Promoting Speaker Diversity with a Database of Databases

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Introduction:
Invited talks at conferences and departmental seminars offer scientists important career advancement opportunities – publicity for their research as well as networking and fostering collaboration. Studies, however, have found gender disparities in invited talks in STEM fields:

- Women are less likely than men to be speakers at major scientific conferences (e.g., Casadevall and Handelsman, 2014), as well as colloquia at top universities (Nittouer et al., 2018).
- Even after adjusting for the lower proportion of women in STEM fields, men are still 20% more likely to be invited colloquia speakers than women (Nittouer et al., 2018).
- Surveyed female professors were not more likely to decline speaking invitations due to family obligations, a widely-held myth (Nittouer et al., 2018).

Since women and people of color remain largely underrepresented in STEM fields, implicit biases often lead to invited speakers lists that are predominantly white and male; the problem has become so pervasive, it sparked use of the term “manel” (short for “all male panel”).

To promote gender parity in STEM speaking invitations, we have aggregated available databases of female scientist speakers, along with a YouTube video database, where available. It is our hope that this resource will be useful to conference and seminar organizers to increase diversity among invited speakers.

Survey:
We solicited anonymous feedback from a small (n=4) group of users across career stages – a graduate student, professor, and professionals from both academia and industry.

Respondents were asked to use our database and answer the following questions:

- In 2-3 minutes, were you able to identify a speaker to invite?
  - Yes 3
  - No 1

- Would you use this resource in future speaker searches?
  - Yes 4
  - No 0

- Would you recommend this resource to colleagues?
  - Yes 4
  - No

Suggestions to increase user-friendliness:
- Organize using bulletpoints
- Add “current of MM/YYYY” so users know how recently lists have been updated
- Add a search bar or dropdown menu with filter options (e.g. subdiscipline)

General feedback:
- For major conferences where you are looking for a high-profile speaker, this was great for getting ideas
- The search is easy and gives many ideas quickly
- It’s nice to have a collated list

Database:
This “Database of Databases” currently contains 40+ lists of minorities and white women speakers in biological sciences, physics and astronomy, chemistry, geosciences, neuroscience, mathematics, engineering, policy and media, computing, and technology, as summarized in the table to the right.

Future directions: Our database will continue to grow as more lists become available. It is currently hosted on Jennifer Glass’ website, with the ultimate goal of transferring to a GT link for hosting. We suggest that more databases integrate example video presentation clips as examples of the speaker’s work.

References