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**DISCUSSION DOCUMENT:  
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY**

# DISCUSSION

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

As a membership organisation with a mandate to provide education and guidance on the continuum of ethical issues between research ethics and publication ethics, **COPE** is committed to providing a context to explore and understand issues related to the protection and promotion of the scholarly record in publishing. Recently, there have been ideological and political disputes within scholarly disciplines and interdisciplinary fields about the content of knowledge claims and the legitimacy of some types of research and its dissemination. There have also been epistemological critiques of research about what counts as excellence and knowledge in scholarly peer review and about the nature of expertise. As such, these topics are central to **COPE's** commitment to publication ethics.

This is a discussion paper. As with all **COPE** discussion papers, it is not a definitive perspective on the topic but rather a discussion of themes and issues at this point in time. **COPE** frequently produces topical discussion documents, in some cases prior to framing more formal policy or guidance on a topic. These are complex issues with various opinions about appropriate solutions and actions. Consequently, this is a discussion document rather than prescriptive guidance with respect to addressing the issues. Also, as with all discussion topics on complex and cross disciplinary matters, it is consequently limited in scope.

In crafting this discussion document, **COPE** acknowledges its own challenge to be representative of all groups. We are actively committed to reflecting the diversity of disciplines, interdisciplinary fields, gender diversity, geographic diversity, linguistic and cultural diversity, and diverse populations of groups identified in this document among our Council and Trustee Board, and have specifically identified diversity in seeking new Council and Trustee Board members. We are also examining our documents to ensure that they are written in an inclusive manner. **COPE** understands the timely nature of revision in response to shifts within scholarly discourse and as such regularly reviews and revises various iterations of discussion documents and guidance. We welcome further comments; please send your feedback to **Natalie Ridgeway, Executive Officer** [cope\\_execofficer@publicationethics.org](mailto:cope_execofficer@publicationethics.org)

Please note that this is just one of the many activities that **COPE** will undertake on an ongoing basis on topics related to diversity, equity and inclusivity (DEI). This year, **COPE** established a DEI subcommittee which will engage our organisation in various relevant activities. **COPE** has also had a working committee on the arts, humanities and social sciences for some years to address the breadth and scope of publication ethics among a broad range of disciplines. In undertaking current and future activities, **COPE** acknowledges the centrality of diversity and inclusivity to publication ethics. These committees are only a small representation of the cross organisational commitment to diversity and inclusivity in all of its various aspects.

## 1. Background

Over the past few decades, there has been increased attention given in scholarly research and publications to considerations of discrimination or bias against classes or groups of persons as the subjects of research, the authors of research or the topic of bias in research. In the history of the sociology and political study of science, claims of biased research, particularly on sexist or racist grounds, have existed since at least the 19th century. During the 1970s and 1980s, new interdisciplinary fields emerged in academia, such as, women's studies, African American studies, disability management studies, rural and urban studies, feminist studies, gender studies, native studies, indigenous studies and queer studies. These were established at mainstream universities as disciplines or interdisciplinary fields to examine empirical, historical, anthropological, psychological, biological, theoretical or philosophical claims about the nature and rights of various groups.<sup>1</sup> In this vein, philosophers of science, like Sandra Harding (1988), argued that science was inherently biased. This type of critique is based on a long history of intellectual disputes about fact/value distinctions in science and philosophy. During this same period, many scholarly journals and learned societies were also established to publish the new scholarship in these emerging disciplines.

It should be noted that much more research (and publication) has been conducted and published on bias and discrimination in research in publishing concerning the topics of “women” and “race” (predominantly Black persons in the United States) than other disenfranchised groups. This is primarily based on feminist scholarship for the 45+ recent years which, since the second wave of the feminist movement, has focused on sexism and bias in academic scholarship. Similarly, the political activism on the part of Black people since the 1960s has resulted in the same type of critique of scholarship as is firmly established in feminist scholarship but on the grounds of race. Consequently, more references in this discussion paper include studies on these subjects and of members of these groups as objects of research. Where other groups are addressed in the literature, the findings are listed and discussed. This includes the more contemporary literature which focuses on indigenous peoples, post-colonialism, and ableism, and its impact on persons with disabilities and gender issues, which are distinct and differentiated from purely feminist critiques or critiques of racism. It also includes populations who are considered vulnerable. Consequently, these topics will also be discussed here.

Additionally, it should be noted that intersectionality with respect to identified groups is assumed. Since the early days in the second wave of feminism, Black feminist scholars initially identified the phenomenon of intersectionality as involving a complex set of variables that are part of the nature of multiple forms of discrimination against persons within and across discriminated persons. This is now an accepted term for discrimination that crosses different sources of bias.

<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that political action by both women's groups and the political collective action of Black people predates the establishment of these new disciplines in university but this paper is focused on scholarly research and publication.

Further, this discussion concerns publication ethics. But, as is frequently noted by COPE and others, there is a continuum between research ethics and publication ethics so both will be referenced here where relevant. Where the scope is broader, it is made with reference to bias and discrimination in the academy more generally, with specific reference to grants, research productivity and the unconscious bias underlying unquestioned and questionable assumptions, for example, with ableism.

Having clarified the scope, this document will attempt to accomplish five goals:

1. identification of subjects of discrimination in scholarly research;
2. representational issues related to workforce discrimination and marginalisation in employment;
3. impact of discriminatory practices in peer review and editorial decision making;
4. marginalisation of topics of research study, including through citation lexicons and algorithmics; and
5. initial recommendations for the promotion of social justice and equality within scholarly publishing.

This discussion will proceed via exemplars of discrimination. To address the subjects in all of their complexity requires separate attention to each and all identified groups or class of persons. This is beyond the scope of this document.

