



Mind the (submission) gap: EPSR gender data and female authors publishing perceptions

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Abstract

The publication pattern of EPSR confirms the findings of established scholarship on gender and publishing; women publish less than men (roughly, 30% to 70%). This gap reflects a previous submission gap; i.e., men submit even much more than women do. EPSR editorial process does not show signs of discrimination: single or leading female authors have significantly lower desk rejection rates than their male counterparts in similar configurations. Women though, are underrepresented as peer reviewers and EPSR has taken measures to redress this situation. Looking at women authors perceptions, findings (that cannot be considered representative), are consistent with existing scholarship. Women authors perceive themselves as more perfectionist and more risk adverse, they also perceive that they can dedicate less time to research, and they express mistrust in the blind review process. As a general conclusion, whilst reversing the gender gap requires structural action beyond and before the editorial process, journal editors must consider forms to secure more extensive women inclusion in publications.

Keywords Gender gap in publications · Political science women authors · Female reviewers

Introduction

The EPSR defines itself as a generalist journal devoted to the most important debates in political science. The journal seeks to publish articles of the highest possible standards in conceptualization, theory and methodology. It should be self-evident that the gender of the authors and, more generally, gender as a topic should not a priori represent a significant obstacle for publication. Yet, as students of gender in neighboring disciplines, and the discipline of political science, have shown,

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research often contains an implicit and often unconscious bias against women (Clain and Leppel 2018). Does this conclusion hold true as far as publishing at the EPSR is concerned?

Anticipating the ECPR 2017 Gender Study and the 2018 Gender Plan, the current EPSR editorial team expressed its commitment to achieving gender balance in its bodies and outcomes. Thus, the renewal of the editorial board sought to achieve gender parity, and as a result, the board has consisted of fifteen female and an identical number of male scholars since 2017. The EPSR started to monitor systematically gender issues in 2016 focusing on submissions and published authors. This monitoring included the reviewers' gender, and since 2019, we have implemented an active policy of recruiting female reviewers. The effects are yet to be measured and reviewed.

This short article looks at patterns of gender submissions and publications during the first 10 years of life of the journal. The article further analyzes the gender of reviewers even though technical limitations (i.e., the platform records the gender of submitting reviewers but not gender of invited reviewers) do not permit a comprehensive assessment. We complete those data with a set of interviews with several EPSR women authors regarding their perceptions and experience of publishing. The present article is part of the broader exercise with other ECPR journals (in this issue) and the initiative of the five leading American political science journals (Brown and Samuels 2018). Both initiatives aim to assess the gender gap in political science publishing, something that has enormous implications for women's advancement in the discipline given the importance of publications for tenure, promotion and salary decisions (Teele and Thelen 2017). The article overviews, firstly, the state of the scholarly debate on gender and publishing that provides the background for this review. Then, it briefly presents the research design to pass on, thirdly, to the presentation of the findings. The discussion and conclusions arrive to similar thesis as the previous research: the existence of a gender gap in publications.

Gender and publishing

Research across various disciplines has documented biases against women in academia. In teaching evaluations, for example, MacNeill et al. (2015) made an experiment so that assistant instructors in an online class each operated under two different gender identities. They found that students (of both genders) rated the male identity significantly higher than the female identity. Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2013) conducted an experiment in which they asked young scholars to rate conference abstracts ostensibly authored by females or males, with author associations rotated. They found that both male and female scholars associate abstracts from male authors with greater scientific quality.

The literature also suggests that women are underrepresented in the publishing process. For example, there are fewer female editors and members of editorial boards and journals invite fewer female reviewers (Lerback and Hanson 2017). Additionally, women are invited to peer-review less than expected by their numerical underrepresentation, and that holds true for editors of both genders (Helmer



et al. 2017). But perhaps the most worrying finding is that women publish less than men, and again, this disproportion does not mirror the proportion of women in the discipline. In political science, Teele and Thelen (2017),—among others—showed that the share of articles published by women as lead or single author (27%) is significantly less than the share of PhDs in political science (40%) and the share of APSA members at this time (31%).

