

Why Do So Few Women Write Letters to the Editor?

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In America, letters to the editor have been around as long as newspapers. They represent one of the country's most basic modes of political engagement, accessible—at least in theory—to all. They are also written, overwhelmingly, by men.

The disparity, several experts told me, stems from “[the confidence gap](#),” a phenomenon covered by Katty Kay and Claire Shipman in *The Atlantic* in 2014. Women are less likely to think that they're, one, skilled enough write something worthwhile, and, two, able to offer insight other people should care about, Joyce Ehrlinger, assistant professor of psychology at Washington State, said.

For a [study](#) she co-authored with Cornell psychologist David Dunning, Ehrlinger gave male and female college students a basic science quiz. Before students took the quiz, Ehrlinger and Dunning asked participants to rate their science ability and, after the quiz, to guess whether they'd gotten each question right. Responding to both questions, women assumed that their science ability was significantly worse than it really was. Men didn't have that problem. There are hardly any subjects that women approach with more confidence than men, according to Ehrlinger. Cooking, she said, is one of only a handful of exceptions.