

Women in Academia

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This piece starts with a simple question: who are your academic idols? Maybe the name that will come to your mind at first is your supervisors or that amazing old professor that you had just before he/she retired. You read the title: So probably you are already thinking about an idol who might be a woman. But can you quickly think of a name of a greater academic that is a woman? For the ones that are already thinking that it is peanuts, here is my question: Is that name an old Nobel Prize winner not even from your field of studies? If your answer is yes, well, welcome to the team.

I am currently a second-year PhD candidate (Politics and International Relations) at the University of Kent. At the beginning of the term, an office in Rutherford College was assigned to me. After some days of working there, I felt the need of adding some personal items that would make me feel more comfortable and happier while working. I mean, doing a PhD is hard. Imagine doing a PhD while staring at a beige wall. I started with the basics: rainbow stationery and rainbow conference calendar for the coming year. Then I added some plants and cacti. Concerning the walls, I decided to create an inspirational mural. I included some travelling photos and selected paintings from five artists: Picasso, Vermeer, Klimt, Van Gogh, and Escher.



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By now you should be thinking about what the link between decoration and women in academia is. I will get to the interesting part. Everyone that entered my office appreciated my mural and I was feeling much better working in there. Some weeks later, in what was a moment of deepest procrastination (PhD life - do not judge), it seemed nice to add not only photos of my political inspirations, but also

photos of my academic idols. I instantly opened both Publisher and Google and started to create a poster with their photos. Guess what: all men.

When I realised that 100% of my academic idols' poster was constituted of men, I started to think and think and think... Firstly, the only women I could remember were politicians, such as Margaret Thatcher. Then, Nobel Prize scientists, such as Marie Curie. In the end, I concluded that only one of them was a scientist from my field: Hannah Arendt (political philosopher). I gained conscience of the problem. Some may say that it was a lack of academic/scientific culture. It might be. It might not be. I understood in conversations with colleagues that I was not the only one. This led to the writing of this piece. The aim is to make you think and to create awareness of the male predominance in academia that we keep perpetuating, sometimes without even noticing.

Some might think I arrived late to the party. Some of you might already know that there is now the concern of citing women when publishing a journal article, book, or thesis. Some of you might know that there are now guidelines on building a gender-balanced reading list or bibliography for modules at university, or simply to be published online. Perhaps, some PhDs in 10 years can easily name 10 female academic idols in 10 seconds. But some of us are not there yet.

The three main questions that I believe we should be putting on the table are: Is this awareness happening? Why is this awareness only happening in British and American academia? What can each of us do to mitigate the problem? I believe I am doing a small part in writing this piece. Coming to the end, I know I have to give you the answer to the question that keeps echoing in your mind: "After all, what are the women she added to the mural?". I leave with you my academic inspirations: Marie Curie, Hannah Arendt, Virginia Woolf, Elena Cornaro Piscopia, Karen E. Smith, Sarah B. Hobolt, and last but not least Margarida Liberato (my mother!).

If you would like to share your "Women in Academia Inspirations" names, please feel free to email [cm113\[at\]kent.ac.uk](mailto:cm113[at]kent.ac.uk). I promise to gather the names and create a list to be shared in the future.

Reading suggestions:

Digeorgio-Lutz, JoAnn, ed. 2002. *Women in Higher Education: Empowering Change*. Westport: Praeger Publishers.

Longman, Karen A. and Susan R. Madsen, ed. 2014. *Women and Leadership in Higher Education*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Mahat, Marian, ed. 2021. *Women Thriving in Academia*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