More recently, scholars—often editors of various political science journals—have been trying to understand what drives this disproportion. They all reached the same conclusion: There is no significant difference between men and women regarding manuscript acceptance; hence, the underrepresentation of women in publication originates from the submission stage (see, for example, König and Ropers 2018; Nedal and Hexon 2018; Samuels 2018; Tudor and Yashar 2018). To illustrate this, Djupe et al. (2019) conducted an individual-level survey of 900 political scientists and found out that women submit, on average, less manuscripts than men. But why does this happen? So far, the literature from various disciplines offers five, nonexclusive, explanations.

1. *Women are more risk averse* The first reason why women submit fewer articles is that they could be more risk averse than men (Borghans et al. 2009). In the aforementioned study, Djupe et al. (2019) also asked political scientists whether they would ‘send their work to the journal that is most likely to accept it’ or whether ‘they would ‘submit (it) to the discipline’s top journals first.’ They found that women are more likely to follow the first strategy, while men follow the second more. Similarly, Brown et al. (2019) show that men are significantly more inclined than women to send their manuscripts to the most prestigious journals.
2. *Women have less time for research* A second explanation is that women can dedicate less time than men to research. Women still perform today the lion’s share of domestic work (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010).¹ Moreover, in the workplace, academic women often take a bigger share of teaching and administration, while more senior men have more time to focus on research (Morley 2003). Political science is not an exception: Alter et al. (forthcoming) have showed recently that women are overrepresented in positions that involve more service than prestige.
3. *Women do more time-intensive research, which is also harder to publish* Typically, women seem to use more qualitative methods than men. In political science, Breuning and Sanders (2007) found that, by large, men apply the statistical method most and that journals are most likely to publish this type of papers—a conclusion also reached by Teele and Thelen (2017). Given the labor-intensive and time-consuming characteristic of qualitative methods (Steckler et al. 1992; Pope et al. 2000), qualitative work might affect the output in terms of quantity.
4. *Women benefit less from co-authorship* Co-authorship has many advantages for academics. It is associated with a higher quality of papers (Hollis 2001) and

¹ https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=TIME_USE.



higher odds of acceptance (Grossman 2018). Women are disadvantaged in that respect too: Many researchers have shown that women rarely co-author together and that male lead authors are much more likely to write with another male rather than a female (for political science see, for example, Evans and Moulder 2011). Additionally, Teele and Thelen (2017) note that all male teams represent a high proportion (24%) of published articles, while by contrast all female teams are very rare (2.4%).

Two causes may explain this underrepresentation of women in co-authorship. Firstly, academics of both genders invite women to join collaborative works more rarely (Davey and Rothstein 1995). Second, and related to this, women also may have less time for networking since this is a “highly time-consuming” activity (Šandl 2009). Moreover, networking involves frequent travelling that may result difficult for women with children (Howe-Walsh et al. 2016).

5. Finally, *journals invite women less often to publish* Occasionally, editors invite authors to submit pieces to their journals, and research shows that women receive less invitations for this kind of work (Holman et al. 2018).

Research design

This very rich background provides for a significant number of hypotheses. Given the kind of limited evidence available from the publishing platform, we could not test them in a meaningful way and we provide instead a descriptive analysis. Apart from gender, the ScholarOne[®] platform collects data for the author’s institution and the latter’s country, but we lack other significant information. We have reviewed all manuscripts submitted to the journal for the period January 1, 2010, to December 31, 2019. We coded the gender of all authors of either submitted or accepted articles in five discrete categories: woman only/man only/mixed team/team men only/team women only. Figures in the findings section summarize the descriptive statistics.

We decided to complement the descriptive analysis with a qualitative analysis. We sought to understand the perceptions of publishing women about what might be the causes of a lower rate of articles published by females in political science journals. For this, we conducted semi-structured interviews with women who have published in the EPSR. We contacted the whole population of female single and leading authors who published at our journal (66 women) in the last 10 years; 24 of those accepted to be interviewed. Those represent around one-third of female authors (10% of all authors). It should be noted, however, that neither rejected female authors nor male authors have been contacted. Hence, findings are not definitive and future research might also interview male authors to compare their answers to those of women. We prepared a questionnaire and conducted interviews between December 2019 and January 2020 (by phone, email or Skype[®]). With the consent of interviewees, they were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. In some cases, authors replied in writing to the questionnaire. We deleted all elements that would enable the recognition of the informant from the text (name, university, academic roles, etc.).



