Do researchers preferentially collaborate with colleagues of the same gender?

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Abstract

Evidence suggests that women in academia are hindered by conscious and un-conscious biases, and often feel excluded from formal and informal opportunities for research collaboration. In addition to ensuring fairness and helping to redress gender imbalance in the academic workforce, increasing women's access to collaboration could help scientific progress by drawing on more of the available human capital. Here, we test whether researchers preferentially collaborate with same-gendered colleagues, using more stringent methods and a larger dataset than in past work. Our results reaffirm that researchers co-publish with colleagues of the same gender, and show that this 'gender homophily' is slightly stronger today than it was 10 years ago. Contrary to our expectations, we found no evidence that homophily is driven mostly by senior academics, and no evidence that homophily is strongest in fields where women are in the minority. Interestingly, homophily was negatively correlated with journal impact factor, as predicted if mixed-gender teams produce better research. We discuss potential causes of gender homophily in science.

Keywords: Gender bias, Homophily, Scientific collaboration, Text mining, Women in STEM.

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Introduction

Women are severely underrepresented in many branches of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM), and face additional challenges and inequities relative to men (e.g. Shaw and Stanton 2012; Larivière et al. 2013; West et al. 2013; Elsevier Report 2017; Holman et al. 2018). On average, women occupy more junior positions (Wutte 2007; Reuben et al. 2014) with lower salaries (Trower and Chait 2002; Umbach 2007), receive less grant money (Hosek et al. 2005; Health 2008), are promoted more slowly (Zuckerman 1987; Rosenfeld 1991; Long et al. 1993; Hopkins et al. 2013), and are allocated fewer resources (O'Dorchai et al. 2009) and less research funding (Feldt 1986; Stack 2004; Larivière et al. 2011). Experimental evidence suggests that bias against women plays a major role in generating these differences (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012; Knobloch-Westerwick et al. 2013).

Because publishing, networking and collaboration are instrumental to scientific productivity and academic career advancement (Lee and Barry 2005; Wuchty et al. 2007; Abramo et al. 2009; Larivière et al. 2015), dozens of studies have tested for gender differences in these areas (e.g. Long 1992; Bozeman and Gaughan 2011; Abramo et al. 2013; Badar et al. 2013; references in Table S1 of Holman et al. 2018). For example, studies have found that women tend to be less involved in international collaboration (Lewison 2001; Webster 2001; Bozeman and Elizabeth 2004; Larivière et al. 2011; Abramo et al. 2013), collaborate less within their own university departments (Webster 2001), have less prestigious collaborations (Long 1990), and fewer collaborations in total (Fuchs et al. 2001). These gender differences in collaboration practice presumably have multiple causes, which might include implicit and explicit gender bias (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012), differential family obligations (Reskin 1978; Long 1990; Wright et al. 2003), concerns relating to sexual harassment (Jagsi et al. 2016), and unequal access to conferences (Martin 2014) and travel funds (Bozeman and Elizabeth 2004).

A high, steadily increasing proportion of research papers is written by more than one author (West et al. 2013), making collaboration a key predictor of publication output, and thus of career prospects (Tower et al. 2007; Jordan et al. 2008). Additionally, empirical studies imply that mixed-gender or otherwise diverse teams produce better results on collaborative tasks than less diverse teams (**???**; Hong and Scott E 2004; Bear and Woolley 2011; Campbell et al. 2013). For reasons such as these, several studies have tested for gender differences in collaboration frequency or pattern by examining the author lists of published research. To our knowledge, every published study of this question suggests that men co-publish with other men, and women with women, more often than expected if collaborators assort randomly with respect to gender (Ferber and Michelle 1980; McDowell and Smith 1992; Crow and Smykla 2015; Ghiasi et al. 2015; Araújo and Elsa 2017*a*, 2017*b*; Fahmy and Jacob TN 2017; Jadidi et al. 2017; Teele and Kathleen 2017; Zettler et al. 2017). This pattern of assortative publishing has been termed 'gender homophily'.