## 2. Introduction

Squazzoni *et al* (2021) introduced their recent article on peer review and gender bias as follows:

“The academic publishing system shows a systemic underrepresentation of women as authors, referees, and editors (1). This underrepresentation is persistent (2, 3) and well documented in various fields of research (4-6).”

This is one of the many different forms of discrimination that will be discussed in this document.

Anyone who has studied the nature of discrimination knows that there is both a laudatory and prejudicial meaning to the word. As a laudatory term, discrimination is often treated as a synonym for discernment. Discernment here is attributed to education, experience and expertise in judgment and is frequently encountered in the field of aesthetics, for example, where the discerning expert may comparatively evaluate two interpretations of a particular piece of classical music, performed by two different classically trained musicians and find one version superior to the other.

With prejudicial discrimination, irrelevant, arbitrary, biased and unjust variables or criteria are used to make judgments about competencies. Such discrimination can be consciously or unconsciously determinative in decision making, and as the grounds of unjust discrimination are articulated, both categories will be identified. Also, these questions will be posed: “What happens when so-called discernment and expertise hides evidence of bias and prejudice in evaluating the quality of someone’s research?” “Is expertise and judicious evaluation subject to prejudice, bias or ignorance about erudition in particular fields?” These questions are related primarily to the notion of unconscious bias where unquestioned assumptions may lead to prejudice in evaluating the quality of certain types of research and research questions.

The word “discrimination” is chosen here in favour of its synonym “bias” because of its association with harm. Members of groups who are unfairly and prejudicially discriminated against are harmed. Discrimination, like bias, is not always consciously done or done with malevolent intent but the harm remains none the less. Further, if our bias or discrimination results in our misrepresenting the facts or being unable to evaluate a different perspective on an empirical or philosophical question fairly, then knowledge is harmed and scholarship is harmed as well, in the sense of true or false claims or in terms of research procedures being misrepresented.

With respect to editing, peer review and publishing, the scholarly community values editorial autonomy and independence and puts its trust in the integrity and commitment of learned colleagues to peer review objectively with legitimate expertise, and for editors to publish what is true and well substantiated knowledge that fosters learning, growth and development. However, the justification for editorial autonomy and independence is not self-certifying but requires rational justification. If bias or unjustified prejudice creeps into peer review or editorial decision making, that is not rigorous and does not reflect best practice in the pursuit or dissemination of knowledge. Further, when an individual’s unconscious bias evolves into institutional practices that perpetuate that bias, change becomes more difficult.

In the discussion which follows, based on the five categories identified above, categories of potential or actual discrimination will be discussed as well as what counts as expertise in editorial leadership and quality peer review of particular topics.

### 3. Identification of subjects of discrimination in scholarly research

Discrimination against particular populations of persons has long been identified in the human rights and social justice literature. When prejudice and discrimination take place, people who are identified as belonging to one or more of the categories listed here are treated as “lesser than” in terms of their human rights. Discrimination occurs when it is assumed that members of the group are less intelligent as a group or less worthy by virtue of membership in the group. One of the historical artefacts of thinking women were less intelligent or rational than men was denying them access to higher education or to the right to vote. Newman (1985) discusses much of the literature on sex dimorphism and discrimination from 1870 to 1915, where the popular science of the period was used as justification for denying women access to higher education or the vote. Similarly, denying enfranchisement to the right to vote to members of a race simply because they are members of that race is harmful prejudicial discrimination. The Eugenics movement of the early 20th century was predicated on the attempt to force sterilisation on persons who were deemed inferior based on, for example, poverty, intelligence, social class or race. The Eugenics movement and governments were also prejudicial in the consideration of the rights of persons with disability, including their rights to marriage and reproduction. (See the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, in entrenching those rights as well as the right to work within the covenant).

It should be noted that these identifiers are social constructs rather than factual scientifically based descriptors of real and meaningful distinctions. Here is just one example of how social constructs identify persons. The distinction between persons with disabilities versus disabled persons is an important distinction in scope. The first identifies persons, one aspect of which is a diagnosis of disability, while the other describes the totality of the person as disabled.

In the realm of publication ethics, there are numerous ways in which membership, according to the terminology identified below, may impact best practices in the scholarly products of research. This will be explored under goals 2, 3, and 4 in this discussion. This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Further, there are many disputes about terminology (eg, some people consider Aboriginal the most inclusive term while others believe it should be Indigenous. Native Americans or North American Indians are still used in the United States, while Canada speaks of First Nations, Metis, Inuit, Innu, etc, when referring to indigenous communities. There are also various further names and titles for indigenous peoples around the world (eg, Saami Peoples, Sami Peoples, Ainu Peoples).

### 3.1 Categories of discrimination

Among these categories of discrimination are the following groups and/or categories of classification:

- Sex/gender identity/LGBTQ2S+
- Race
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Visible minority
- Immigrant minority
- Ability or differently abled
- Disease (including stigmatising diseases)
- Socioeconomic status
- Literacy and numeracy (lack of)
- Geography
- Health (and Illness)
- Religion
- Language and/or culture
- First Nations
- Indigenous people
- De-colonised people (used to refer to indigenous people and other original citizens of countries which were colonised during exploration and settlement by European explorers and their rulers)
- Vulnerable populations (particularly when considered as subjects or participants in research. Vulnerabilities can be based or transitory or more permanent status). Recently, there has been some movement not to use the term vulnerable as it is deemed discriminatory in itself.

Clearly these categories are not mutually exclusive, and an individual may be a member of more than one category. As previously noted, the term used in the literature for these multiple forms of discrimination is intersectionality, which is important to be identified and examined. As Henrickson *et al* (2020) state, “Intersectionality, a theoretical framework that emerged from Black feminist writers, refers to the complex ways different aspects of identity and oppression work simultaneously to shape individuals’ lived experience...and can allow for these lived realities to become known...”