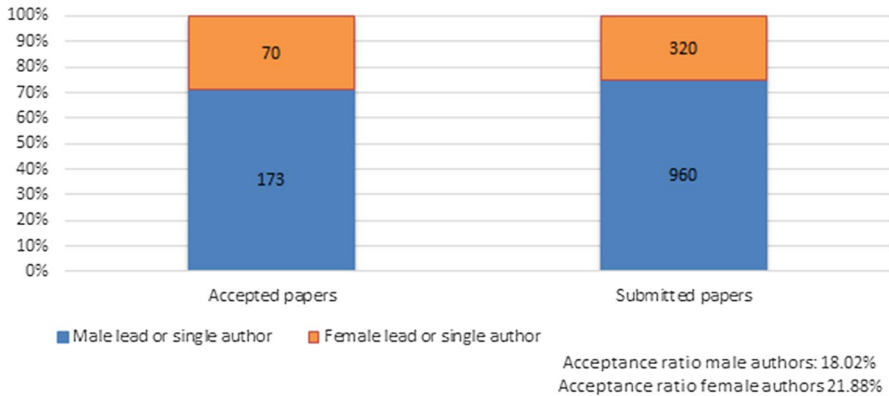


Fig. 1 Submitted and accepted papers by gender (2010–2019)

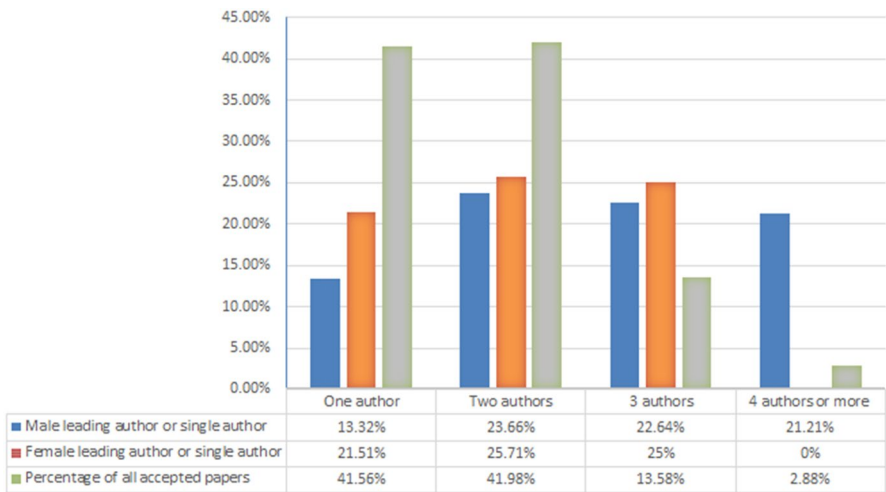


Fig. 2 Acceptance by number of authors and by gender

Findings

Data in Fig. 1 confirm that a great majority of articles (71%) are published by men (single or leading authors)—a proportion that does not mirror the proportion of women in the profession (as an example, 50% of people with a MyECPR account are women² and APSA counts 64% of male members³).

² https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/CustomContent/Membership/Gender_Study_2018.pdf.

³ <https://politicalsciencesnow.com/chart-of-the-month-how-diverse-are-apsas-organized-sections-and-how-are-they-diverse/>.



