

The peer review process is imbalanced

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Peer review may be defined as the evaluation of a work by one or more persons of similar competence to the producers of the work. The above similarity should be limited to expertise alone, but such target is very difficult to achieve. Therefore, peer review is often unconsciously biased. Reviewers are often suggested by the authors themselves, and finally selected by an editorial board member who gives preference to persons whom she/he trusts. Furthermore, busy persons are likely to decline invitations, as well as aged scientists and several other groups of researchers. Last but not least, referees are often categorized by journals and scientific boards to facilitate their identification and selection. The results is that reviewers are not evenly distributed over gender, age, country of origin, race, research groups and scientific opinion.

It is difficult to check for bias in the peer-review process because the identity of peer reviewers is often kept confidential. However, recent contributions published by the literature provided some statistics that show an interesting perspective. It was found that women are underrepresented in the peer-review process, and that editors of both genders operate with same-gender preference when selecting reviewers.

In this talk I will present an overview of the above published statistics and I will discuss ways forward to resolve imbalance.