

## **When We Work Together We Succeed Together**

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### **Gender Equality Benefits Everyone**

Nearly 100 years ago, on August 18, 1920, women achieved the right to vote, yet gender equality continues to be an issue that affects everyone. A healthy community values all its members because input from different perspectives creates balance. A work environment that encompasses respect for all and values diversity increases job satisfaction and productivity for everyone. It is imperative to acknowledge that there are differences between genders to effectively deal with the gender equality issue. Women have biological and cultural realities that are unique to their gender. When we can acknowledge those differences, learn to value strengths and work together to address problem areas, each workplace, and society as a whole, will benefit.

Society, businesses, families and individuals all benefit from gender equality. A recent article in Lancet on Gender Equality in Science stated, "Gender equality is recognised as one of the most important determinants of health and economic development. Despite this recognition, gender equality remains a complex issue in health and development." [1] Societies that educate women have fewer families living in poverty, as educated women wait longer to marry and have fewer children. [2] Women-headed households exhibit improved child nutrition and higher education levels, leading to a positive trend of poverty decline. [3]

Gender equality promotes happier, healthier families as well. Teens in countries with higher levels of gender equality, where social norms are likely to support both parents' involvement in childcare, reported higher levels of life satisfaction than teens in countries with lower levels of gender equality. [4] This phenomenon becomes cyclical. Raising girls and boys in an environment that fosters gender equality creates a different set of social norms, changing the expectations these children will carry into adulthood.

Gender equity in the workplace corresponds to higher innovation and business performance. Businesses with women in more than 10 percent of key management positions have a 27 percent higher return on equity and a 42 percent higher dividend payout ratio compared to other firms. [3] An inclusive atmosphere promotes innovative thinking by encouraging the sharing of ideas. "Companies managed by women report more motivated workers and higher productivity than those managed by men. A Gallup poll found that individuals with female managers were 6% more engaged than those with male leaders. Similar studies have found that women may be more affirming, and check in with their employees more often than male managers do, which results in motivation, interest, and higher productivity." [2]

Gender equality cannot be achieved without men. Just as gender inequality affects us all, efforts to rectify the issue will fail without the involvement of all. "Equity is relational. Inequities are rooted in uneven dynamics that give disproportionate power to one group versus another. Irrespective of the amount we invest in women, men also need to be willing participants in the redistribution of power between genders." [5]

Gender norms are rules of behavior that individuals adhere to because they believe their peers are following, thus creating a perception of expectation. Men might resist behavior that they don't perceive as masculine due to fear of judgement from other men. Active participation in parenting and household chores are common gender associated social norms for men and women that perpetuate gender inequality. Understanding what drives the motivations and behaviors of boys and men will help identify and address unconscious cultural barriers to gender equity.

We must adjust our perceptions of gender differences as "weaknesses" or "strengths." For instance, women are often perceived as "softer, weaker and more emotional," leading to the misperception that they are less capable in leadership roles. In reality, increased ability for empathy and compassion in women managers leads to greater collaboration and greater work satisfaction reported by their employees.

### **Gender Equality and Science**

The world of science is not immune to gender equality issues, and while we primarily represent an intelligent and progressive group of professionals, gender inequality is still an issue in the flow cytometry world. A recent article on gender equality in Cytometry A noted that of 27 editorial board members, 4 were women. In other words, "a Society whose 47% female membership is represented by 15% of the Board". [6] Overall, women are drastically underrepresented on editorial boards, ranging from 9 to 27% (<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ecpe/why-diversity-matters-women-on-boards-of-directors/>). "Women are also ubiquitously under represented as authors, editors, and reviewers in academic publishing as a whole, which is both a reflection and a cause of women's disadvantage in scientific professions." [6]

While the membership of both ICCS and ISAC are roughly equal in gender composition, the numbers of speakers, panel members and those in leadership positions are disproportionately male. [6] Speakers at the ICCS annual meetings from 2006 – present have been 67% male. The CYTO 2019 meeting exhibited an alarming display of gender inequality with few women plenary speakers or session chairs and no women society award winners. This inequality at CYTO 2019 was visibly manifested in the all-male innovation panel on CytInnovation Day. This obvious inequality was immediately noticed by the attendees, which led to a flurry of twitter and social media criticism from male and female attendees.

ICCS and ISAC are both working to tackle gender inequality at all levels in our respective societies. Over 10 years ago, ICCS formed the ICCS Women in Cytometry to address these issues, and at CYTO 2019 in Vancouver, ISAC established CytoWomen. Some of our most inspirational and accomplished women clinical and research cytometrists created these groups to support women in their professional development while dealing with issues of discrimination, social pressure and work/life balance.

Aided by a generous grant from the Wallace Coulter Foundation, ICCS Women in Cytometry (WIC) has assumed an early lead in tackling the gender inequality in the clinical cytometry world. In 2008, several women ICCS members noticed the lack of representation of women on the ICCS council and speakers at the annual meetings. These women had already forged great mentoring relationships with other women in the society and felt that formalizing this type of relationship and expanding the scope of the ICCS gender equality efforts would benefit and support the growing number of women ICCS members. The mentorship program has radically changed the lives and career paths of many women over the last decade, including mine. The efforts of the ICCS WIC group have made a significant difference; since the

inception of the group in 2008, the percentage of women on ICCS council has risen from 10% to approximately 50% in the last few years. ISAC President Elect, Dr. Jonni Moore is a founding member of ICCS, and the WIC Taskforce. From this involvement, she found inspiration for the creation of ISAC women's CytoWomen.