However, we believe that prior studies of gender homophily were hindered by a largely unacknowledged statistical issue that we term the Wahlund effect (Figure 1), by analogy with a conceptually similar effect in population genetics (Wahlund 1928). The Wahlund effect makes it deceptively difficult to infer gender-based preferences simply by counting same- and mixed-gender coauthorships. Essentially, whenever coauthorship data are sampled

from two or more discrete sets of literature, which vary in the author gender ratio and which are largely not connected by collaboration, the number of same-gendered coauthors will be inflated. This can give the impression that authors preferentially publish with same-gendered colleagues if no gender preferences exist, or even if opposite-gendered colleagues are prefered. For example, a sample of literature containing bioinformatics and cell biology papers will probably contain an excess of mostly-male and mostly-female author lists, simply because researchers preferentially work with colleagues from the same discipline, and because the author gender ratio is more male-biased in bioinformatics than in cell biology (Holman et al. 2018).

The Wahlund effect
Illusory preferences for same-gendered collaborators

One paper with two women authors

Overall set of papers

Male-biased subset, e.g.

- Papers on Surgery
- Older papers
- Papers from Japan

Female-biased subset, e.g.

- Papers on Nursing
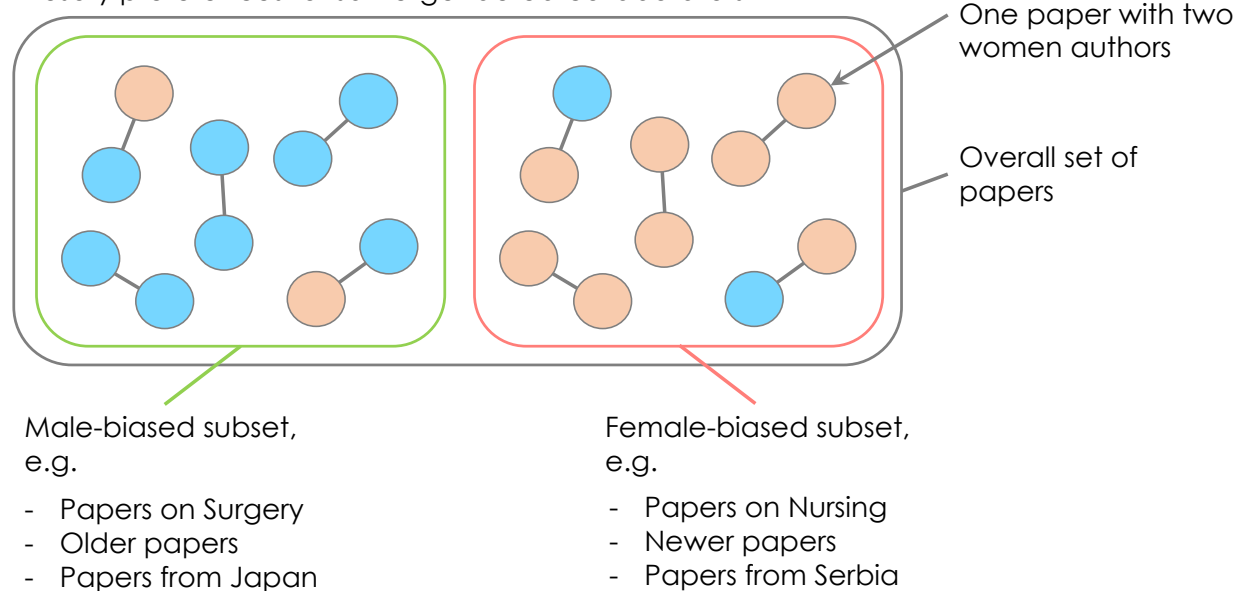- Newer papers
- Papers from Serbia

Figure 1: The Wahlund effect can make it appear as if authors prefer to publish with same-gendered colleagues, even if no such preference exists. Here, coloured circles represent male and female authors, and coauthors are linked with lines. Across the whole set of ten papers, there is an apparent excess of same-gender collaborations: there are six same-gender papers and only four mixed-gender papers, which is fewer than the $10 \times 2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 = 5$ mixed-gender papers expected under the null hypothesis that authors assort randomly with respect to gender. However, within each subset, there is no evidence that authors prefer to publish with same-gendered individuals (if anything, this small dataset suggests gender heterophily). The Wahlund effect will tend to inflate the frequency of same-sex coauthorships whenever the data is composed of two or more disconnected subsets of literature with different author gender ratios; these subsets could be research disciplines, older versus newer papers, or papers from authors in different countries.

