEH members.
2. Undertake a survey of members in order to better understand barriers to publication, organizational culture, and other professional concerns that may be explicitly or implicitly gender- and/or difference-driven.
3. Provide these survey findings to the ASEH membership in general, possibly to broader audiences in academia, but especially to the Diversity Committee and to WEHN in order to formulate strategies to overcome barriers and encourage professional success for all scholars in environmental history.
4. Continue to support WEHN conceptually and institutionally, and, when possible and appropriate, materially.

For its part, WEHN is committed to several activities intended to further understanding of disparities in advancement within the environmental history profession, and to promote professional success for all scholars in the field:

1. Hold annual networking receptions at ASEH meetings and encourage similar gatherings at other environmental history conferences and workshops around the world (ESEH, etc.).

---

<sup>6</sup> “Almanac of Higher Education, 2015-2016,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 61, no. 43, p. 11. <http://www.icuf.org/newdevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Chronicle-Almanac-2015-16.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> In this Almanac, productivity is a measure of “professional writings published or accepted for publication in the previous two years, as well as the number of chapters in edited volumes and the number of articles in academic and professional journals published during a faculty member’s career.” “Almanac of Higher Education, 2015-2016,” p. 11.

2. Support and help expand the ASEH mentoring program at the ASEH reception, ASEH conference, and throughout the year.
3. Maintain connection among scholars interested in WEHN through quarterly communications via a dedicated list serv.
4. Help develop a survey of environmental history scholars and continue to collect data about publication and professional endeavors through WEHN itself and international affiliates, and provide those data to ASEH, WEHN, and other interested parties.
5. After receiving these data, develop and refine responses to be undertaken by WEHN and ASEH to support professional advancement of all scholars in environmental history.

## II. Summary

This report results from recent conversations and initial activities. A small group of female environmental historians began to discuss their individual concerns about gender bias at the ASEH meeting in Washington D.C. in March 2015. After sharing numerous anecdotes about overt and implied bias in their professional lives, these women decided to take action. They formed the Women's Environmental History Network (WEHN), which held its first reception at the ASEH meeting in Seattle in March 2016. In addition, WEHN founders began compiling data to assess whether various institutional barriers might be creating an unequal environment for women in ASEH specifically and the field of environmental history more broadly. They also initiated contact and began important conversations with a number of ASEH leaders, including Lisa Brady (current Editor of *Environmental History*), Kathleen Brosnan (current President of ASEH), and Lisa Mighetto (current Executive Director of ASEH).

An informal review of published work by gender in *Environmental History* and in the H-Environment Roundtable suggests some lag between the number of women active in the field and the number whose work is accepted for publication, who are asked to prepare book reviews, and whose books are reviewed. Most significantly, just 15 percent of research articles published in *Environmental History* between 2013 and 2015 were written by women. At the same time, in "curated" publications—that is, roundtables, fora, and Gallery reviews—the representation appears to be more equitable.

Given these preliminary data, it is time to undertake a more formal examination of the experiences of scholars across the field of environmental history to determine the extent of exclusion based on gender or other difference that may take place, and what the underlying causes may be. With this kind of information, WEHN, ASEH, and other concerned organizations can devise active and appropriate responses.

In making such recommendations, we readily acknowledge that gender is merely one axis of demographic identity and diversity within the environmental history community. Although WEHN and this report focus on gender, we are also concerned by the underrepresentation of other groups (delineated by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, and/or nationality) within the field in general and within ASEH in particular. The focus on gender in this report stems from the fact that women represent a large subgroup within environmental history, large enough to make bias measurable. We do feel, however, in a larger and more formal survey it will be possible to identify exclusion

or bias that affects other subgroups as well. In brief, although we are focused primarily on gender bias, we are committed to intersectional analysis and see ourselves as strong allies with parallel causes.

Finally, we note that the ASEH as an organization has already undertaken numerous initiatives with respect to diversity and equity issues both intellectually and institutionally. It has formed a Diversity Committee and the most recent conference in Seattle had several important presidential panels on race, environmentalism, environmental justice, and environmental history. We wholeheartedly support these efforts and see our nascent organization as building on this growing concern. The organization has also repeatedly recognized the leadership of women in its elected offices, demonstrating a de facto commitment to gender equity at the highest levels. It is, however, in the day-to-day experiences of women in the field that we have found the greatest concern.

***We believe that the ASEH, as a healthy and vibrant academic association, can and should take a leadership role in tackling gender bias in the field of environmental history.***

### **III. Methodology**

For overall statistics regarding participation by gender in the field, we consulted surveys conducted by the National Science Foundation, the American Historical Association, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. For specific publications, we undertook several approaches, including a hand count of names in the table of contents of the journal *Environmental History*, an analysis of the editorial records of *Environmental History*, and consultation with the current editor to the web commons *H-Environment Roundtable* reviews. Readers of this report should note that the information presented below is not intended for publication. The surveys were completed systematically, but informally, and covered publications across multiple years. The results are suggestive of both barriers and opportunities for all scholars in environmental history, and should be understood as informative, but not definitive.

