Equality, diversity, and inclusion: policy statement

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion at the *Journal of Sports Sciences*

The Editor-in-Chief and the Executive Editors at the *Journal of Sports Sciences* Editorial Board[1] all identify as male and white[2,3]. Although the journal's Associate Editors and the Editorial Advisory Board are more diverse, it is cold comfort that the *Journal of Sports Sciences* is not alone in having very few senior editors who identify as female or people of colour[4] (Martínez-Rosales et al., 2021). The lack of diversity in gender and ethnicity on editorial boards has been an issue for a long time across many fields of study (Alkhawtani et al., 2021; Metz & Harzing, 2009, 2012; Van Miegroet et al., 2019) and the historic under-representation of women in public office (Uberoi et al., 2021) and company boardrooms (Davies, 2011) has not evaded academia. Yet, it is argued that the relationship between women and leadership is not simply one of under-representation, but of male dominance (patriarchy), with sport one of the key domains for the confirmation of masculinity (Messner, 2007; Ryan & Dickson, 2018). Although we do not have data on editorial board ethnicity for our field of science, it is likely that people of colour are equally, if not more, under-represented at this level (Ford et al., 2017).

Although the under-representation of women is clearly a multifactorial problem (Hardcastle et al., 2019), we can start to understand how the problem may develop in sport and exercise science by examining the gender diversity of students entering academic programmes across countries and continents. In the UK for example, where the *Journal of Sports Sciences* is published, 48.7% of the adult population report to be female[5] (Office for National Statistics, 2020), whereas the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency reports that 32% of those studying undergraduate sport and exercise science in the 2019/20 academic year were female (13,840 ♀ vs 28,885 ♂) (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-b). The gender imbalance in sport and exercise science is in contrast to that observed across all higher education courses in the UK, where 57% of students are female (1.4M ♀ vs 1.1M ♂) (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-b). Moreover, the imbalance doesn't appear to have shifted much over time, with females accounting for 29% of undergraduate sport and exercise science students in the 2014/15 academic year (13,875 ♀ vs 33,325 ♂) (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-c). The number of females doing a postgraduate research or taught degree in sport and exercise science in 2019/20 was 1755, representing 33% of all postgraduate sport and exercise science students (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-b) (1755 ♀ vs 3560 ♂). So, the figures do not differ markedly relative to the proportion studying at undergraduate level.

As far as academic staff working in sport and exercise science departments, in the UK, 37% are female (1125 ♀vs 1915 ♂) (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-d). In contrast, the number of female academics across all fields of higher education in the UK in 2019/20 was 104,305, representing 47% of all faculty, which is very close to the proportion of female adults in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-e). However, the percentage of female academics at 'senior' level drops to 39%, and then further to 28% at professorial level. Collectively, these data suggest two things: (1) the gender imbalance in sport and exercise science is evident in undergraduate sport and exercise science programmes; and (2) this imbalance creates a smaller cohort of potential female sport and exercise science academics, particularly at senior level from whom editorial positions are normally filled. Unfortunately, data on ethnicity are not as accessible as those for gender. It is therefore difficult to quantify if sport and exercise science journals and/or student cohorts lack

[1] The Editorial Board is comprised of the Editor-in-Chief and five Executive Editors.

[2] As determined by self-report.

[3] The capitalisation of 'Black' is now widely accepted, but the capitalisation of 'white' is contested (Appiah, 2020). We have therefore adopted the Associated Press Stylebook (55th edition) recommendation to not capitalise 'white' (Bauder, 2020).

[4] The use of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) is a contested term. We use 'people of colour', (Black British Academics, n.d.), 'ethnicity', and 'Black', which are often the terms reported in United Kingdom government official reports.

[5] 'Female' is the term used by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Office for National Statistics.

ethnic diversity. Data across all fields of higher education show that about 25% of students are people of colour (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-a), yet fewer than 1% of professors are Black (Higher Education Statistics Agency, n.d.-e), the latter constituting a lower proportion of Black academic staff (3.5%) compared to white professors as a proportion of white academic staff (11.9%) (Joice & Tetlow, 2020). It is therefore highly likely that people of colour are under-represented on editorial boards (Ford et al., 2017). Moreover, the interaction of gender and ethnicity (Ryan & Dickson, 2018) creates an even greater barrier for women of colour.

