

Women are underrepresented on the editorial boards of journals in environmental biology and natural resource management

Despite women earning similar numbers of graduate degrees as men in STEM disciplines, they are underrepresented in upper level positions in both academia and industry. Editorial board memberships are an important example of such positions; membership is both a professional honor in recognition of achievement and an opportunity for professional advancement. We surveyed 10 highly regarded journals in environmental biology, natural resource management, and plant sciences to quantify the number of women on their editorial boards and in positions of editorial leadership (i.e., Associate Editors and Editors-in-Chief) from 1985-2013. We found that during this time period only 16% of editorial board members were women, with more pronounced disparities in positions of editorial leadership. Although the trend was towards improvement over time, there was surprising variation between journals, including those with similar disciplinary foci. While demographic changes in academia may reduce these disparities over time, we argue journals should proactively strive for gender parity on their editorial boards. This will both increase the number of women afforded the opportunities and benefits that accompany board membership and increase the number of role models and potential mentors for early-career scientists and students.

1 **Women are underrepresented on the editorial boards of journals in environmental biology**
2 **and natural resource management**

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ABSTRACT

Despite women earning similar numbers of graduate degrees as men in STEM disciplines, they are underrepresented in upper level positions in both academia and industry. Editorial board memberships are an important example of such positions; membership is both a professional honor in recognition of achievement and an opportunity for professional advancement. We surveyed 10 highly regarded journals in environmental biology, natural resource management, and plant sciences to quantify the number of women on their editorial boards and in positions of editorial leadership (i.e., Associate Editors and Editors-in-Chief) from 1985-2013. We found that during this time period only 16% of editorial board members were women, with more pronounced disparities in positions of editorial leadership. Although the trend was towards improvement over time, there was surprising variation between journals, including those with similar disciplinary foci. While demographic changes in academia may reduce these disparities over time, we argue journals should proactively strive for gender parity on their editorial boards. This will both increase the number of women afforded the opportunities and benefits that accompany board membership and increase the number of role models and potential mentors for early-career scientists and students.

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INTRODUCTION

37 Despite women in the United States and Europe earning similar numbers of graduate

38 degrees as men do, they remain underrepresented in upper level positions in both academia and

39 industry in these regions (European Commission 2012; National Science Foundation 2004;

40 National Science Foundation 2012). Several mechanisms have been put forward to explain this

41 disparity, including biases against women in hiring, promotion, and offers of compensation, the

42 emphasis on productivity, journal placement, and citation rates as determinants of merit despite

43 evidence of gender bias influencing all three, inflexible or even hostile work environments, and a

44 lack of role models and mentors (reviewed in Budden et al. 2008; Lariviere et al. 2013; Leahey

45 2007; Long 2001; Moss-Racusin et al. 2012). In response, universities, funding agencies, and

46 other institutions have implemented strategies to address these issues, including making

47 opportunities for professional advancement more broadly available and actively seeking gender

48 diversity in leadership roles (Fox 2008). While these efforts have had some positive results,

49 much remains to be done to ensure women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

50 (STEM) disciplines are afforded the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

51 The editorial boards of scientific journals act as gatekeepers that help maintain the

52 scientific integrity and standards of a journal as well as identify emerging and innovative areas of

53 research (Addis & Villa 2003; Mauleon et al. 2013). An invitation to serve as a Subject Editor is

54 recognition that a scholar is respected in his or her discipline; it is also the path towards

55 leadership positions because Associate Editors and Editors-in-Chief are typically selected from

56 the Subject Editors. Serving on a board is also a means of advancing one's scholarship, both by

57 becoming aware of the latest advances in the field and gaining insights into the writing and

58 publication process. Finally, editorial boards are important professional networks – in serving on
59 a board one is able to develop relationships with reviewers, authors, and other editors (Addis &
60 Villa 2003; Pearson et al. 2006). Serving on a board is therefore both an honor and a means of
61 furthering one’s research and career.