### **IV. Findings**

Based on these initial data, it appears that women are active in academia in numbers nearly equal to men, comprising more than half of all college professionals, and slightly less than half of all faculty and graduate assistants. In addition, the same number of women and men pursue degrees in STS, a field closely related to environmental history, and this may likewise be true for environmental history. Approximately forty-three percent of registrants and panel participants at ASEH in 2016 were female.

The publication data are sharply divergent although again inconclusive. We do not have solid information about the percent of female scholars in the field, nor do we know anything about the demographic distribution of those scholars or how long they have been active professionally. Nonetheless, it appears that women submit significantly fewer items for publication to *Environmental History* than men. Although women compose almost 50 percent of the environmental history community, they submit only 28

percent of the research articles to the journal. In addition, their work is less frequently accepted for publication; 10 percent of female-authored articles are accepted, whereas almost 23 percent of male-authored articles are accepted. In addition, reviews of books written by women seem to be published less frequently than books written by men, and book reviews by women are also published less frequently. Notably, for curated publications—for example a roundtable to which authors are invited to submit work—discrepancy by gender is reduced and the numbers are more even.

These publication data suggests that there are a variety of barriers that limit the frequency with which women submit work for publication, or resubmit if their initial work is not accepted. However, when individuals in positions of publishing authority purposely seek equity among qualified scholars to participate in publication, the bias seems to be reduced.

The data appear below:

### Gender of College Administrators, Faculty, and Staff, 2013

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent Women</i>
Professional	52.4%
Executive, administrative, managerial	55%
<b>Faculty Members</b>	<b>48.8%</b>
Graduate Assistants	47.3%
Other	60.0%
Nonprofessional	62.2%

*Source:* 2016 Almanac of Higher Education, Chronicle of Higher Education, August 14, 2016, [http://www.chronicle.com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/interactives/almanac-2016#id=9\\_108](http://www.chronicle.com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/interactives/almanac-2016#id=9_108). Please note, we do not, at this time, have data to indicate the gender breakdown of historians in general and environmental historians in particular, and further this data refers only to universities in the United States.

### Gender of Ph.D. Recipients

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent Women</i>
History overall*	44%
Science, Technology, and Society*	50%
Recent Dissertations Listed in <i>EH</i> **	47%

*Sources:* \* *Science and Engineering Doctorates: Doctorate Recipients from U.S. Universities: 2014*, National Science Foundation statistics, <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/2016/nsf16300/data/tab16.pdf>;

\*\* Review from 2013-2015, based on best guess of author gender, and not including unknowns in the final total and percentage calculations. Please note we do not have data to indicate the gender breakdown of recent Ph.D. recipients who identify themselves as “environmental historians.” In addition, the “Recent Dissertations” list may include scholarship from other countries.

### Gender of Participants in ASEH 2016 Meeting

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent Women</i>
Registration	43%
Panel Participants in Program	43%

*Source:* Manual count of registration list and program listings, based on best guess of gender by name.

Looking at ASEH program history (2012-2016 inclusive) the following was noted:

Average percent female panel chairs = 35%, trend is increasing.

Average percent female commentators = 39%

Average percent female panelists = 41%

Average percent female single gender panels = 35% (shifting from 7% in 2012 to 60% in 2016)

Average percent plenary moderators = 0%  
 Average percent plenary speakers/panelists = 45%

### Gender and Journal Authorship

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent Women</i>
<i>EH Research Articles*</i>	15%
<i>EH Forum Essays*</i>	25%
<i>EH Gallery*</i>	60%
<i>EH Invited Pieces*</i>	50%
<i>EH Book Review Reviewers**</i>	21%
<i>EH Reviewed Book Authors**</i>	30%
<i>EH Listing of Recent Journal Articles**</i>	25%
<i>EH Listing of Recent Books**</i>	28%
<i>H-Environment Book Review Reviewers***</i>	31%
<i>H-Environment Reviewed Book Authors***</i>	29%
<i>Environment &amp; History Published Articles****</i>	29%

Sources: \*Calculation by *Environmental History* Editor and Assistant Editor, for years 2013-2015.

\*\*Informal review of listings in *Environmental History* for years 2014 and 2015, not including unknowns in the final total and percentage calculation.

\*\*\*Data provided by Christopher Jones in March 2016.

\*\*\*\*Data provided by Dolly Jørgensen in November 2016 for years 2013-2016 (16 issues). First authors counted for co-authored papers.

