Dear Editor,

We wish to submit our manuscript entitled, "Males are not the more variable sex when it comes to personality" by Lauren Harrison, Daniel Noble and Michael Jennions for consideration as a *Nature Ecology & Evolution* research article. We test the robustness of oft-cited biological explanations for the ‘greater male variability’ hypothesis in humans. To do so we present a meta-analysis of animal personality behaviour that uses a massive dataset of 2,000+ effect sizes, covering 226 different species of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles/amphibians and invertebrates collected from over 200 studies.

Studies of differences in trait variability between men and women often draw parallels with the animal kingdom to provide an evolutionary explanation for greater variability in men. There is, however, limited evidence that morphological traits show greater male variability in animals, and almost no evidence for behaviours that are shared by both sexes. We compared the personality behaviours of males and females in 226 animal species, to test the applicability of the ‘greater male variability’ hypothesis. There was no evidence for widespread, consistent male-female differences in variability in personality. There is therefore no evidence to support the greater male variability hypothesis for behaviours expressed by both sexes.

Our findings suggest that invoking evolutionary explanations as the chief reason for greater variability in men than women for personality and allied behaviours (e.g. creativity) is premature. This is important as such explanations can be socially influential. The most high-profile case was when Harvard President Larry Summers speculated that biology might explain why fewer women are in STEM careers, an evolutionary argument given further prominence by the leading public intellectual Steven Pinker. Our study undermines this speculation.

Sex differences in variability for men and women is a topic that frequently attracts attention in psychology and the social sciences, but researchers often cite single-species studies to infer a biological basis for sex differences in humans. We think that the unexpected findings of our large meta-analysis will therefore interest both a general audience and specialists interested in animal behaviour or human sex differences. We believe our work is an excellent fit for *Nature Ecology & Evolution*. We note that in our earlier meta-analysis, published in your sister journal *Nature Communications*, we examined the link between variability and sex differences in students (O’Dea *et al.* 2018. Gender differences in individual variation in academic grades fail to fit expected patterns for STEM. *Nature Communications*). Given the extremely high levels of interest in our earlier paper (Altmetric 1230, 717k Accesses), we expect a similar response for the current paper, especially given the overlap in the study topic.

Each of the authors have contributed significantly to the present submission, and all confirm that this manuscript is not under consideration by another journal. Our meta-analysis was also pre-registered with the Open Science Foundation (OSF), as is good practice for systematic and meta-analytic studies. All the authors have approved the contents of this manuscript and agree to *Nature Ecology & Evolution’s* submission policies.

We would like to suggest the following four people as potential reviewers:

Dr Stuart Ritchie, King’s College London [email: [stuart.j.ritchie@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:stuart.j.ritchie@kcl.ac.uk)] He has published many papers on behavioural sex differences in humans, including variation in brain structure. He is also well acquainted with meta-analysis (see his 2020 book *Science Fictions*).

Dr Wiebke Schuett, University of Sussex [email: [w.schuett@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:w.schuett@sussex.ac.uk)] She is an academic expert in the study of animal personalities, and is lead author of the highly cited review of sexual selection and animal personalities (2010).

Prof Denis Réale, Université du Québec a Montréal [email: [reale.denis@uqam.ca](mailto:reale.denis@uqam.ca)] He is an academic expert in the field of animal personality and has experience publishing meta-analyses in the evolution and ecology field.

Prof Cordelia Fine, University of Melbourne [email: [cfine@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:cfine@unimelb.edu.au)] She is an academic expert in the study of human sex differences. She is also aware of the social dimensions of such research, as shown by her Royal Society Prize winning 2017 book, *Testosterone Rex*.

Assistant Prof Kimberley Mathot, University of Alberta [email: mathot@ualberta.ca] She has conducted many studies on animal personalities and has plenty of experience with meta-analyses in this field.

We look forward to your editorial decision. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lauren Harrison

Corresponding Author

PhD Candidate  
Australian National University  
Research School of Biology

46 Sullivan’s Creek Road, Acton

Canberra ACT 2600 Australia  
Email: lauren.harrison@anu.edu.au  
Phone: +61 422 366 788

Professor Michael Jennions

Additional Corresponding Author  
Head of Division, Ecology and Evolution  
Australian National University  
Research School of Biology

46 Sullivan’s Creek Road, Acton

Canberra ACT 2600 Australia  
Email: michael.jennions@anu.edu.au  
Phone: +61 2 6125 2866