62 Previous studies have quantified the gender composition of editorial boards in the social
63 sciences (Addis & Villa 2003; Green 1998; Stark et al. 1997), business administration and
64 management (Metz & Harzing 2012), and STEM fields such as information systems (Cabanac
65 2012) and medicine (Galley & Colvin 2013; Keiser, Utzinger & Singer 2003; Wilkes & Kravitz
66 1995). To our knowledge, however, no such efforts have been made in ecology, natural resource
67 management, plant sciences, or related disciplines (collectively referred to here as
68 “environmental biology”). We therefore used ten highly regarded journals in environmental
69 biology to address the following questions: 1) What proportion of editorial board members were
70 women between 1985-2013? 2) How did the representation of women on editorial boards
71 change over this time period? 3) How many women served in leadership positions, i.e., as
72 Editors-in-Chief or Associate Editors?

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METHODS

75 We selected for review 10 high profile environmental biology journals: *Annual Review of*
76 *Ecology, Evolution, and Systematics*, *Biotropica*, *Agronomy Journal*, *North American Journal of*
77 *Fisheries Management*, *American Journal of Botany*, *Conservation Biology*, *Biological*
78 *Conservation*, *Ecology*, *Journal of Ecology*, and *Journal of Tropical Ecology*. We chose these
79 journals because they are published by the primary professional organizations of which we (i.e.,
80 the authors) are members (e.g., *Biotropica*, *Conservation Biology*) or are alternative, non-society

81 outlets for similar research (e.g., *Journal of Tropical Ecology*, *Biological Conservation*). It was
82 not intended to be a random sample of journals or a subset of journals with similar impact
83 factors. Rather, they were chosen because they are the journals many graduate students in
84 environmental biology, natural resource management, and plant sciences, including the authors,
85 target to publish some of their thesis research.

86 Our analyses were based on the years 1985-2013. We chose 1985 as a starting point
87 because it is shortly after studies began demonstrating disparities in career advancement between
88 male and female scientists (reviewed in Long 2001; National Science Foundation 2003) but a
89 few years prior to major initiatives by the US National Science Foundation and others to rectify
90 these disparities (e.g., the 2001 initiation of the ADVANCE Program, National Science
91 Foundation 2014). As such, we expect our survey period to reflect potential shifts in editorial
92 board composition resulting from increased awareness of gender biases in STEM and the results
93 of efforts to rectify these biases. For each journal we selected the first issue published each year
94 and recorded the names, institutions, and editorial positions of all editorial board members. We
95 then used Internet searches, personal knowledge, and interviews of colleagues to determine the
96 gender of each editorial board member. Because of library licensing issues we were unable to obtain
97 data for *Journal of Tropical Ecology* for the years 1986-1989.

98 Journals often have different names for positions with similar editorial responsibilities,
99 these names frequently change over time, and editorial positions are frequently created or
100 eliminated. We therefore assigned editorial board members to the following categories based on
101 their responsibilities: (1) Editor-in-Chief (EIC). The EIC oversees the journal and is ultimately
102 responsible for editorial policy, standards, and practice, including appointing members of the
103 Editorial Board. Some journals (e.g., *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*) had co-

104 Editors-in-Chief; in such cases all were included in the total EIC count. (2) Associate Editors
105 (AE). The AE assists the EIC with their responsibilities and may take the lead on some aspects of
106 journal administration; in some cases they might oversee all submissions in a particular subject
107 area or from a geographic region. Not all journals have AEs, while those that do may vary in the
108 length of time they have had them. (3) Subject Editors (SE). The SEs, also commonly referred to
109 as Handling Editors, oversee the process of manuscript review. For some journals they make
110 final decisions on manuscripts after considering reviewer feedback (e.g., *Ecology*) while for
111 others they provide recommendations based on which EICs or AEs make final decisions (e.g.,
112 *Biotropica*). They also provide formal or informal feedback to the EICs/AEs on journal policy
113 and administration. They are referred to collectively by a variety of titles, including Board of
114 Editors (*Ecology*, *Biological Conservation*) and the Editorial Committee (*Annual Review of*
115 *Ecology, Evolution, and Systematic*, *American Journal of Botany*). Note that two journals – the
116 *American Journal of Botany* and *North American Journal of Fisheries Management* – used the
117 title of “Associate Editor” for members of their Editorial Board with the responsibilities of SEs;
118 we therefore included them in this category in our analyses. (4) Special Editors. Many journals
119 have someone tasked with organizing special sections, reviewing data archives, soliciting
120 reviews of recently published books of interest to the journal’s readers, etc. (e.g., Biological
121 Florida Editors for the *Journal of Ecology*; Concept Section, Data Archive, Special Features, and
122 Invited Papers Editors for *Ecology*).