### Initial Submissions to *Environmental History*

<i>Type of Submittal</i>	<i>Submitted by Women</i>	<i>Submitted by Men</i>
Research Articles	68 (28.3%)	172 (71.6%)
Gallery	12 (52%)	11 (47%)
Forum Essays	8 (38%)	13 (62%)
Invited Works	2 (50%)	2 (50%)

Source: Calculation by *Environmental History* Editor and Assistant Editor, for years 2013-2015. The total for "research articles" includes multi-author submittals and does not include unknowns.

### Rough Estimate of Acceptance Rates for *Environmental History*

<i>Type of Submittal</i>	<i>Percent Accepted, Women</i>	<i>Percent Accepted, Men</i>
Research Article	10.2%	22.7%
Gallery	75%	54.4%
Overall	17%	29.7%

Source: Calculation by *Environmental History* Editor and Assistant Editor, for years 2013-2015. Please note: there is a lag between initial submission and final publication, so these percentages reflect a best guess effort only.

### Representation of Female Scholars in Relevant Book Series

<i>Book Series</i>	<i>No. Books</i>	<i>Female Authors</i>
UW Weyerhaeuser: Environmental Books	45	22%
UW Weyerhaeuser: Environmental Classics	11	9%
Cambridge University Press: Environmental History Series	45	13%
UNC Press: Flows, Migrations, and Exchange Series	2	0%
University of Georgia Press: Environmental History and the American South	13	38%
University of Pittsburgh Press: History of the Urban Environment	33	6%
Oxford University Press: Environmental History (hardcover and softcover editions of books listed separately)	99	21%
Routledge Environmental Humanities	51	43%
The University of Arizona Press: Latin American Landscapes	3	67%

*Sources:* Online review and hand count by Sara Pritchard, Julie Cohn, various dates.

### Gender and ASEH Prizes

<i>Prize</i>	<i>Years/Prizes</i>	<i>Percent Female Recipients</i>
Marsh (best book)	26	19%
Leopold-Hidy (best article in <i>EH</i> )	21	24%
Hamilton (best article outside <i>EH</i> )	18	22%
Rachel Carson (best dissertation)	21	22%
ASEH distinguished service	11	27%
ASEH distinguished scholar	8	13%

*Source:* Sara Pritchard review of past ASEH prize recipients.

## V. Additional Investigations

We are interested in adding the following to this information:

1. More extensive analysis of gender balance for other related scholarly journals such as *Environment & History*, ideally including submission data;
2. Further analysis of gender balance of environmental history-related book series given the importance of books to tenure and promotion;
3. Gender balance of “the (environmental history) canon”—that is, inclusion on undergraduate and graduate syllabi, comprehensive exams reading lists, etc. Preliminary scans of limited data suggest significant imbalance.
4. Although harder to study and quantify, we also hope to investigate and address other types of challenges female environmental historians may face within their respective institutions and at larger gatherings of scholars.

## VI. Indications

While suggestive rather than conclusive, these data indicate that there are disparities—and sometimes significant disparities—in the professional experiences and trajectories of men and women in environmental history. While those disparities do reflect broader trends across academia, systemic patterns do not justify the perpetuation of structural inequalities. The most compelling data come from submissions and publication at *Environmental History*. With the caveat that the submission and publication data are not directly aligned, the information Dr. Brady provided indicates that there may be barriers to publication experienced by women in this discipline. Publication rates by gender in multiple book series seem to confirm trends in the journal. These data are in line with the broader finding of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that women lag behind men in publication productivity. It is possible to speculate about what the nature of the barriers may be, but without more data, collectively in a scientifically defensible manner, the speculations will not be strong enough to support clear action steps.

This is why WEHN strongly urges ASEH to take on the challenge of more closely examining the publication experiences of scholars in environmental history. While this report focuses somewhat narrowly on the publication process and outcomes, more formally investigating the publication process may indicate other professional activities in which bias based on gender or other differences persists. Together, ASEH and WEHN can use the results to clarify both barriers and opportunities, to identify and characterize any disadvantages that exist, and to delineate actions that will improve the professional pathways for all in the field. This will serve environmental history overall by ensuring as many doors as possible are open for a diverse array of scholars to engage with this discipline and contribute to its growth and strength.

Respectfully submitted,  
Julie Cohn  
Sara Pritchard

### **Founders of WEHN:**

Lisa Brady  
Kathleen Brosnan  
Julie Cohn  
Sarah Elkind  
Sarah Hamilton  
Ann Norton Greene  
Sara Gregg  
Nancy Jacobs  
Lisa Mighetto  
Sarah Mittlefehldt  
Sara Pritchard  
Emily Wakild