

The status quo at scientific meetings: findings and recommendations

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Gender distribution at conference:

Why do we care?

Important for
visibility of your science

Equity

Role models for early
career women

What are the metrics by which we evaluate equity?

Gender distribution of:

Attendees at different career stages

Invited talks

Organizers

Lengths of talks

Role in conference

Lunar Science
Conference,
~1970

What do studies show us?

Most research in biological/life sciences where the fields are quickly approaching parity

Apparent bias in selection of speaking roles

Women in control results in more women speakers

Women are making choices that impact their visibility

Schroeder et al, 2013

European Society for
Evolutionary Biology

Women decline invitations at
higher rate than men

Number of invitations for women
smaller than the gender
distribution of early-mid career
scientists, but similar to that of
senior scientists and authors of
high-impact journal articles

Jones et al, 2014 analysis of length of talks at the Australian Evolution Society

- Women and men request talks over posters at the same rate
- Women more liked to request short talks (5 minute) than longer talks (12 minutes)

Ford et al, 2018 Speaking opportunities at AGU Fall meeting

- Women request posters more than men
- Male conveners allocate invited abstracts and oral presentations to women less often

Dardelis and Drew (2016) Society of Conservation Biology and American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists

Casadevall and Handelsman (2014)
American Society of Microbiology

- For each additional female organizer of the conference, there is an average increase of ~80% in female speakers
- But no increase in the number of women speakers over 15 years

Kalejta and Palmenberg (2017) American Society of Virology Annual meeting

Selection of first time participants for speaking slots and presence of a women on the speaker selection committee increases women speakers

Kappel and Thompson (2014): Gordon and Chapman Conferences

- Women are better represented as discussion leaders than of invited speakers
- The ratio is worse in conferences where overall representation of women is small (i.e. physical oceanography vs. biological oceanography)

Consequences of the status quo

- High-quality science by women has low exposure when women opt for or are assigned lower visibility presentations and roles or publish in lower impact journals
- Less exposure of the younger women to female role models when women are not represented in high profile speaking roles
- Younger participants have a harder time getting visibility when not offered speaking roles

Recommendations

Find ways to increase acceptance of invited talks by women
(or invite more women)

Encourage women to take advantage of longer talks for more
visibility

Perform gender blind speaking assignments

More women should take on conference organization:

Data about bias in gender distributions of speaking roles
should be made widely available

A renewed effort in diversifying scientific societies

Conference organization should begin with a plan for
avoiding bias

Disruptive recommendations

When you notice a biased agenda, tell the organizers to change the agenda

If you notice after the fact, tell the organizers anyway

Develop metrics for equity and insist that they be used in conference organization

But what about culture?

How do you learn about conference culture?

Who speaks and when and for how long?

Questions to help or to hurt?

How to network when you are different?