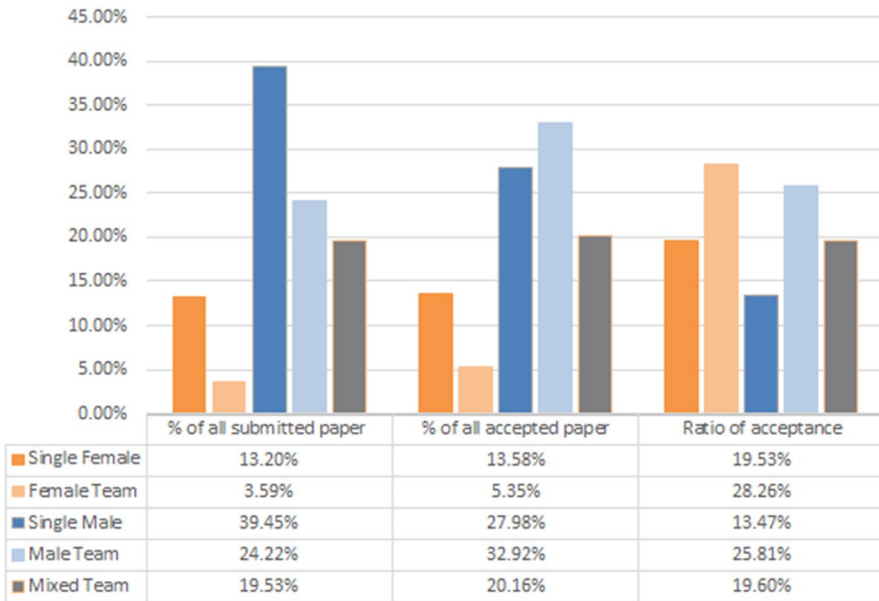


Fig. 3 Percentage of submitted and accepted papers and ratio of acceptance per type of paper

Figure 1 also shows that the proportion of papers accepted by female leading or single authors mirrors perfectly that of papers submitted by this group (25.6 and 25.0%, respectively). Consequently, and in line with the previous research, these data confirm that a submission gap explains the lower number of articles published in the EPSR by females as single or leading author. Women as single authors or leading a team submit only 25% of EPSR received manuscripts. This gap, again, does not correspond with the proportion of men and women in the profession.

As we can see in Fig. 2, in cases of manuscripts authored by two or three persons, the rate of published papers led by female authors outperforms both single-female-authored papers and male-authored papers (ratio of published to submitted). However, larger teams (four or more authors) return a different picture: Females have not led any of these papers, and the ratio between published and submitted is 0. The number of submitted papers authored by more than four authors amounts to 41 (16.9%), and the publication rate is rather small (2.88% of all published papers).

In Fig. 3, we show that a majority of submitted papers are by single male authors, while papers by male teams represent a majority of published papers. The ratio of acceptance is larger for female teams (however we have very few of those), followed by male teams, single female, mixed teams—the papers by a single male author have the lowest ratio. Looking at published articles, we should also note that one-third of articles are co-authored by a team of men (half of all co-authored articles), while articles by a team of women constitute only 5.35% of all published papers (10% of co-authored articles).

Desk rejection data, presented in Fig. 4, show that females—either as single author or as a team—have much lower rates of desktop rejection than males in



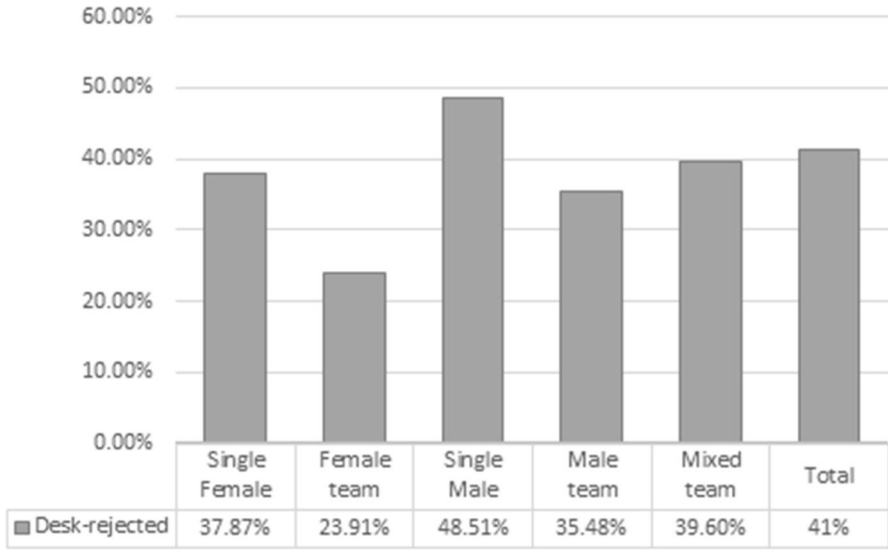


Fig. 4 Percentage of desk rejected paper according to the type of paper

similar configurations. In general, teams (either all female or all male) have better rates of desk rejection than single-author papers, but mixed teams perform worse than any of the other two team categories.

