Editorial

After 17 years (sic), Mark D'Esposito is stepping down as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*. Our community owes a large debt of gratitude to Mark and, before him, to Mike Gazzaniga, for creating and shepherding this journal that has played such a vital role in the growth and success of our field.

Sometime later this year I will be stepping into the E-i-C role, and am grateful that many of the journal's highly talented and dedicated Associate Editors will be staying on to help smooth the transition: Jeff Binder, Randy McIntosh, Earl Miller, and Jordan Taylor. We will miss the expert contributions of the departing Roshan Cools and Kia Nobre, but are thrilled that Morgan Barense, Heleen Slagter, and Virginie van Wassenhove will be joining our ranks! Although we don't have grand ambitions to 'fix what ain't broken' at the journal, we are planning some modifications to how it operates, in the hopes of accommodating the increased importance that our field is putting on robustness in our science and on transparency and equity in our practices.

Our decisions about what to keep at *JoCN*, and what to change, are guided by the fundamental conviction that there is a special role in our science for the society journal. Society journals, like *JoCN*, are run by us, for us. Editorial policy is guided by what’s best for the field, with minimal influence from commercial considerations. Editorial decisions are made by colleagues who are, like us, active members of our community. At *JoCN*, there are no layers of professional staff between authors and reviewers, and no staff generating surveys and promotional messages to clog our in-boxes. Along with this special status comes a special responsibility to lead by example, and we hope that the changes that I'll summarize here will be welcomed in that spirit.

**Peer review.** If you’ve read this far, you have almost surely reviewed for the journal. Thank you. We are instituting a “conversation” stage in the peer review process whereby an editor, upon receiving the requisite two reviews of a manuscript, will have the option of opening a 3-way dialogue between themself and the two reviewers. This will entail the reviewers reading each other’s reviews and helping the editor come to a consensus decision about the manuscript. Often, when the two reviews are in concordance, such conversations won’t be necessary. Sometimes, however, the two reviewers will have discordant takes on a manuscript, or will differ in their overall recommendations (typically one ‘revise-and-resubmit’ and one ‘reject’).

More rarely, the editor may suspect that one of the reviews lacked good-faith substance (perhaps it was “phoned-in”; perhaps the reviewer has an unfair bias). Thus, peer-review conversations are intended to accomplish two goals: give reviewers more direct involvement in editorial decisions; and provide a check against unfair reviews.

**Editorial rejection.** Since its inception, one challenge for *JoCN* has been the fact that we receive many more high-quality manuscripts than can be reviewed and published, necessitating the triage that occurs between the receipt of a manuscript and the send-out for peer review. The decision to editorially reject a manuscript is necessarily a subjective one, and one that’s made based on a limited amount of information, and so it’s unavoidable that many authors will feel
that such decisions are unfair, if not wrong. In an effort to ‘take a sad song and make it better’ (sorry), JoCN is adding a new category of editor, the Consulting Editor. The modal Consulting Editor is a relatively early-stage independent investigator who has been selected because of their reputation as an excellent scientist within a particular subdomain of cognitive neuroscience where the journal needs coverage. Each editorial reject decision contemplated by the E-i-C or an AE will go to a Consulting Editor, who will then either decide to corroborate that decision or to disagree with it, in which case the “rescued” manuscript will go out for peer review. The roster of Consulting Editors is too large to list here, but their names will/can be found at https://www.mitpressjournals.org/journals/jocn/editorial. When you encounter any of these colleagues, be sure to thank them for this valued contribution! (If you’d like to self-nominate, please contact me.)

Gender bias in citation practices. Recently, Jordan Dworkin, Perry Zurn, Danielle Bassett, and colleagues undertook a monumental study of citation patterns in five high-profile neuroscience journals, and discovered that the proportion papers first- or last-authored by women was markedly lower than what would be expected if gender\(^1\) had no role in selecting which papers to cite (Dworkin et al., 2020). (Alarming, even though the proportion of women publishing in these journals has increased over the past 25 years, the proportion of citations of papers first- or last-authored by women has been decreasing over the past several years!) Can you say “h-index”? During the summer of 2020 a team in my laboratory applied the approach of Dworkin et al. (2020) to the 2,106 papers published in JoCN in the past ten years, and confirmed that we, too, have this problem. Importantly, this is a systemic problem, because “everybody does it” -- the same qualitative pattern of over-citation of Man-first/Man-last papers was seen for reference sections regardless of whether published by a Man-first/Man-last, a Woman-first/Man-last, a Man-first/Woman-last, or a Woman-first/Woman-last team (Fulvio, Akinnola, & Postle, in prep). Although we have no illusions that we can remedy this state of affairs by fiat, we hope that by encouraging the generation of a gender citation balance index for each paper reviewed by JoCN we can at least contribute to social norm messaging that can nudge our behavior in the right direction (Murrar, Campbell, & Brauer, 2020).

Preregistration. When I was a (relatively) young, impressionable graduate student, our lab statistician opined to me that in a perfect world, papers would be reviewed based on the inherent interest of the hypothesis (Introduction) and the soundness of the design (Methods), with no consideration of the results – if the experiment was worth doing, and if it was carried out well, any outcome would be informative. Now, a few decades later, voilà, we are in an era that has embraced the registered report. Leveler heads than mine have advised that requiring all submissions to have been preregistered would be Procrustean, but we are instituting a policy of accepting “Stage 1” registered reports, and a practice of encouraging the preregistration of your experiments even if you don’t go through the formal process of submitting a Stage 1 proposal for peer review before carrying out the research.

\(^1\)The results were admittedly imperfect a priori, because they relied on the invalid assumption that gender is a binary variable. This is another realm for which social-equity improvements in data science can’t come too soon.
Details about the implementation of these new developments can be found at https://www.mitpressjournals.org/journals/jocn/sub.

[something pithy yet profound]

Bradley R. Postle
University of Wisconsin–Madison