A few years ago, the ICCS WIC Taskforce was formed by a group of dedicated and motivated women, to provide a more formal structure to the WIC group with the purpose of pushing for real quantifiable change. This includes revamping the mentorship program and endeavoring to make our events and programs more relevant and inclusive. We are developing a larger digital presence that will encourage conversation and disseminate resources more broadly, especially to a younger generation of cytometrists that communicate more heavily in digital media. And we are using more traditional media, such as this newsletter, to spread the word as well. After seeing the recent publication in Cytometry A concerning Editorial Board inequities, the WIC Taskforce undertook an evaluation of the issue in ICCS and extended it to awards, society leadership, speakers and session chairs. We now have collected and analyzed that data since 2006 and have a similar manuscript in preparation, focusing on ICCS and clinical cytometrists to be submitted to Cytometry B in the next few months.

### **What's next?**

Gender associated social norms are changing and men are taking a more active role in this change. How do we continue to affect change and promote gender equality?

The first step in affecting the unconscious (and conscious!) bias that limits the progress of women is recognition of this bias, especially by leaders in the field. A culture of collaboration and open conversation among peers breaks down prejudices and misperceptions. We must foster teamwork between male and female colleagues. A 2018 study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that female patients' mortality rates decreased when their male doctors had more female colleagues. [7] Science is a field that experiences more gender inequality than many other professional fields do. Academic and clinical scientific culture must change from leadership down.

One such example is Dr. Francis Collins, director of the NIH. Dr. Collins called out the preponderance of all male panels at scientific conferences, which he termed "Manels". He has refused to sit on panels that do not include any women. "It's not enough to give lip service to equality," Collins stated, "Leaders must demonstrate their commitment through actions." [8] If we do not, hostility, harassment, and resistance will drive out prominent and promising scientists and we will miss out in their breakthroughs, innovations, and valuable contributions to progress in their fields. The "manel" at CytoInnovation, struck a nerve at CYTO 2019 and was one of the major pushes for the final establishment of CytoWomen.

Research is very clear on what works, what does not, and why. Change requires initiative commitment from leadership, and funding. Creating policies alone does not change behavior. Approaches to empowering women and shifting the power balance must take into account the cultural and biological differences that occur outside of the workplace or they will fall short.

There are many ways to make a positive difference. More key opinion leaders like Dr. Francis Collins making pledges to refuse to speak at non-inclusive meetings will send a clear message that gender inequality will not be tolerated. When leaders set policies to promote gender equality and eradicate discrimination and harassment, and follow through on those policies, progress will certainly follow.

Many professional groups are rendering claims that there is a dearth of female options baseless by creating lists of qualified female speakers.

Education is a key factor in promoting gender equality. Organizations have the ability to shift the focus on training and reward structures that value collaboration and cooperation rather than only individual accomplishments. Training should include the topics of discrimination, sexual harassment and bystander intervention. Employers could also provide education on career progression such as leadership and negotiation. Studies show that negotiations disproportionately benefit men. This disparity was reduced when women were experienced with negotiation. One key factor in gender equality issues is that there is a tendency to educate males on certain skills preferentially. Mentorship and employer provided education help bridge this gap. [9]

Mentorship programs are invaluable, both gender specific and gender neutral. Women might feel more comfortable being guided by other women through issues that are unique to them, and that is key, but male mentors for women are important as well. Women need to feel valued by both men and other women in their industry. "For women in the workforce, particularly those early in their careers, having male advocates can significantly affect their career growth and success." [5] Numerous men in ICCS are strong advocates, guiding and encouraging women in their career growth. But we must go further with sponsorship programs whereby women and men leaders actively bring qualified women forward for a "seat at the table".

## **Conclusion**

We have made progress, but we are not there yet. We strive to eliminate the need for groups that promote gender equality. The goal is to educate the next generation of cytometrists that women and men are equally capable and competent in this field. We need women to step up to participate and men to support women in this capacity. We need to provide opportunities for men and women to work together toward understanding our similarities and differences and how we can progress in a united front to advance science together.

Change takes time, but if we do not push forward, it never happens. Paradigm shifts largely occur in a generational manner. Consider how drastically our cultural perspectives on racial diversity and sexual orientation have changed over the last few decades. Gender equality is no different. Young men and women, like those that were outraged at the bias exhibited at the CYTO meeting a few months ago, have been raised with a different set of social norms. In turn, this generation of current young adults will raise their children with their own unique cultural perspectives. As long we all continue to push for progress, each generation will see less and less gender discrimination until it becomes a relic of past.

WIC actively welcomes and encourages male members to attend our annual event at the ICCS meeting to increase their awareness of bias in the workplace and become motivated to mentor women in their institutions. It has become clear over the past decade just how critical this dynamic is. Join us at ICCS 2019 in Atlanta, GA on Sunday October 6<sup>th</sup> and see what a focused and involved group of women (and men) can do to assure gender equity in our society and field.



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