Underrepresentation of women in EPSR peer-review processes

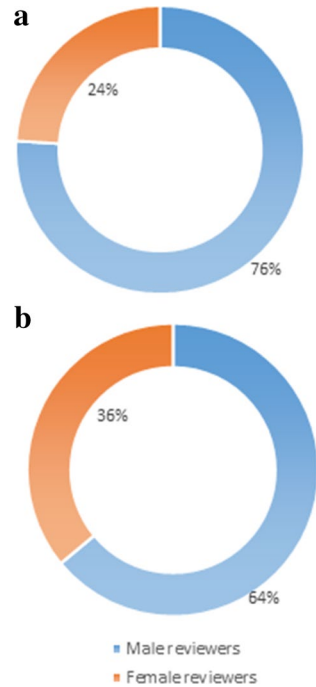
Peer-reviewed data submitted through ScholarOne[®] between 2010 and 2019 reveal an underrepresentation of women in the journal’s review process: Female reviewers have provided only 26% of all reviews in the history of EPSR.⁴ This figure mirrors the trends depicted in the literature (Helmer et al. 2017; Holmes and Hardy 2019). Data show that the pool of female reviewers was not only smaller, but its members were also called upon less frequently. Records of user profiles⁵ indicate an average of 2.9 invitations were issued for an already active male user, compared to 2.5 invitations per female counterpart. Within the pool of already active reviewers, the rate

⁴ Reviewers can choose the option “I prefer not to say” when declaring their gender; hence, these figures are not complete. EPSR lacks data for around 36% (239) of initially invited reviewers because they do not have to fill in their personal data if they are not going to use ScholarOne[®].

⁵ We only collected data about those reviewers who at least once have accepted an invitation to review for the journal, consequently providing information about gender within a user account. The platform monitors their responses to further invitations as well. However, it does not record such information about many other invitees who declined without having an active user account. Given these limitations, the data above refer to a sample of 3343 reviewers (out of the total of 7224 ever-invited reviewers).



Fig. 5 **a** Reviewers by gender (2010–2018) and **b** reviewers by gender after implementing a policy of actively inviting female reviewers (2019)



of accepting an invitation to review is similar for men and women, with 57% and 59%, respectively.⁶

Since March 2019, EPSR has implemented a policy of actively inviting female reviewers. For this, the Associate Managing Editor selects, exclusively, female academics. Editors, in turn, select instinctively male and female reviewers. Even though EPSR has implemented this policy for just a few months, at the time of writing, the initial data illustrate that it has increased the proportion of female reviewers well above the average from previous years (with a 12% increase) (Fig. 5a, b).

Disaggregation of reviewer recommendations by gender of reviewer, in Fig. 6, suggests that women were less likely to recommend a straightforward reject than their male counterparts (28 vs. 34%), expressing a preference for various degrees of revisions instead.

To sum up, the submission gap determines the predominance of articles written by men whilst the smaller rate of women reviewers may be due to editors' neglect. EPSR has taken measures to redress this reviewer gender imbalance but results are not yet available. The next section presents the perceptions of female authors that published in the EPSR about the causes of this gap.

⁶ Same limitations apply. A significant share of those who decline an invitation does so without having completed a user profile on the platform; therefore, the full share of female academics among these remains unrecorded.



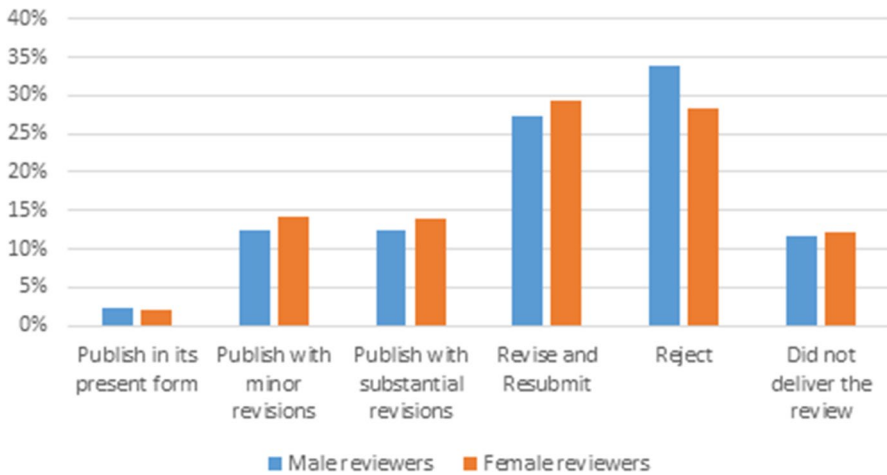


Fig. 6 Percentage of submitted and accepted papers and ratio of acceptance per type of paper