In the present study, we test whether researchers working in the life sciences tend to co-publish with same-gendered collaborators, while controlling for the Wahlund effect as strictly as possible. Our study uses a recently-published dataset describing the gender of 35.5m authors from 9.15m articles indexed on PubMed (Holman et al. 2018). Holman et al. (2018) reported

large differences in the gender ratio of authors across research disciplines, journals, countries, and across the years 2002-2016. We therefore tested for gender homophily after restricting the analysis to particular journals (i.e. research specialties), time periods, and countries.

Methods

The dataset

We used the dataset of PubMed author lists from Holman et al. (2018). Briefly, that dataset was created by downloading every article indexed on PubMed and attempting to infer each author's gender from their given name. Each journal was assigned to one of 107 scientific disciplines, using PubMed's journal categorisations in the interests of objectivity. Because the present study focuses on co-authorship, all single-author papers were discarded. We also discarded all papers for which we could not determine the gender of every author with $\geq 95\%$ certainty, in order to simplify the statistical analysis. To mitigate Wahlund effects caused by variation in the gender ratio of researchers over time (see below), we also discarded all papers except those that were published either 0-1 or 10-11 years before the PubMed data were collected (i.e. 20$^{\text{th}}$ August 2016). Lastly, we excluded journals with fewer than 50 suitable papers.

The final sample sizes were 276,879 papers and 1,311,213 authorships from August 2015 - August 2016, and 151,652 papers and 647,634 authorships from August 2005 - August 2006. Respectively, these papers came from 2,116 and 1,192 journals, which were grouped into 107 and 101 research disciplines. There was a median of 87 (87) papers per journal, 413 (371) authors per journal, and 4 (4) authors per paper (the first number is for 2015-6, and the bracketed number for 2005-6).

Calculating α, the coefficient of homophily

Following Bergstrom et al. (2016), we defined the coefficient of homophily as $\alpha = p - q$, where p is the probability that a randomly-chosen co-author of a *male* author is a man and q is the probability that a randomly-chosen co-author of a *female* author is a man. Therefore, $\alpha > 0$ suggests that same-gender authors publish together more often than expected under the null hypothesis that authors assort randomly with respect to gender (homophily), $\alpha < 0$ suggests that opposite-gender authors publish together more often than expected (heterophily), and $\alpha = 0$ suggests random assortment with respect to gender. Like the Wahlund effect, α is borrowed from population genetics; for a set of 2-author papers, it is equivalent to Wright's coefficient of inbreeding (Wright 1949). Mathematical work illustrates that α is closely related to network-based alternative methods for quantifying homophily (Wang and Erosheva 2016).

To estimate α for a particular subset of the scientific literature, we estimated p as the average proportion of men's co-authors who are men (averaged across all papers with at least one man author), and q as the average proportion of women's co-authors who are men (averaged

across all papers with at least one woman author). To estimate the 95% confidence intervals on α for a given set of n papers, we sampled n papers with replacement 1000 times, estimated α on each sample, and recorded the 95% quantiles of the resulting 1000 estimates.

As well as calculating α for all authors, we calculated α for first or last authors only. α was again defined as $p - q$, but this time p was estimated as the average proportion of male co-authors on papers with a male first (or last) author, and q was estimated as the average proportion of male co-authors on papers with female first (or last) authors. We did not calculate α for other authorship positions (e.g. second or third authors) because this would necessitate culling the dataset to include only papers with a sufficiently long author list, complicating interpretation of the results.