When editors choose peer reviewers who they believe to have the appropriate scope of knowledge, it is important to note that it is imperative for sound and good peer review that editors are fully knowledgeable of the impact of the lack of knowledge or prejudicial attitudes of the reviewers. For example, if the editor and reviewer believe that indigenous people are seriously damaged because of the impact, both collective and individual, of reservations and forced institutional residential schooling by the state, they may believe that particular positions on social and public policy are scientifically warranted by data that confirms the interpretation of indigenous people as damaged. An alternative body of research that looks at populations in terms of human rights and socioeconomic status for indigenous persons might well be rejected due to the preconceived framework of interpretation of the editor and the reviewers, despite the value of the article in question. This implies a rethinking of the notion of expertise and knowledge in a field. In countries with indigenous “First Nations” around the world, scholars are attempting to reframe the western vision of the history of exploration and settlement of the relevant nation states which were previously described only from the received perspective of the colonising countries.

This theme will be further discussed at a later point in the paper.

#### 4. Representational issues related to workforce discrimination and marginalisation in employment in publishing

Research by Diversity in Publishing (2019) and Global Voices for Workplace Equity (2018) both describe the demographics of publishing staff at a non-senior management level as overwhelmingly white, heterosexual and able bodied. According to the Diversity in Publishing study, university presses are 81% white, 65% cis women, 79% heterosexual and 88% non-disabled.

The data from the Global Voices for Workplace Equity similarly show that the field of the publishing industry is 76% female, 81% white and 83% heterosexual. “Yet men are nearly twice as likely to be in senior and executive management roles, roles for which our study found no representation from respondents identifying as black.”

In many countries where women have access to university, they represent the majority of undergraduate students and, particularly in democratic nation states, women also are in the majority of some professional programmes (UNESCO Gender in Education Gap). However, women have yet to achieve pay equity.

As Economist Bourguignon (2015) notes,

“In most countries, education differentials between men and women have virtually disappeared and, with a higher participation of women in the labor force, job experience has also equalized. The remaining wage differences are thus a result of either discrimination, in a strict sense, women being paid less for exactly the same work, or remaining differences in non-observed characteristics of salaried employees.”

Thus, the workforce employees in academic publishing seem not to represent opportunities for the promotion of women to higher paying leadership roles while being seriously overrepresented at lower levels by white, cis women who are by majority, heterosexual and non-disabled. There is a serious gap according to these studies for equitable representation, for persons of colour, persons with disabilities, or persons of different gender identity. Further, data from both the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation note that while 80% of the over 1 billion (sometimes cited as 1.5 billion) people who have disabilities in the world are of working age, persons who are disabled are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than others (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, disability, 2020). The report of the UK Publishing Association (Diversity Survey of the Publishing Workforce 2020) provides more positive UK data on women’s representation in leadership roles in publishing, and also provides more specificity with respect to other minority groups. Briefly, the findings are:

- **Over half of executive leadership and senior management positions are women (52% and 55%, respectively)**
- **Black, Asian and minority groups**
  - 13% of which the following self-identify as:
    - 3% Black
    - 6% Asian
    - 3% mixed ethnicity
    - 1% other minority, ethnic groups
- **LGBT+ (note, this is how the data were identified here. We understand that some contest this acronym)**
  - 11%
  - 0.6% trans
- **Persons with disabilities**
  - 8%
- **Persons reporting mental health problems**
  - 46%

In addition to the workplace data from publishing sources, it is important to address underrepresentation by the researchers and scholarly authors of the published scholarly record. Two recent studies illustrate the bias of who gets studied and by whom.

These are:

- In 2017, the *Journal of Political Philosophy* published a 30+ page symposium on substantive and normative issues in the Black Lives Matter movement authored solely by white philosophers.
- In 2020, *BMC Medicine* published a paper by Kraemer *et al* which studies conflict in the Congo during an Ebola outbreak. There were no Congolese among the researchers or authors. Research was done by 17 non-Congolese persons. As was noted in a Twitter commentary, this type of “narrative” has been long referred to as helicopter or parachute research.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>One commentator of an earlier version of the paper added that another common feature of helicopter research is publication in high ranked international journals rather than journals from the country studied. This limits the access of researchers in these countries to the knowledge produced.

## 5. Impact of bias or discriminatory practices in the conduct of research, in peer review and in editorial decision making. What does good quality mean with respect to particular areas of research and expertise?

In addition to the long standard critiques of sexism, particularly in science, academic feminists also criticised the use of “man” as a generic term for all human beings. The critique again was based on the claims that such language was biased and ambiguous because it sometimes meant all persons and sometimes meant just male persons. The underlying assumptions of much of the empirical work, particularly in psychology, at the time were that the “sexes” were binary and oppositional in nature (eg, that women liked ballet and men liked sports). Further, all sorts of psychological, biologically based scientific observations were predicated on the unquestioned assumption of oppositional binary differences in female and male “traits” which were then extrapolated to matters such as leadership and followership traits. Many such studies did not address issues of gender identity.

The initial shift in focus began with issues related to research ethics. Where you place the beginning of raised consciousness regarding the responsible conduct of research varies from those who select the Nuremburg Trials of the late 1940s to the Belmont Report of 1979, but it is sufficient to note that by the year 2000, many countries in the world had government mandated research ethics boards and committees to oversee the ethical conduct of research with humans and animals. This led to considerations of the nature of research subjects (passive) to research participants (active and providing informed consent). It also led to further consciousness raising with respect to categories of potential vulnerabilities of persons recruited as research subjects (such as vulnerable populations in phase 1 clinical drug trials).