Although women and people of colour are under-represented at the higher levels of academia and on editorial boards, why does this matter? There are two main reasons. First, although contested, it is a moral issue (Köllen et al., 2018). Second, and as outlined by Fine et al. (2020) in relation to gender diversity, ensuring equal access to leadership positions "makes an important contribution to reducing the broader political, sociocultural, and material disadvantages women face, in part by giving women greater influence in high-level decision-making". Although an argument for gender and/or ethnic diversity on sociocultural grounds is important, it is also argued that diversity enhances the quality of scientific output (Freeman & Huang, 2015; Nielsen et al., 2017).

So, as members of the Editorial Board what can we do to increase the diversity of editors at the *Journal of Sports Sciences*? As a first step, the Editorial Board and wider Associate Editor group acknowledge the equality, diversity, and inclusion problems we face in science and academia. Yet acknowledgement is not enough; action is needed (Prasad, 2021). To assist us, there are good examples of how other academic journals are tackling equality, diversity and inclusion (Bair et al., 2021b; Crook et al., 2019; Hodin & Pawlik, 2020), including the development of diversity statements (Bair et al., 2021a). In the short-term, we make a commitment to monitor equality, diversity, and inclusion issues on an annual basis and we have taken immediate steps to make our Editorial Advisory Board more diverse. This action has increased the proportion of women on the Editorial Advisory Board from 22% to 33%. We will continue to diversify by seeking out more people of colour and those from developing regions[6] to act as Editorial Advisory Board members. Although we need to do more to encourage women and people of colour to apply for senior editorial positions, encouragement alone might not be enough. We need to remove the systematic barriers placed in front of women and people of colour that prevent them from progressing into leadership roles (Prasad, 2021). Moreover, leadership roles tend to enforce a 'male model of a worker', who "is expected to be continually available, have no outside caring responsibilities and able to prioritise work above all else" (Acker, 2006, 2009). As such, we need to examine the fundamental working practices associated with the editorial role and whether these need to change. As has now become common in academia, we should be transparent with our recruitment practices, including making selection criteria explicit and public, using gender neutral language, and convening diverse interview panels (The University of Sheffield, 2018; University of Exeter, n.d.). Over the medium term we need to encourage more women and people of colour to engage in mentoring and leadership programmes (Carter-Sowell et al., 2019; Van Miegroet et al., 2019), as these appear to have a positive effect on securing leadership roles and enhancing career progression. At the *Journal of Sports Sciences*, we currently do not have a formal internal mentoring scheme, and so we will look to enact such a scheme with immediate effect. This action includes a commitment to engage with the principles of the Athena Swan Charter (*Athena Swan Charter*, n.d.). A medium-term goal is to ensure that the Editorial Board, wider Associate Editor roles and the Editorial Advisory Board should at least reflect the current diversity among sport and exercise science academics. This would mean ensuring that some of our Executive Editor roles are taken up by women and people of colour and that women and people of colour are better represented[7]. Over the long-term more work is required on education programmes so that girls and children of colour have appropriate role models (González-Pérez et al., 2020), that they see science and a scientific career as more relevant to their lives, and that science matches with their own self-perception (British Science Association, 2020; Kang et al., 2019). These

[6] This is the term used by the United Nations (United Nations, n.d.).

[7] 20% (4/20) of our current Associate Editors are female.

long-term solutions will require the involvement of parents/carers (Kang et al., 2019; Wiese & Freund, 2011), physical education and science teachers (Lamb et al., 2018; Nicaise et al., 2007), university sport and exercise science departments (González-Pérez et al., 2020), and professional associations (Coe et al., 2019).

At the *Journal of Sports Sciences,* we are aware that issues related to equality, diversity, and inclusion will continue to impose barriers on many of our colleagues, and for some time. However, we are determined to tackle these issues where we can because we believe they are important, not only for women and people of colour, but for sport and exercise science as a discipline. With this editorial, we make a commitment to increase the diversity of our editors, and to monitor progress on an annual basis. We all have important roles to play in these varied solutions to ensuring an equal, diverse, and inclusive culture within sport and exercise science.

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