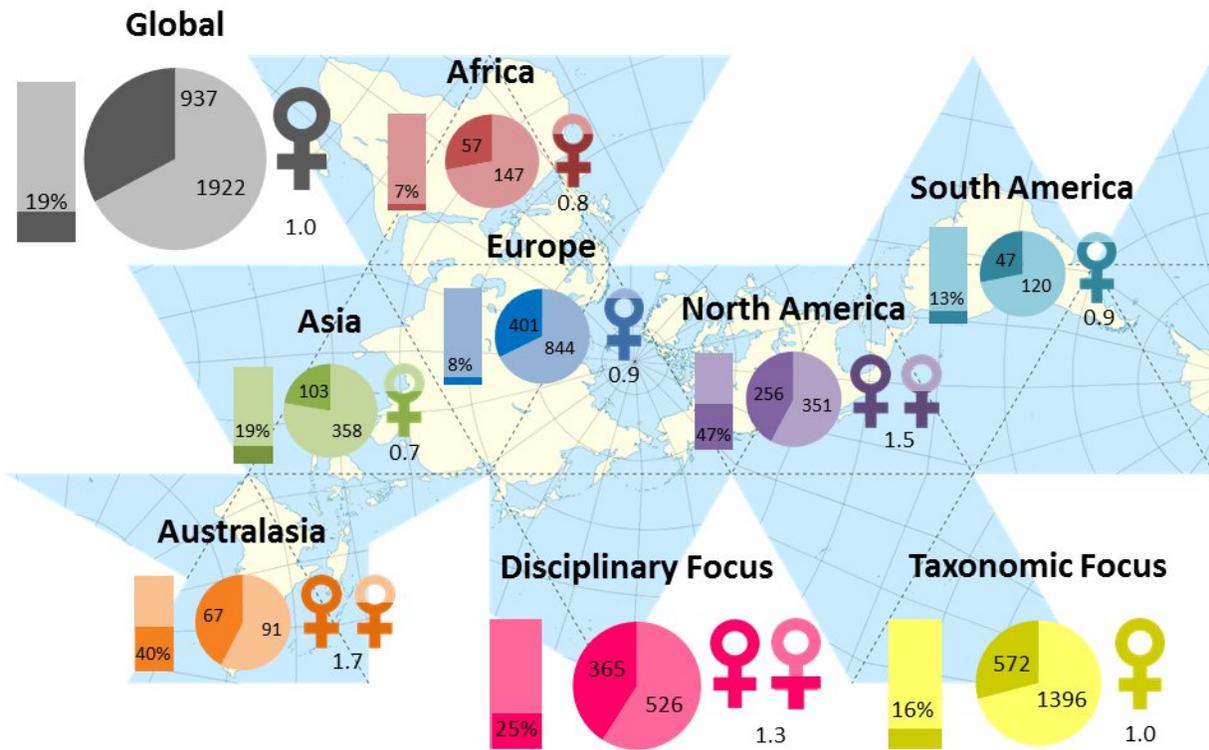


Societies may help promote female representation within academic science

May 30 2018



Pie charts show the number of men and women on the boards of scientific committees across different geographic regions, and society focus. Darker colours denote women, lighter colours men. Bar graphs show the proportion of societies that have diversity statements (to the nearest percentage). Female symbols represent the average count for the number of women fulfilling leadership roles within a society (president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer) to the nearest decimal place.

Infographic showing a) Proportion of societies have diversity statements (bars), b) Numbers of men and women on scientific boards (pie charts) and c) the average number of women on society boards (the filled female symbols). Credit: Potvin et al (2018)

Academic societies may be able to increase gender equity through supporting female leadership and making an outward commitment of equality, according to a study published May 30, 2018 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Dominique Potvin from University of the Sunshine Coast, Hervey Bay, Australia and colleagues.

The lack of female representation in academic science is a well-known issue, but little is known about how academic societies might help promote [gender](#) equity in this field. In their new study, Potvin and colleagues quantified gender equality (male:female ratios) in 202 zoology society boards globally. The researchers compared multiple models for investigating the number of women on a society board, the number of female society presidents, and the presence of women in [leadership](#) roles (president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary).

The researchers found that the most informative indicator of gender ratio of society boards and leadership positions was a cultural model, which included the age of the society, size of its board and whether or not a [society](#) had an outward commitment or statement of equality. Models that focused on geographic location or study discipline were less informative when it came to gender ratio.

The researchers' findings suggest that women may be more highly represented in smaller societies with at least one woman in a leadership position. However, this representation still falls far short of equal (~30%). To promote [gender equity](#) within academic societies, researchers recommend a push to increase female leadership and including a constitutional commitment to equality, such as a statement of support.

More information: Dominique A. Potvin et al, Diversity begets diversity: A global perspective on gender equality in scientific society leadership, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0197280](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0197280)

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