### 5.1 More general history of violation of research ethics in human participant research

There are many examples in the scholarly record of violations of human rights in research where there was no standard voluntary or informed agreement by the subjects of the research as a condition of participation. Further, participants often had no clear understanding of the purpose of the study or the potential harm there might be in the research to those participants. As these egregious examples became known, governments, learned associations and universities changed research practice to establish guidelines and frameworks for the responsible conduct of research. One frequently mentioned study is the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, where Afro-American men with untreated syphilis who were poor sharecroppers were studied from 1932 to 1972. They were deceived into believing that they were receiving treatment for 40 years. In terms of identifying categories of discrimination, they were Black persons with limited education and perhaps illiterate, and they were deceived into believing that they were receiving free medical care. Another significant case in the development of standards of research ethics was a study of children intentionally infected with hepatitis C virus who were living in the Willowbrook State School for Children with learning disabilities (Krugman, 1986). The experiments started in the mid-1950s and continued for 14 years. The children were triply vulnerable: they were children, they were institutionalised as residents of a special purpose state facility and they had been diagnosed with what was then termed “mental retardation”.

An equally egregious Canadian example comes from the use of indigenous children in residential schools who were used by the government as research subjects in malnutrition studies. As McGregor (2018) quotes from Mosby's (2013) examination of the research:

“...during the war and early postwar period bureaucrats, doctors, and scientists recognized the problems of hunger and malnutrition, yet increasingly came to view Aboriginal bodies as “experimental materials” and residential schools and Aboriginal communities as kinds of “laboratories” that they could use to pursue a number of different political and professional interests. Nutrition experts, for their part, were provided with the rare opportunity to observe the effects of nutritional interventions (and non interventions, as it turned out) on human subjects while, for Moore and others within the Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services bureaucracy, nutrition offered a new explanation for and novel solutions to the so called “Indian Problems” of susceptibility to disease and economic dependency.”

As McGregor adds,

“These studies were actually controlled experiments conducted by Canada’s leading nutrition experts at the time in cooperation with Indian Affairs, but without the informed consent or even knowledge of the highly vulnerable subjects (primarily malnourished Indigenous children) and their parents.”

As a consequence of studies like these, a number of ethical standards were established as necessary conditions for conducting human participant research, including the stipulation that participants were volunteers and participating voluntarily; that they understood the nature of the research and any risks associated with it; and that they could give their free and informed consent to their participation, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to do so.

This discussion document is clearly not a detailed examination of research ethics. However, it is important to note that many of the categories of discrimination identified earlier can and do make a person vulnerable in circumstances of unethical human subject or participant research. An elderly person with Alzheimer’s disease may not be in a position to give full and informed consent to experimental drug therapy, for example. Equally important is the fact that many violations in publication ethics initially arise in the conduct of research.

## 5.2 Some underlying assumptions that impact the conduct of research among academic faculty with disabilities

Articles assessing the underlying assumptions of ableism within universities are less frequently found in the literature than other forms of discrimination. The articles that do focus on disability and university faculty clearly identify the same issues. Generally, as Burke (2021) puts it, “faculty members with disabilities still say academe can be a difficult and unwelcoming place”. As Yerbury and Yerbury (2021) note, there is an “expectation of normality and the overvaluing of able bodiedness known as ableism” that dominates the academic arena. Most articles stress that universities, particularly since the global impact of neoliberalism on universities, are focused on fast output and is highly competitive.

Scholars with disability vary in their needs for accommodation, which can include the issue of a limitation of access to relevant recently peer reviewed articles for the blind, or lab and other facility issues with lack of accommodation for scientists with mobility issues. Persons with disabilities may have an excellent programme of research but take longer to publish with fewer publications. In an academic world that honours and rewards quantity and rankings, the work of faculty with disabilities may be undervalued. This also has a spin off impact on research grants because part of the criteria for success is the level and frequency of peer reviewed publications.

## 5.3 Establishment of new journals

As noted earlier, not only did new academic disciplines become established within universities, but so did the establishment of new journals. Part of the rationale for these new journals was to provide scholarly venues for the publication of peer reviewed research on topics which may not have access to publication otherwise. One clear assumption was that certain topics, such as gender and race and research about other historically excluded minorities, would not receive fair peer review and evaluation in already established disciplines. Learned societies also formed among the new disciplines, and discussions were held concerning discrimination against various types of research from traditional mainstream journals. History was also revisited in new journals and monographs to explore racist historical portraits of slavery and colonialisation, and to rethink much that had been written about the “discovery” of various continents and countries from the perspective of the indigenous people who lived in these so-called uninhabited regions of the world. These studies also revisited the stories of colonisation and its impact on countries such as India and the continent of Africa. History, feminists also wrote, was not just about wars fought by men or explorers establishing new colonies for the use and appropriation of various European countries. Further, gender identities previously categorised and defined as pathologies (eg, homosexuality in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - DSM II - until 1973*) could be explored without the medicalisation and labelling of the identity as diseased or deviant.

Were these journals necessary for some types of research to be published? Are similar issues illustrated in journal publishing currently? Many studies suggest so, as evidenced in the research below. Further, is there evidence to suggest bias in peer review, editorial boards or editors that might result in less than fair evaluation of certain types of research, on certain topics written by certain scholars? Finally, is there systemic underrepresentation of particular groups, such as peer reviewers, members of editorial boards or editors of scholarly journals? These questions will implicitly and explicitly be explored in what follows. It should be noted that the data are different for different disciplines. Here are some of the findings.

#### 5.4 Demographics on editorial boards, editors and peer reviewers: is there bias in scholarly journals?

Topaz and Sen (2016) found that while women made up 15% of the tenure track faculty at doctoral degree granting mathematical science departments, they made up only 8.9% of editorships. Similarly, Lerback and Hanson (2017) found that “journals invite too few women to referee” in an analysis of peer reviewers for journals published by the American Geological Union.