Underrepresentation of women in publications: EPSR female authors' experience

We present findings on EPSR female authors perceptions around the factors identified earlier in the literature review. This section contains also some direct quotations from these interviews that illustrate the summary of the different arguments. In general, findings lend support to the several existing explanations even we caution about the representativeness of findings. Less than half of the asked authors responded to our questionnaire.

Perfectionism/risk aversion gap

The most frequent explanation given by the interviewees for the lower rate of submission by women is the fact that they perceive themselves as being more perfectionist than their male colleagues. We recorded in our interviewees 15 statements (out of 24 interviews) pointing out this factor,⁷ although a proper assessment would require looking comparatively to male perceptions. Related to this, many women (14/24) also see themselves as more risk averse and/or less self-confident than men. Those women gave us statements like this:

I would never think about going for the top three journals, simply because I would think that I could never make it (...) and I've seen that my male colleagues would simply (...) think 'I will go there and I might get rejected but I'll try nevertheless'.⁸

⁷ For instance, *I'm one of those people that tends to sit on (papers) for too long. I re-work and re-work, whereas you could probably send it in an early stage and then use the feedback you get in the review process. (...)* Interview 5.

⁸ Interview 10.



Experience with previous harsh reviews emerges in some narratives (4) as an explanation for this lack of self-confidence, but also more generally (according to four women we talked to) from being educated and socialized into a world dominated by men. As one of our authors explains,

In the generation of my PhD those are really all male networks, and I found it really difficult to get into these networks, and be accepted, not just as a PhD student but as a colleague.⁹

Less time for research

Another reason for the submission gap that interviewees frequently (13/24) refer to is the fact that women have less time to do research than their male counterparts. Some of the expected explanations emerge in their narratives. Thus, few (3/24) point out toward the traditional domestic work gap: Women still do the lion's share of the domestic work, especially those who have children. Paradoxically, measures to promote gender balance via the presence in committees may be counterproductive and may have a detrimental effect on the ability of certain females to concentrate on research. Four interviewees noticed this and one exemplary portrayed the situation,

We need to involve women systematically but we also need to (...) to do it proportionally. (...) Obviously you can't ask women to do half of the work because they'd do disproportionately more and that's already happening in many departments and faculties¹⁰

Type of research

Perceptions of interviewees also confirm that the type of methodology that women more frequently use may influence acceptance rate. Out of sample, around one-third use (at least occasionally) qualitative methodology and perceive that this lengthens and hinders publication. In our sample, four women use both methods and they confirm the perception that the papers based on qualitative methods are harder to get accepted.

Lower scientific credibility of women and limits to anonymity

Finally, five of our interviewees consider that the process of submission is rarely fully anonymous (arguing, for instance, that reviewers can google the title to find the author, and editors know the gender too¹¹). These women also believe that lack of anonymity might penalize them, as their perception is that they are seen as less credible than men. One, for example, told us to have felt such a credibility gap when presenting her own work with a man co-author: The male got the questions and she

⁹ Interview 16.

¹⁰ Interview 18.

¹¹ Interview 5, Interview 15.



did not have the opportunity to respond.¹² Another author recognized her own bias in favor of men mentioning that ‘she unconsciously is biased towards men when quoting¹³.’

What could journal editors do?

We finally asked our interviewees about what, in their opinion, could journal editors do to address this submission gap. They made several interesting proposals. On top of what EPSR does already (encouraging parity in the editorial team and pool of reviewers, and taking decisions collectively rather than individually), many women (6) advised editors to actively encourage women to submit to their journal (for example, at conferences and/or by publishing data on submission gaps on their website as an incentive for women to submit more). Another author advised for a perfectly blind submission process. This could be either a triple-blind (i.e., editors ignore the name of the author) or/and editors make sure that reviewers cannot infer the name of the author from the title. Two interviewees recommended to editors to control better the reviews and ensure that they are always pragmatic and constructive. Finally, a practice that we as editors should observe responds to the observation made by an interviewed author. She declared that the (male) editors refused her an extension, while both she and her co-author were in maternity leave¹⁴.