123 We conducted our analyses using only EICs, AEs, and SEs, and throughout our
124 manuscript and analyses we use the term ‘Editorial Board’ to refer to the group collectively
125 made up of these three categories. Special Editors were not included in our analyses unless they
126 were also identified as EICs, AEs, or SEs because very few journals had these positions and they

127 rarely existed for the entire survey period. We also excluded from our analyses production staff
128 (e.g., production editors, managing editors, editorial assistants) and the *American Journal of*
129 *Botany*'s "Section Representatives", which were only present in our survey in 1985 and whose
130 primary function was to help identify journal priorities and suggest reviewers if asked – they did
131 not make editorial decisions on individual manuscripts (Dr. Judith E. Skog, pers. comm., 2014).

133 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

134 We found that from 1985-2013 only 16% of editorial board members were women (N =
135 332 of 2065, Fig. 1A). The disparity also extends to leadership positions: since 1985 only 14% of
136 Associate Editors (N = 18 of 125, Fig. 1B) and 12% of the Editors-in-Chief of our focal journals
137 were women (N = 7 of 59, Fig. 1C). Not surprisingly, the proportions of male and female editors
138 were significantly different for all of groups of Editors (proportion tests with continuity
139 corrections, null probability = 0.5, SE: $\chi^2 = 946.44$, df = 1, p <0.0001; AE: $\chi^2 = 61.952$, df = 1,
140 p <0.0001; EIC: $\chi^2 = 32.81$, df = 1, p <0.0001).

141 While there was a general increase in the representation of women on editorial boards
142 over time, for most journals the percentage of women on the board rarely exceeded 20% (Fig. 2).
143 Nevertheless, there was notable variation among journals in the representation of gender on their
144 editorial boards during the time period surveyed. For several journals, the proportion of women
145 editors increased from zero in the mid-1980's to ~40% by 2013 (e.g., *Biotropica*, *American*
146 *Journal of Botany*, *Conservation Biology*). Others, however, had consistently few women on
147 their boards throughout the period surveyed (e.g., *Agronomy Journal*, *North American Journal of*
148 *Fisheries Management*, *Biological Conservation*). A similar pattern of underrepresentation was
149 observed for Associate Editors and Editors-in-Chief. While most journals had female Associate

150 Editors at some point during the period surveyed, only 5 of the 10 journals we reviewed had ever
151 had a woman as Editor-in-Chief (Fig. 3). Of these, only one – the *North American Journal of*
152 *Fisheries Management* – had multiple women serve as EICs.

153 We recognize that determining the extent of gender bias in the composition of editorial
154 boards in environmental biology will require evaluating many more journals from multiple
155 subfields. However, the results of similar surveys in fields ranging from economics to
156 anthropology have found disparities comparable to those we document (Addis & Villa 2003;
157 Cabanac 2012; Galley & Colvin 2013; Green 1998; Keiser, Utzinger & Singer 2003; Metz &
158 Harzing 2012). Assuming the results for the journals we reviewed are representative of others in
159 environmental biology, our observations suggest two questions to be addressed by this scientific
160 community. First, why are women underrepresented on editorial boards and in positions of
161 editorial leadership? Second, for what gender composition on editorial boards should journals
162 strive?