Murray *et al* (2019), looking at the data of approximately 24,000 submissions to the biomedical open access *eLife* journal, found that “women worldwide, and researchers outside North America and Europe were less likely to be peer reviewers, editors and last authors” (in those discipline where last authors are used as indicators of seniority, importance or the principal investigator). This research suggests not only bias against women but also geographic bias that favours authors from North America and Europe.

With respect to the issue of racism and editorial practice, Pickler *et al* (2020) state,

“As editors and scientists, we like to believe that publishing a manuscript is ‘just about the science.’ However, we know that is not necessarily true, and that multiple factors beyond ‘just the science’ can potentially exert undue influence on the fate of manuscripts. Editors have biases as well. Recognizing and dealing directly with these biases is important to reducing the effects of racism on scientific publication. However, there has been little study of the effects of race and ethnicity on publishing.”

In research on racial inequality in psychology, Roberts *et al* (2020) found the following based on their research of more than 26,000 empirical articles published within various sub-disciplines in psychology from 1974 and 2018:

“First, across the five decades, psychological publications that highlight race have been rare, and although they have increased in developmental and social psychology, they have remained virtually non-existent in cognitive psychology. Second, most publications have been edited by White editors, under which there have been fewer publications that highlight race. Third, many of the publications that highlight race have been written by White authors who employed significantly fewer participants of color.”

Murray *et al* (2019) undertook a study to evaluate the claim that author-reviewer “homophily” had an impact on peer review and publication outcomes. Analysing submissions to *eLife* from 2012 to 2017, they found that

“Outcomes were more favorable for male authors and those affiliated with institutions in North America and Europe; these groups were also over-represented among gatekeepers. There was evidence that peer review outcomes were influenced by homophily— a preference of gatekeepers for manuscripts from authors with shared characteristics.”

This “people like me” reality seems to indicate that the “otherness” of lower income countries, English as a second language and gender, among other features, may contribute to bias in peer review to favour individuals who are similar in a number of demographic ways. Clearly, the implication and recommendation from this study is the need to broaden who “us” is and have more diversity of editors, editorial board members and peer reviewers.

Another important study by Silbiger and Stubler (2019) surveyed members of groups in the scholarly community identified as among the discriminated against who provided verbatim quotes from negative peer reviews. The quotes clearly illustrate bias in the reviews. These included:

- “The author’s status as a trans person has distorted his view of sex beyond the biological reality.”
- “The phrases I have so far avoided in this review are: ‘lipstick on a pig’, and ‘bullshit baffles brains’.”
- “This paper is, simply, manure.”
- “Despite being a woman, the PI was trained by several leading men in the field and is thus likely adequately prepared to lead the proposed research.”
- “The author’s last name sounds Spanish. I didn’t read the manuscript because I’m sure it’s full of bad English.”

## 5.5 Bias in terms of name changes on articles and monographs

Unconscious bias (or institutionalised bias) can have consequences that not only impact scholarly reputations but also pose a real risk of physical and psychological harm to authors, including job discrimination. Editors and publishers have been seemingly reluctant to change the name of authors post publication. Their rationale is that this alters the scholarly record, and if the change is recorded, it should be carefully documented. In a recent guest article in *COPE Digest*, Tanenbaum *et al* (2021) noted that “[Trans people} ...are subject to significant risk of discrimination, harassment, and violence; and many experience a particular form of personal trauma connected to their pre-transition identities that makes them especially vulnerable within the academic community.” The authors of this guest article are members of the *COPE* working group on name changes, and *COPE* will be providing guidance on this topic soon.

The authors offer five high level principles and best practices with respect to name changes.

These are:

1. **Accessibility**—“Name changes should be available to authors on request without legal documentation, unnecessary barriers, burdens, or labour placed on the author making the request.”
2. **Comprehensiveness**—“Name changes should remove all instances of an author’s previous name from the records maintained and disseminated by the publisher.”
3. **Invisibility**—“Name changes should not draw attention to the gender identity of an author, nor create a clear juxtaposition between the current name and the previous name.”
4. **Expediency and simplicity**—“Name changes should be implemented in a timely matter and with a minimum of bureaucratic overhead.”
5. **Recurrence and maintenance**—“Publishers should regularly audit and correct new instances of changed names in order to prevent ongoing dissemination of incorrect information.”

### 5.6 If these are the ways in which discrimination enters research questions, methodologies, subjects studied and by whom, what are the best criteria to ensure fair peer review and editorial decision making?

While the final section of this discussion will list helpful directions and guidelines, it is important first to return to the opening discussion of the meanings of discrimination. There were two meanings of discrimination addressed there. One was the pejorative term for harmful, unwarranted, unjust and unfair treatment or judgment about persons who belong to a number of groups who have faced or continue to face harm—physically, psychologically, and in various socioeconomic and political ways merely because of their membership in the group and independent of what would reasonably be called fair treatment.

The other meaning of discrimination was discernment and the knowledge and experience (in academia) that comes from formal study, teaching, research, participation in the dissemination of new research, peer review, etc; or to summarise, the features which come from contributing and leading in all of the relevant activities of one’s discipline. However, as previously discussed, such expertise is not immune from bias where new knowledge can challenge the traditional interpretation of research and publications on a particular topic or field.

Further, with respect to editing and peer review, there are many helpful guidelines, such as COPE’s “Ethical guidelines for peer reviewers”, that outline good practice for responsible and ethical performance in reviewing and evaluating manuscripts. However, much of the literature discussed in this discussion document points to systemic examples of discrimination against members of particular groups in the analysis, discussion and conclusions. So, how can reviewers and editors be both learned and rigorous while at the same time be biased against particular topics? Here, unconscious bias becomes the focus. Scholars of good faith can have canonical expertise in their field and still have prejudice when others provide critiques in order to expose bias within the literature. The history of philosophy and theologically based historical literature is both implicitly and explicitly sexist. Many philosophers in the history of ideas

thought as did Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas that women were incomplete or misbegotten males who consequently had lesser souls. A feminist critique of Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas may not receive a fair review by a philosopher steeped in this ancient and medieval literature who may come to any such types of research with the intellectual frame which finds the very topic irrelevant to the contribution of these authors to philosophy.