Discussion and conclusion

What do these findings say in relation to the existing literature? Firstly, interviewees confirm the risk adverse orientation among female authors (Borghans et al. 2009; Djupe et al. 2019; Brown et al. 2019). EPSR lower rates of desktop rejection for single or female teams could indicate that women submit only when they feel that their research is likely to pass. Secondly, interviewed female authors also confirm that they perceive to have less time to dedicate to research in line with previous findings (Morley 2003; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). One paradoxical effect points to the reduction in effective research time due to women’s increasing involvement in managerial duties (such as serving in committees, for instance). Thirdly, as argued by the previous research (Steckler et al. 1992; Pope et al. 2000; Breuning

¹² ‘Most of the work had been done by me in terms of both writing and empirics. Then, after the presentation, people asked questions, he replied, (...) and no one gave me the opportunity to talk (...) It was the first time I realised that as a young woman in political science you are less legitimate to talk when you’re in an assembly of men’ Interview 3.

¹³ ‘If I check the work I cite, it is overwhelmingly men, and of course many women do good research in my field (...) It is this kind of unconscious bias that we all have, that we tend to give more weight to what a man says’ Interview 7.

¹⁴ ‘Another factor that takes time away from research is the family, and this is completely ignored in the publishing business (...) One time, (we received a R&R from a journal) when my co-author and I were both on maternity leave (...) So we said “we cannot deliver within the deadline, but we definitely want to revise it”, and we explained the situation. (...) The editors were two men, who write back declining our request’. Interview 4.



and Sanders 2007; Teele and Thelen 2017), women interviewed also perceive that they tend to develop more time-intensive research and those using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies believe that it is more difficult to publish the former. Fourthly, in relation to co-authorship, as observed elsewhere (Teale and Thelen 2017), articles by female-only teams constitute only a very small minority of submitted (and hence published) articles, in contrast to the proportion of articles by male-only team. A nuance to those findings is that female-only teams slightly outperform male teams in their acceptance rate at EPSR. We do not have data disaggregating the internal composition of teams, though. Finally, as EPSR does not publish by invitation, no gender bias (Holman et al. 2018) exists deriving from this factor.

As observed for other journals, single or leading male authors write an important majority (71%) of articles published by the EPSR. Given the importance of publications for career and tenure, this is a preoccupying finding. Our inquiry, however, has not shown any significant bias against female authors in the EPSR. Indeed, single female authors are more likely than their male colleagues to get published in EPSR. The data show that the editorial process (from submission to publication) does not penalize female authors: Publication rate mirrors (and even improves) submission rates. Hence, the source of the gap seems to be in the structural factors that limit females' propensity to submit their research for publication.

Qualitative data, however, point to a worrying perception of implicit biases—and even for some women—distrust in the blind peer-review process. Addressing these concerns is of paramount importance, and we hope that our efforts with gender equality go in the right direction. Our interviewees made suggestions as to how we can make the process more equal, such as actively encouraging women to publish to our journal, and the EPSR will attempt their comprehensive implementation.

List of interviews

- Interview 1, Skype, 10/12/2019
- Interview 2, phone, 13/12/2019
- Interview 3, Skype, 18/12/2019
- Interview 4, Skype, 10/01/2020
- Interview 5, Skype, 12/12/2019
- Interview 6, Skype, 19/12/2019
- Interview 7, Skype, 18/12/2019
- Interview 8, Skype, 19/12/2019
- Interview 9, Skype, 13/12/2019
- Interview 10, Skype, 15/01/2020
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- Interview 15, Skype, 16/12/2019
- Interview 16, Skype, 12/12/2019
- Interview 17, google hangouts, 17/12/2019



Interview 18, Skype, 10/12/2019
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Interview 22, phone, 09/01/2020
Interview 23, e-mail, 10/12/2019
Interview 24, e-mail, 09/12/2019

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