163 While our study was not designed to elucidate why women are underrepresented on
164 editorial boards, potential mechanisms include many of the same ones invoked to explain why
165 women are lacking in leadership positions in other spheres of academia (Fox 2008; Long 2001).
166 It may also be that men continue to be more visible and hence more likely to be identified as
167 potential board members because they have greater productivity, have more first- or last-authors
168 of papers (West et al. 2013), and tend to be “citation elites” (sensu Parker, Allesina & Lortie
169 2013; Parker, Lortie & Allesina 2010). It may be that using these metrics to screen for editors
170 might eventually – albeit slowly – result in increased numbers of women on editorial boards.
171 This is because gender-based disparities in rates of publication (West et al. 2013) and citation
172 (Borsuk et al. 2009) are diminishing (but see Lariviere et al. 2013), although this does not appear

173 to be the case for all disciplines (West et al. 2013). More difficult to overcome might be the
174 reliance on using the social and research networks of (mostly male) editorial board members to
175 identify potential new editors (Addis & Villa 2003), since women scientists are frequently
176 excluded from such networks or on their periphery (Fox 2008). This is where proactive
177 measures, including the promotion of women to positions of editorial leadership, may have the
178 greatest impact (Galley & Colvin 2013). Indeed, at least one study has found that having a
179 female Editor-in-Chief is correlated with a greater proportion of women on editorial boards
180 (Mauleon et al. 2013).

181 For what gender composition on editorial boards should journals in environmental
182 biology strive? We propose they should proactively seek gender parity, rather than simply mirror
183 the proportion of women earning doctoral degrees in a specialization, conducting research in
184 particular disciplines, or who are members of academic societies – numbers which, in contrast to
185 other fields (e.g., Morton & Sonnad 2007), we were surprised to find are extremely difficult to
186 ascertain for environmental biology. Some might argue that the relatively lower number of
187 female senior scholars in certain fields (e.g., agronomy) might make parity a challenge.
188 However, it is important to emphasize that the issue is not whether there is parity in the number
189 of women earning PhDs, but whether there are sufficient qualified women worldwide to
190 comprise half an editorial board, which is a much smaller number (mean number of board
191 members in 2012 = 56 ± 41.3 SD, range = 9-127). It is difficult to argue that there are not, given
192 the global reach of academic societies (Carroll 2014), the internationalization of research
193 programs (Stocks et al. 2008), increases in research productivity in developing countries
194 (Holmgren & Schnitzer 2004), and the time elapsed since issues of gender & STEM came to the
195 fore (though we concede that for highly specialized or national journals parity may be a greater

196 challenge). We argue that Editors must work harder to proactively identify these potential board
197 members – the fact that journals with similar disciplinary foci can have very different
198 representation (e.g., *Biological Conservation* and *Conservation Biology*, *Biotropica* and *Journal*
199 *of Tropical Ecology*) suggests increasing the proportion of women on editorial boards can be
200 matter of policy and not pool size.

201 Attempts by journals to strive for gender parity would greatly increase the number of women
202 afforded the opportunities and benefits that accompany board membership, as well as increase
203 the number of female role models and mentors for early-career scientists and students seeking
204 guidance on scientific publishing. When coupled with initiatives such as double-blind reviewing
205 (Budden et al. 2008) and efforts to explore factors that influence our perceptions of ‘merit’
206 (Lortie et al. 2007), editorial board parity could ultimately help reduce the pervasive and
207 insidious “gender productivity puzzle” first identified over thirty years ago (Cole & Zuckerman
208 1984). Finally, a more inclusive editorial board might bring unanticipated benefits to the journal
209 itself, including attracting a broader diversity of research topics, contributors, and approaches
210 (Stegmaier, Palmer & van Assendelft 2011). All of this could greatly increase a journal’s impact
211 via shaping both the discipline and the scientific workforce advancing it.

212

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218 used in this paper are available at the Dryad Digital Repository (accession number ---- -).

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FIGURE LEGENDS

221 **Fig. 1.** The proportion of men and women who served as (A) Subject Editors, (B) Associate
222 Editors, and (C) Editors-in-Chief of 10 environmental biology journals from 1985-2013.