And here it is important to note the difference of research about and by critics of much of mainstream science, social sciences and humanities. A great deal of this literature either critiques the historical record or attempts to illustrate counter evidence and alternative explanations of essential features of the disenfranchised groups. Frequently, the researchers and the authors are members of those groups. So, what does this imply for editors, editorial board members and peer reviewers? At least, two things:

- 1. Excellent scholarship requires expert knowledge with respect to the subject matter. This includes not only the original theory or treatise but the body of knowledge which critiques that knowledge by knowing it and challenging some of it. Using the example above, this requires that an expert peer reviewer is not only a learned Aristotelian but also has a foundational knowledge of the feminist critiques of Aristotle that have been published for the past 40 years.**
- 2. As a corollary, this requires the recognition that there are two kinds of knowledge—knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. Most traditional scholars are familiar with and most comfortable with knowledge by description, such as empirical research. Knowledge by acquaintance comes from experiencing the phenomenon personally. Much of the research from the lens of systemic disenfranchisement is grounded in knowledge by description but adds the dimension of knowledge by acquaintance. Many scholars who research various types of discrimination have experienced or been victimised by the impact of being a member of a group that they study.**

The proposed solution that has sometimes been raised by members of marginalised groups is that only scholars with knowledge by acquaintance should do research on certain topics. This does not seem like a reasonable proposal because it is contrary to the very assumptions under which all intellectual inquiry proceeds. For example, there is a sense in which survivors of horrendous violations of human rights have a privileged understanding of their experiences. This does not imply that research from the larger scholarly community does not inform learned inquiry into the nature of the phenomenon of the event. In fact, the more researchers who undertake the research in question, the more complete the scientific, social scientific or humanist perspective we can acquire concerning the events.

## 6. Citation lexicons and algorithmics: the “computational theocracy”

Ray (2018) makes the following well known points with respect to citation, “Inequality is reflected through a veneration of the classics in the social sciences and humanities, many of these works were written during a period when racial and gender exclusion was simply expected and taken for granted. What counts as canonical is shaped by who had access to existing knowledge and the tools and institutional resources to produce new knowledge.” He states further that the racial politics of citation has real effects: “Citations draw our attention to ideas that supposedly matter, they are a measure of one’s intellectual influence and they shape what we are able to think about a given field. Citations, or lack thereof, bolster reputations and facilitate or exclude one from subsequent opportunities.”

In an era of global ranking and competitiveness among universities, the issues of rankings and citations have taken on a much higher profile in the domain of evaluation and reputation than ever before. There have also been criticisms of the emphasis and methodology applied in algorithmics and citations, and the variability of the role of these factors in establishing scholarly performance. The critique of algorithmics which raises elements of discrimination in the construction of lexicons of algorithmics is not a new one. There has been much written on the problems for at least 20 years and from various perspectives. Even prior to the proliferation of algorithmic citation services and glossaries of lexicons, library systems were also the subject of criticisms of bias on various grounds.

This section on algorithmics will briefly discuss a few of the issues impacting the fairness of lexicon representation of subjects and allegations of biased representation.

One perspective is based on the claim that the dominance of English language journals included in citation indexes discriminates against authors for whom English is a second language and who may publish in other than English journals. As Curry and Lillis (2018) put this point,

“...around 27,000 journals included in the Web of Science...indexes – most prominently, the Science Citation index...[mostly]...publish in English. However, more than 9000 peer-reviewed scholarly journals are being published in other languages, with French (3500), German (2700), Spanish (2300) and Chinese (1400) contributing the highest numbers. Most of these journals are excluded from journal indexes, thus perpetuating the ideology that English is the global academic lingua franca.”

Added to this problem is the difficulty which some authors, for whom English is a second language, encounter in having their articles fairly reviewed when submitted manuscripts have limited language skills exhibited in the article. It has been suggested that one consequence of higher rejection rates among authors for whom English is a second language is to publish in predatory journals. As Shen and Bjork (2015) note, “[t]he regional distribution of both the publisher’s country and... [the country of authorship] is highly skewed, in particular Asia and Africa contributed three quarters of submissions and publications [to predatory journals] by authors.”

With respect to articles and monographs on bias in citation lexicons and algorithmic systems, many recent publications identify specific issues. One such article by Block (2020), a historian of colonial North American history, examined how the digital library, JSTOR, “repeatedly misrepresent[s] and erase[s] work in women’s, African diasporic/African American, and Native American and settler colonial histories.”

In exploring a survey of the field in 2018 in JSTOR on topics including colonial North America women’s, race, indigenous and African American histories, Block found that articles on women’s history,

“did not seem to be categorized by the topic of ‘women’. Instead, some were mischaracterized with ‘men’ as the most relevant topic: JSTOR’s topic for African, African American, Native American and race histories showed misapplications and erasures as well, fundamentally distorting the content of scholarship in these fields.”

On the ethical concerns of algorithms more generally, Mann and Matzner (2019) identify an opposite although equally concerning issue. While Block is concerned with the lack of identification of key terms related to articles which provide an alternative focus or analysis on history (also known as an “erasure” or diminution of subjects traditionally either underrepresented in the literature or framed within a discriminatory paradigm), Mann and Matzner note the danger of profiling and ability for social sorting and discriminatory identification in big data sets.

