

EDITORIAL

Gender equality in wine and medicine

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The best kind of wine is that which is most pleasant to him who drinks it.

Pliny the Elder, Roman author and philosopher (23/24–79 AD)

The initial task, when I wrote my first editorial for this journal in 2018 was to attract readers, so I decided to call it: ‘Sex matters’. This seems to have worked as I have been writing editorials ever since. That editorial was, to a large extent, about Madame Clicquot of Veuve Clicquot’s fame and happily the beautiful yellow, saffron colour still adorns bottles of Veuve Clicquot champagne. In fact, Thomas Napper has recently released a film about the said lady, Barbe-Nicole Ponsardin Clicquot (1777–1866), which was reviewed in the Financial Times recently [1]. Although I haven’t seen the film yet, JR, the reviewer’s initials, said in his last line: ‘Widow Clicquot is distinctly lacking in verve’.

Madame Clicquot was a formidable lady and also a very good business woman Fig. 1. She is credited with creating the first known vintage champagne in 1810, and inventing the riddling table process Fig. 2 to clarify champagne in 1816 (riddling: Madame Nicole-Barbe Clicquot objected to the cloudy appearance of champagne in the early 1800s. Riddling is the process of periodically rotating a bottle a quarter of a turn while simultaneously tilting it until it’s upside down. This movement causes sediment accumulating inside the bottle to slide down to the neck. The subsequent removal of those particles, called disgorgement, leaves the appearance of the wine clear instead of cloudy). Madame Clicquot is also credited with the early introduction of labels on her champagne [1] bottles and of opening up the market for champagne in Russia, thus associating the wine with the bourgeoisie. She championed dry (‘sec,’ in French) champagne as the sophisticated drink of choice Fig. 3.

So, Madame Clicquot was a famous wine-maker and innovator but how many Masters of Wine [MWs] are female? As far as I can find out the gender split of new MWs in the last 10 years is 56% male, 44% female. Almost there! The gender split seems to be even better in sommeliers 56/44 female/male! It looks like the ‘battle of the sexes’ is over in the wine world. For example, there are many female wine-makers, some of whom are developing a very good reputation. In France, a country that many people still believe is the bastion of wine-making, it is estimated that at least one third of wine-makers are female. There are many female wine-makers associations, the most famous of which is probably ‘Femmes Vignerons Rhône’ (founded in 2004). Yet one can agree with Camille Nosworthy who says: *If a man was making it, I think the result would be the same. Rather, I credit the quality of the wine to the soil and altitude.*

How are we doing in the medical profession? We all remember a time (depending on your age) when most of the doctors in the

USSR were female. I don’t know what the position there is now. Certainly, when my wife (then girlfriend) went to the USA as a medical student in 1969 with two female colleagues, the hospital community where she worked was surprised to meet female medical students. Happily, things have changed since then and female medical students/doctors are no longer a rarity. I have not conducted a detailed survey but looking at entrants to medical school at the University of Minnesota, the girls outnumber the



Fig. 1 Veuve Clicquot Champagne Yellow Label Brut. Creative commons attribution-share alike 4.0 international license. Yakue Woangibar. 2020. Source Wikipedia.



Fig. 2 Riddling racks in Veuve Clicquot Chalk Cellars, Reims, France. Creative commons attribution- share alike 4.0 international license. Source Wikipedia.

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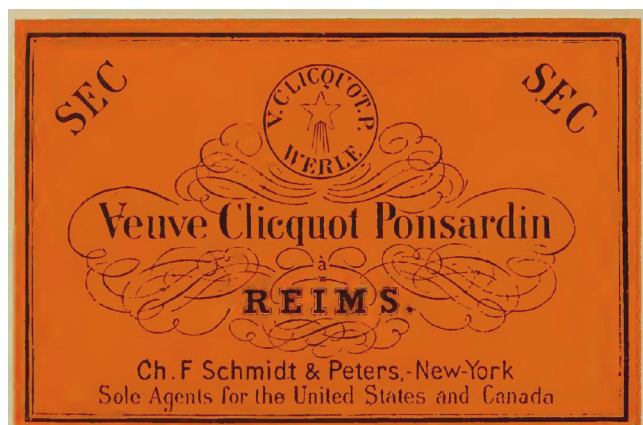


Fig. 3 ‘Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin’ champagne 1896 ad-17th annual regatta, Larchmount yacht club, July 14th, 1896. Public domain. Source Wikipedia.

boys by 57/42 although entrance to their fellowship programme still favours the boys 58/42 M/F. The overall split in the USA is that females are 57% of entrants to medical schools. In North West and Central London females still predominate at 65%. In my own country (Ireland) the gender split of entrants to the medical school at Trinity College Dublin, for example, is 63/37 F/M, and is probably mirrored across the country. Overall, it seems clear that female medical students now outnumber males. This may reflect a change in society or another possibility is that more males are opting for other courses at university than heretofore. Recently a French Professor (female) of haematology remarked to me that fewer males are applying to medical schools in Paris than

previously. Apparently, they wish to pursue more lucrative careers and this may influence the gender balance.

Misogyny is dead in many western countries and if not dead, is certainly beating a hasty retreat. There is absolutely no reason to think that women do not make as good doctors as men [2, 3] or that they cannot make excellent wine. In fact, many of us believe that women are also better wine tasters than men.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.