223

224 **Fig. 2.** Change in the percentage of women on 10 Editorial Boards from 1985-2013. Editorial
225 boards comprise Editors-in-Chief, Associate Editors, and Subject Editors.

226

227 **Fig. 3.** Total number of men and women who served as (A) Editors-in-Chief (B) Associate
228 Editors or (C) Subject Editors of 10 environmental biology journals from 1985-2013. Note that
229 we categorized the Associate Editors of the *American Journal of Botany* and *North American*
230 *Journal of Fisheries Management* as Subject Editors given their responsibilities, and hence are
231 depicted with that category.

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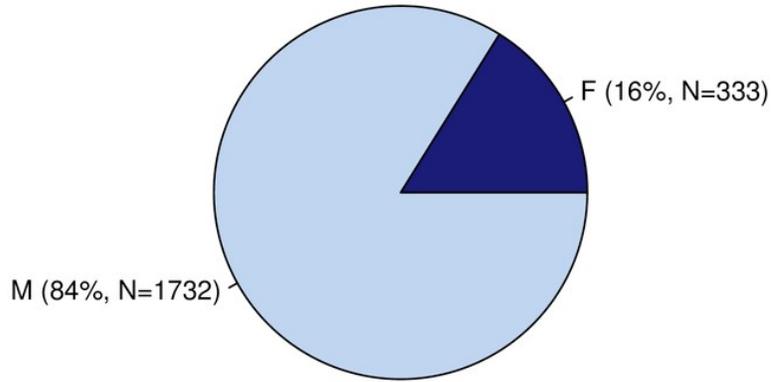
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313

Figure 1

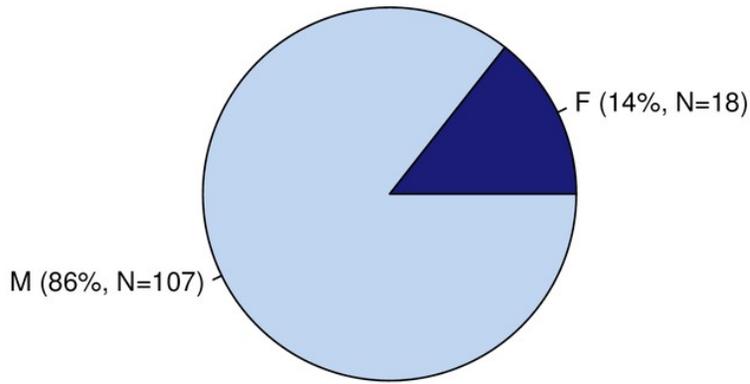
The proportion of men and women who served as Subject Editors, Associate Editors, and Editors-in-Chief.

Figure 1. Gender Representation on 10 editorial boards in environmental biology. . The proportion of men and women who served as (A) Subject Editors, (B) Associate Editors, and (C) Editors-in-Chief of 10 environmental biology journals from 1985-2013.

(A) Subject Editors



(B) Associate Editors



(C) Editors-in-Chief

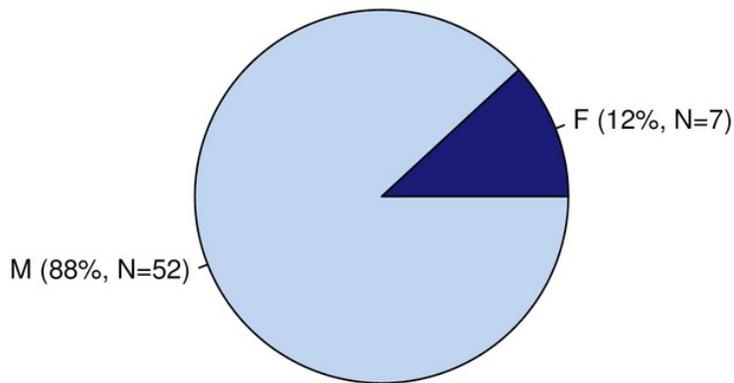


Figure 2

Percentage of women on 10 editorial boards from 1985-2013.

Figure 2. Change in the percentage of women on 10 Editorial Boards from 1985-2013.