The problem once identified with this issue is frequently met by a lack of systematic attempts to correct the bias. This is a familiar response or lack of response to matters of bias and discrimination. One reason for resistance here may be the cost and complexity of recreating a more comprehensive, equalitarian system of terms and methodology for searches. However, complexity and costs are not justifications for the continuance of a biased system of identifying scholarly fields of research. This topic will be returned to in the next section of this discussion paper.

## 7. Initial recommendations for the promotion of social justice and equality within scholarly publishing

Luckily for those committed to responding to the critiques and evidence presented in this discussion paper, there has been a lot of excellent work and helpful suggestions ready to be considered. Some are straightforward and easily done. Others are more costly, require more commitment, and involve technological and policy interventions, staff and human resource commitments. Recommendations are organised in terms of categories for change.

## 7.1 Recommendations for change

### 7.1.1 Policy statements

Commitment to ethical principles of diversity, equity and inclusivity should include the development of DEI statements, commitments and policy to equality and diversity.

Many mainstream publishers and learned societies have enacted mission statements and policies for the promotion of DEI in accordance with the four categories of forms of discrimination and lack of inclusivity discussed in this document. Such statements should be prominently displayed on publication websites. Some specific initiatives include, for example, the work of the American Geophysical Union which has developed a policy to provide attention to identified groups, including women, young scientists and minority reviewers as peer reviewers.

This is critically important, a necessary but not sufficient condition for ameliorating problems related to discrimination, inequality and lack of inclusivity. Dissemination of such statements on web pages, including journal web pages, is critically important for the community within and external to these publishers. Another good example comes from Sociological Science which tracks diversity and also states on their website that “Sociological science encourages submissions from all scholars, regardless of position, affiliation or country of origin.” Success in implementation depends on strategies of engagement, and all levels of the organisation need to be committed to the statements and engagement. Leadership requires followership to be successful (McGregor Burns, 1978, 2003), and this means not only commitment to principles of diversity, equity and inclusivity to be successful but also concrete plans and strategies for success among staff and volunteers. Educational opportunities continue to grow at annual meetings and conferences. The American Association of University Presses has summarised a number of progressive activities that have been undertaken in the USA, including programmes funded by the Mellon Foundation to “increase the recruitment and retention of those currently under-represented in publishing” through the Mellon University Press Diversity Fellowship Program (Coggins *et al*, 2020).

### 7.1.2 Operationalisation of plans/strategies for meeting established targets to promote equality and inclusivity.

Again, many publishers have implemented both top down and bottom up strategies through the establishment of broad based standing committees to address issues related to all forms of discrimination as well as subject specific groups. This is laudatory but frequently is only available to internal paid staff of the publisher. Clear language and prominently displayed commitments to promote diversity in the workforce are critical and may be a necessary if not sufficient condition for success. However, mechanisms need to be articulated as many such plans in the 20th century were not entirely successful (see Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report, 1984; Lum, 1995).

### 7.1.3 Role of editors, editorial boards and peer reviewers

There are excellent guidance documents covering the responsibilities of editors, editorial board members and peer reviewers. Some of that guidance comes from the publishing industry and some comes from industry membership organisations. COPE, for example, has best practice guidance for editors and peer reviewers as well as advice for new editors. Many industry organisations annually include DEI sessions in their conferences. Publishers should consider subsidising attendance at such sessions by editors and editorial board members.

#### 7.1.3.1 Rationale for change and educational support

One clear finding from the studies on the demographics of the review of scholarly manuscripts is that who reviews the manuscripts and who rejects or accepts manuscripts for publication matters. This implies that a number of things must change to mitigate the various forms of discrimination that are a feature of academic journals.

#### 7.1.3.2 Role of editors

The role of editors in promoting inclusivity and diversity is central. However, it can be contested grounds. The bedrock of editorial expertise and autonomy is foundational within scholarly publishing. This does not imply or guarantee that editors are aware or well versed in issues related to discrimination and unfairness within editorial practices that raise important issues for the selection of qualified peer reviewers, especially with respect to studies on discrimination, as well as involvement of editorial boards and editors in decision making. This is particularly worrying for matters involving unconscious bias or discrimination. Some discrimination may come from lack of recognition of new knowledge and new directions on standard theories within the discipline. In 1970, Thomas Kuhn wrote a compelling history, sociology and psychology of science, describing the difference between established science and revolutionary science. Kuhn had various explanations for why established scientists resisted new theories and new explanatory models in science. He provided a number of reasons but one of the more interesting came from his notion of new paradigms. He argued that to accept a new critical perspective on an established body of knowledge required a “paradigm shift” and further argued that some scientists just may not be able to see that. Something similar may be at stake when a critique about a theory is informed by critiques based on claims of discrimination or bias. Some editors or editorial board members may just not be able to grasp the nature of the critique as legitimate criticism. This is why ongoing education and professional development for editors is key. Editors are clearly a varied group with some employed by the publisher or professional organisation full time and others working for societies or scholarly journals as part time work for a small stipend, if at all. These disparate roles have a direct impact on the influence that publishers may have on the professional and learned opinions of editors and editorial boards that may influence their judgments. There are a number of strategies that publishers and editors can jointly work on. Some may be incentive based, as indicated below.

### 7.1.3.2 Role of editors (continued)

Also, editors must be educated and made familiar with the need to diversify the editorial boards and stable of peer reviewers. Education of the known data is an important part of convincing editors of the reasons for change. Professional training opportunities with respect to DEI material can be credentialed and certificates of completion can illustrate recognition of the service to the profession which universities encourage in tenure and promotion criteria. This **COPE** document provides some of the key data to begin a dialogue with editors and editorial board members. A number of learned societies and associations do collect demographic data on their membership which can inform editorial boards to develop reasonable proportional representation of traditionally discriminated against members in their field. Some of those studies and the literature is referenced in this discussion document and further listed among the references.

