



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editorial decision is still a men's task

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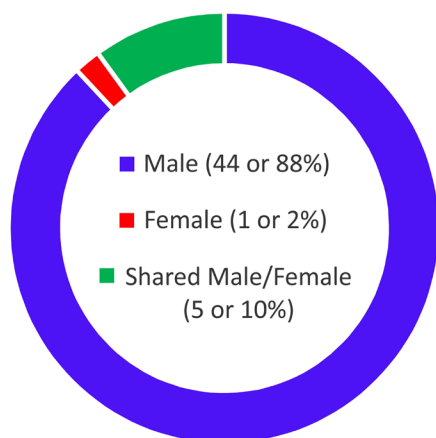
Try to remember your recent manuscripts accepted or rejected for publication. Were the decision letters signed by a man or a woman? Regardless of your research area, they were probably signed by male Chief Editors. And most likely your manuscript was also handled by a male member of the Editorial Board. Although since the 90's the number of women has skyrocketed among life scientists (Holman et al. 2018, Watt 2018), resulting in an increase in the proportion of female researchers, some niches are still far away from gender equity. It seems to be the case of Editorial Board positions (Silver 2019).

In order to illustrate that, we checked the Editorial Board composition of the 50 research journals that hold the term "*Biotechnology*" in their titles, which is the primary research field of the authors. As expected, we found a very unpleasant and disturbing discrepancy (Fig. 1). Only one journal has a woman as the sole Chief Editor. In other five, this position is shared by male/female researchers. And most of the journals (44) are solely led by men (Fig. 1a). Considering the entire Editorial Board of the 50 journals, female researchers account for an average of only 17.7% (Fig. 1b). Such gender inequity was also found on editorial boards of journals in the areas of medicine/pharmacy

(Amrein et al. 2011; Sarna et al. 2020), management (Metz et al. 2016), ecology/evolution (Fox et al. 2019), pediatrics (Alonso-Arroyo et al. 2020), and neurology (Mariotto et al. 2020). We risk saying that we would find very similar results in most of the research areas, except in research fields with a clear female bias, as nursing (Sarna et al. 2020). Therefore, editorial boards are still (predominantly) a male environment, and we are clearly losing this fight for gender equity.

One could say that current Editorial Board members are the best researchers in their fields. Well, we strongly disagree. Female researchers are just as qualified as male researchers to lead a journal and have ideas that are just as good as those of men. Such underrepresentation of women in Editorial Boards really matter? It certainly does and should be avoided. Do we all recognize the size of the problem around us? Probably not, it is easier to become complacent. But why female researchers are underrepresented in these positions? While maternity is often referenced as an obvious reason for women to step away from their careers, at least temporarily (Staniscuaski et al. 2020), there are certainly other reasons. What can journals/authors do to prevent such inequity?

a) Chief Editor gender



b) Editorial Board gender

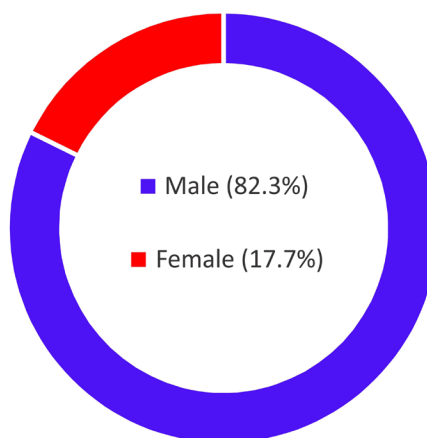


Figure 1. Gender of the Chief Editors (a) and Editorial Board members (b) of the fifty journals that hold the term “Biotechnology” in their titles. Numbers and percentages in (a) refer to the journals.

We suggest that scientific journals could help to overcome such gender inequity making a rotation between male and female researchers in Chief Editor positions or establishing shared positions. Also, gender equity should be pursued among the members of the Editorial Board. As the authors need to declare “*potential conflict of interests*”, and that “*manuscript reports unpublished work that is not under consideration for publication elsewhere*”, the journals could provide a declaration that gender equity was taken into account to select the Editorial Board members, clearly stating the percentage of male and female researchers. Then, we all could decide whether this information is an important/deciding factor when we are selecting the most appropriate journal to publish our data. We believe beyond more women making science, we also need more women making editorial decisions.

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