Editorial boards comprise Editors-in-Chief, Associate Editors, and Subject Editors.

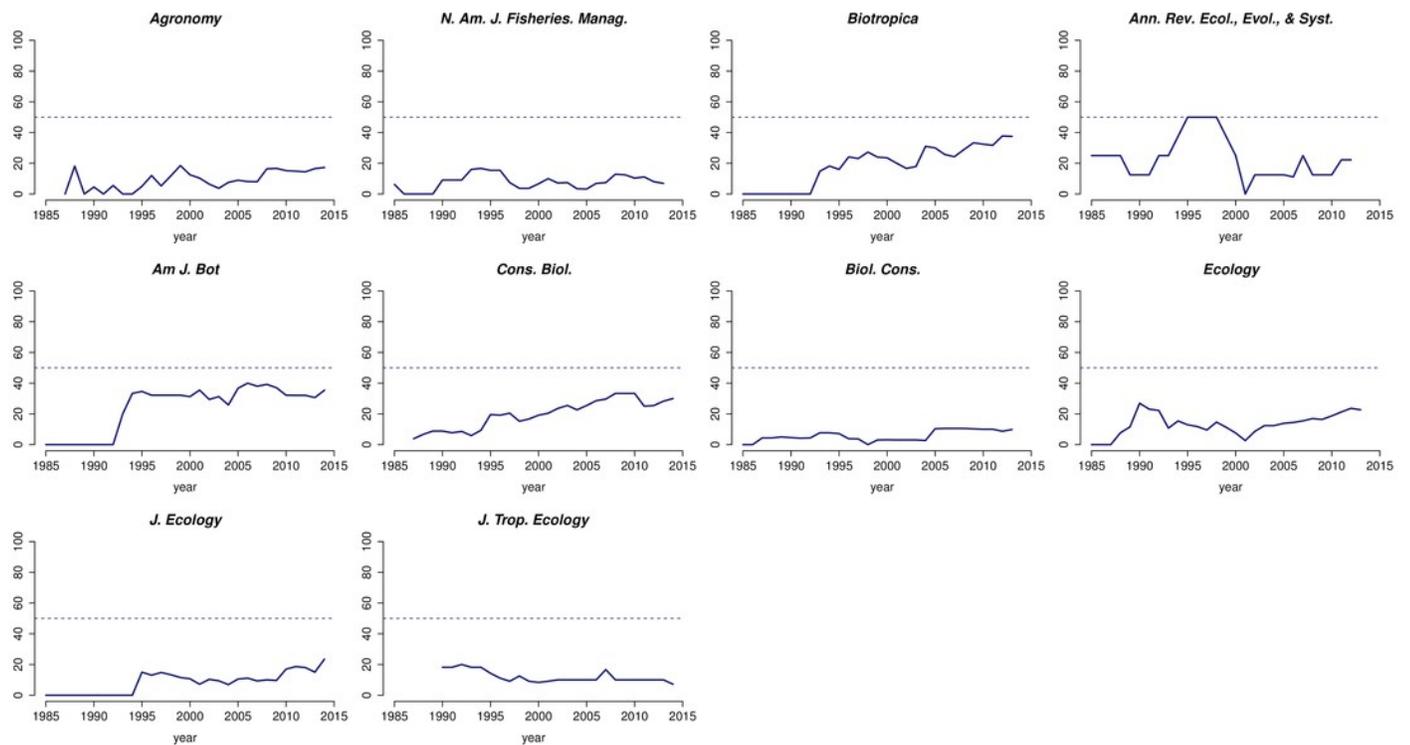


Figure 3

Number of men and women who served as Editors-in-Chief, Associate Editors, or Subject Editors of 10 environmental biology journals.

Figure 3. Total number of men and women who served as (A) Editors-in-Chief (B) Associate Editors or (C) Subject Editors of 10 environmental biology journals. Data are from from 1985-2013. Note that we categorized the Associate Editors of the *American Journal of Botany* and *North American Journal of Fisheries Management* as Subject Editors given their responsibilities, and hence are depicted with that category.[b]