### 7.1.3.3 Editorial board members

Like editors, editorial board members vary in their roles and responsibilities from journal to journal. Some editorial board members are actively engaged in the editorial decision making of the journal. At the other end of the spectrum, editorial board members may only participate in selecting appropriate peer reviewers within their areas of expertise, review manuscripts and sometimes also recommend or accept or reject an article based on their judgment and the peer reviews. One attractive feature in engaging this population may again be recognition of professional development about DEI. These are learned people by selection as editorial board members and providing new demographic data on the colleagues involved in editing is fundamental to change. In all cases, continuing education of the role of editorial board members is important. Part of this requires that publishers offer professional development opportunities rather than increase requirements for tasks that are primarily volunteer in nature. This may require investment in the editor's and editorial board members' professional development opportunities. Many publishers are creating new policy and practice with the expectation that volunteers will learn and follow such information. Doing this in the absence of educational investment for scholars who receive very little recognition from their institutions for such work may be unrealistic and provide additional barriers for scholars to engage in such roles.

### 7.1.3.4 Peer reviewers

**COPE** has guidance for peer reviewers available as an educational flowchart, "What to consider when asked to peer review a manuscript". Generally, there is very little guidance for peer reviewers to understand their responsibility to provide constructive, knowledgeable and detailed reviews of manuscripts. Some journals are more helpful than others in outlining what is necessary for good reviews. This type of information should include direction about the conditions where a reviewer might not accept the invitation to review. Journals need to produce more detailed guidelines for peer reviewers, including what counts as qualified with respect to the literature.

#### 7.1.4 The publishers' domain

Just as publishers include professional standards of conduct in contractual agreements currently, statements of scholarly standards of excellence, including commitments to review scholarly manuscripts with an understanding of the nature of judgments that are compromised by prejudice, unfairness or bias, should be considered as elements within editorial contracts.

Further, publishers should develop and offer multiple professional development opportunities for editors to learn about mechanisms for encouraging excellence in scholarly peer review and editorial decision making that is informed by an awareness of the importance of research from the perspectives of the many who face discrimination in the world, including in academia.

Also, publishers should pursue memberships, such as **COPE**, for their journals, which also provides fora, webinars and seminars of professional development opportunities throughout the year on various topics, including DEI. As well as **COPE**, meetings of industry organisations offer such training and educational opportunities, such as the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP), Council of Science Editors (CSE) and the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion on Scholarly Communication (C4DISC).

Publishers should introduce new editors to all of these available resources as part of the orientation for new editorships. Further, there should be formal introductory training for new editors. In some cases, there is none except reference to policy documents and resources available, such as the resources that come from **COPE** membership.

With the inclusion of diversity commitments, editors should be encouraged to actively recruit a diversity of qualified editorial board members and qualified peer reviewers. The fact that it seems difficult is not a legitimate response although the challenge sometimes appears difficult to recruit qualified peer reviewers. Finally, it is ultimately the publisher's responsibility to follow through on addressing the consequences of acts of discrimination with respect to the content and acts of egregious discriminatory actions or practices within or impacting a particular journal.

### 7.1.5 Researchers and universities

This discussion has been relatively silent on a large factor in ethical publishing, namely the origin of all publications which resides with the researcher. That is primarily because research ethics falls under the mandate of those who create new knowledge—universities, research institutes and the granting agencies which fund scholarly research. At the instigation of government imperatives and learned societies and university interventions, standards for research ethics have vastly improved over the past two decades. **COPE** has recognised, as have editors, publishers and some universities, that an important feature of the development of resources for publication ethics is the collaboration of universities with organisations committed to publication ethics. As part of the decision to include the category of universities as partners and members of **COPE**, the organisation is currently developing an online course on publication ethics.

Universities traditionally relegate editorial work and peer review to the category of “service” in consideration of tenure and promotion. This provides a disincentive for faculty to engage in the critically important work of evaluating the dissemination of research through scholarly journals and books. Universities should actively engage with scholarly editors and publishers to establish fair evaluations of the contributions of editors, editorial board members and peer reviewers

It is incumbent upon universities to recognise their role in education for ethical scholarly publication. Building a relationship with universities and new members of **COPE** will serve to facilitate that recognition and build strong partnerships between universities, editors and publishers.

## RESOURCES

There is a growing body of developed educational materials and learning opportunities available on the sites of many of the industry membership organisations of editors and publishers. Most of these materials are easily accessible from the publisher websites. Also, membership organisations like the following include specific assistance.

“Equity, diversity, and inclusion in APA Journals.”  
 APA Publishing’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework.”  
 American Psychological Association. <https://b.link/apa-1>

The Society for Scholarly Publishing has a DEI Resource Forum and provides “a space to share resources that will help our industry tackle multiple challenges as scholarly publishing adapts to a broader world.” The forum is open to members and non-members. <https://b.link/sspnet-1>

National Organization Standards Association (NISO) has a DEI committee which organizes various surveys and resources. <https://b.link/niso-1>

The International Society of Managing and Technical Editors (ISMTE <https://b.link/ismte-1>) offers webinars on DEI.

The Council of Science Editors (CSE <https://b.link/cse-3>) offers a variety of services, including relevant sessions at conferences of the organization.

The Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communication (C4DISC <https://b.link/c4disc-1>) is a multistakeholder working collectively to address diversity and inclusivity from various industry perspectives.

The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC <https://b.link/rsc-1>) multistakeholder group aims “to ensure a more inclusive and diverse culture within scholarly publishing.”

This is just a sample of the available resources supporting DEI in scholarly publishing. More services and learning opportunities are being developed on an ongoing basis.

Links to other sites are provided for your convenience but COPE accepts no responsibility or liability for the content of those sites.

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## OTHER RESOURCES

**Antiracism Toolkit for Allies** <https://b.link/c4disc-2>

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