

Ten Steps to More Equitable Academic Publishing in the Pandemic

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Author Note:

In the interest of full transparency, when asked to review an article for this issue, I agreed, and told the editor I had some ideas, and asked if I could submit this essay, a process that could be called “negotiated” (Brian Nosek, 2019).

Abstract

The contribution of diverse scholars is essential as we face unprecedented challenges during a pandemic. Science and academia must attend to the structural effects on scholars' contributions to ensure the strongest possible workforce is equally able to contribute. Women, people of color, and other groups disproportionately affected by the virus itself, the collapse of the school and dependent care systems, and other structural barriers to full participation in work. University leadership, promotion and tenure committees, and human resource professionals have roles to play, but academic journal editors have some unique tools to bring to bear. Here, I describe ten steps editors, editorial boards, and reviewers can make to help ensure robust, diverse science continues through the pandemic.

Keywords: Academic Publishing; Academic Journals; COVID-19; Pandemic; Women in Science

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A robust scientific environment requires the participation of all members of the population; a crisis requires that we draw from the intellect of the full population. We must create infrastructures to allow for all populations to participate, and to acknowledge systematic differences in their ability to do so.

–Vincent-Lamarre, P., Sugimoto, C. R., & Larivière, V. (2020).

Women and people of color in STEM and academia in general have long faced barriers in academic publishing as a result of systemic hiring, promotion, and grant funding disparities (Hoppe et al., 2019; Larivière et al., 2013; Schrouff et al., 2019; Witteman et al., 2019) as well as systemic bias in the journal review process (Hengel, 2017; Lerback & Hanson, 2017).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, which has coincided with a surge in the Black Lives Matter protests and counter protests, women, and particularly mothers and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), have been under unprecedented pressure (Frederiksen et al., 2020; Gross et al., 2020; McLeod et al., 2020; Power et al., 2020). The pandemic is amplifying longstanding barriers in the domains of economic inequality, teaching and service, and research demands (Malisch et al., 2020; Myers et al., 2020). All of these indirectly affect academic publishing. In the pandemic, across STEM disciplines, women, and especially mothers of young children, are uploading fewer preprints and submitting fewer articles in STEM disciplines (Amano-Patiño et al., 2020; McCormick, 2020). Women in fields where pre-prints are not standard are likely to be facing similar reductions in research productivity that are less visible.

Department chairs, promotion and tenure committees, funding agencies, and higher education institutions and broader society can take steps to help. Women need dependent care, schools, and flexibility to continue to do their research more than tenure clock extensions, leaves, and other

mechanisms that take them farther away from their research (Antecol et al., 2018; Malisch et al., 2020).

To ensure equitable representation in STEM to solve the biggest problems humans have ever faced, we need to work together to build and sustain new infrastructures. Here are 10 steps journal editors could consider, across disciplines:

- 1) Create special issues featuring women authors and awards for papers authored by early career women as *Psychology and Neuroscience* has done (No author, 2020). Similarly, special issues might help correct for biases in publications by choosing topics that otherwise are neglected (Ginther et al., 2016; Hoppe et al., 2019; Witteman et al., 2019).

- 2) Be explicit about the journals' diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and actions.

Explicitly explain that women, and particularly mothers and BIPOC authors are subject to policies and procedures that are unequal *and* inequitable (and the difference between the two), especially during the pandemic (Antecol et al., 2018; Malisch et al., 2020). For example, strictly holding all authors to deadlines during the pandemic may appear to be equal, but if the practice systematically excludes women and particularly mothers of young children who are facing the unpredictable collapse of infrastructure to care for and educate children, the practice ultimately is inequitable.

- 3) Plan for and communicate flexibility with due dates, to better allow authors to align the work to times when they have access to dependent care, before a baby is born or foster or adoptive child is placed, and around a partners' high intensity work periods. This does not necessarily mean assuming women need more time. Rather, editors' willingness to accept a paper ahead of a deadline, get the paper under review, and back to the author

faster in ways that align with women's availability may be as helpful as extending deadlines.

- 4) Track rates of submissions, reviewers, and board membership by the intersection of gender, parenthood, and race/ethnicity. Make these data public to help authors and reviewers find journals that employ fair practices to submit to and review for (for an example, see Buckley et al. (2014)).
- 5) Train reviewers to reduce bias. Focus on behavior change to meet a specific goal (Carter, Onyeador, & Lewis, Jr., 2020). For example, reviewers can suggest authors use accurate language to describe the sexism, racism, and other societal factors when discussing health disparities, and to cite the Black women and others who have developed key theories, such as intersectionality (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1990), essential to the analysis (Milner & Jumbe, 2020). Associate editors could support reviewers. At Oregon State University, trained search advocates serve on search committees as a neutral party to observe and consult to make the process more fair and inclusive. Recently a group of scientists suggested university name Pandemic Response Faculty Fellows, who likewise can be informed of institutional metrics, goals, and policies and interact with reviewers and action editors to decrease systemic bias (Malisch et al., 2020).
- 6) When reviewers and board members take on additional training and service, provide evidence of impact they can report for annual, merit, and promotion and tenure reviews. For example, reviewers can indicate how they contributed to a process that led to measurable improvements in the journals' equity goals.
- 7) Invite women, make it clear if you welcome pitches, and make invitations and "negotiated publications" transparent. Not long ago open science enthusiast Brian Nosek

raised eyebrows when he tweeted “the rich-get-richer is a thing in academic publishing”(Nosek, 2019a), noting of his past 30 publications, 17 were “negotiated” or “solicited” defined as “advance discussion w/high likelihood of acceptance”(Nosek, 2019b). To the extent editors informally negotiate publications, they could do so more transparently and with an eye toward supporting women in producing work that is likely to be accepted on a flexible time line. If we can create a rich-get-richer system, we can also create a spread-the-wealth system. (See author note.)

- 8) Where possible, work with professional societies to offer post-COVID research grants for those most affected by lab, childcare, and school closures, online teaching demands, COVID-related caregiving and grief to buy out of courses to quickly ramp research back up.
- 9) Ask those who have more (literal and figurative) bandwidth to review more articles, carefully and fairly, and to provide more assistance helping women develop their papers, find an appropriate outlet, rework their paper into a publishable form to keep careers moving.
- 10) Keep asking women to serve on editorial boards, guest edit special issues, and other important work needed to advance in academia.

As Vincent-Lamarre, Sugimoto, & Larivière, V. (2020) wrote, “the pandemic will subside, but these inequities will not. A long-term commitment to equity in science will help us to not only survive this crisis, but to be stronger when we emerge.” We need everyone working together to build the infrastructure we need to build robust, inclusive science, including academic publishing.

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