Our test assumes that the expected value of α is zero if authors randomly assort, but for small datasets this assumption is not always true (as pointed out by Carl Bergstrom in a blog post, http://www.eigenfactor.org/gender/assortativity/note_to_eisen.rtf). To borrow Prof. Bergstrom's example, consider a small research specialty comprising just two men and two women researchers, who have together produced six two-author papers: one in each of the six possible two-author combinations. For these six papers, $\alpha = -\frac{1}{3}$, even though same- and opposite-gendered coauthors were selected in equal proportion to their frequency in the pool of possible collaborators.

To control for the fact that the null expectation for α is not zero for small datasets, we devised an adjusted version of the coefficient of homophily, which we term α'. Every time we calculated α for a set of papers, we also determined the expected value of α under the null hypothesis that authors assort randomly with respect to gender. This was accomplished by randomly permuting authors across papers 1000 times, recalculating α, and taking the median. We then calculated α' by subtracting the null expectation for α from the observed value. We also used the null-simulated α values to calculate a two-tailed p-value for the observed value of α; the p-value was defined as the proportion of null simulations for which $|\alpha_{null}| > |\alpha_{obs}|$. We applied false discovery rate (FDR) correction to each set of p-values to account for multiple testing (Benjamini and Hochberg 1995).

As expected, α' was usually almost identical to α (Figure S1), but α was downwardly biased relative to α' for small datasets (Figure S2). Additionally, the correlation between α' and sample size was negligible ($R^2 < 0.01$), suggesting that our calculation of α' effectively removed the dependence of α on sample size. We therefore used α' in all analyses.

Minimising the Wahlund effect: research discipline and time period

To minimise bias in α' due to the Wahlund effect, we restricted each set of papers to a single research specialty to the greatest extent allowed by our data. Specifically, we only calculated α' for individual journals, since papers from the same journal typically focus on closely related topics. Although some journals, e.g. *PLoS ONE*, publish research from diverse disciplines with very different author gender ratios (Holman et al. 2018), calculating α' for these highly multidisciplinary journals is still useful as a contrast. The difference in α' between highly

multidisciplinary and more specialised journals, e.g. *PLoS ONE* versus *PLoS Computational Biology*, gives an estimate of the extent to which multidisciplinarity inflates α'.

As well as varying between disciplines, the gender ratio of authors has changed markedly over time (Holman et al. 2018). Because the gender ratio was more male-biased in the past, α' would be inflated if we calculated it for a sample of papers published over a long enough time frame. To minimise this effect, we only sampled papers from two one-year periods (namely 2005-6 and 2015-16). The median change per year in % (fe)male authors across journals is below 0.5% (Holman et al. 2018), and so restricting our dataset to a single year should prevent temporal changes in gender ratio from noticeably affecting our estimates of α'.

Minimising the Wahlund effect: author country of affiliation

A Wahlund effect could arise even if one calculates α' for a single discipline and time period, because of variation in the gender ratio of researchers from different countries. For example, Holman et al. (2018) showed that PubMed-indexed authors based in Serbia are more than twice as likely to be women as are authors based in Japan. Therefore, a dataset containing a mix of papers from teams of authors based in these two countries would contain an excess of same-sex coauthorships, even if collaboration were random with respect to gender within each country. To address this issue, we also analysed every combination of journal and author country of affiliation for which we had enough data (i.e. 50 or more papers published in 2015-16). For simplicity, we restricted the dataset to only include papers for which Holman et al. (2018) had identified the country of affiliation for all authors on the paper, and all authors shared the same country of affiliation. Restricting the dataset in this fashion produced enough data to measure α' for 325 combinations of journal and country (median: 70 papers and 273 authors per combination).

Calculating standardised journal impact factor

We obtained the 3-year impact factor for each journal from Clarivate Analytics. To account for large differences in impact factor between disciplines, we took the the residuals from a model with Log_{10} impact factor as the response and the research discipline of the journal as a random effect. Thus, journals with a positive standardised impact factor have a higher mean number of citations than the average for journals in their discipline. We then used Spearman rank correlation to test whether α' was correlated with impact factor across journals.

Statistical analysis

Previous authors (e.g. Sheltzer and Smith 2014; Bonham and Stefan 2017) have hypothesised that senior scientists preferentially recruit staff and students of the same gender, and/or that junior researchers preferentially select same-gendered mentors. In the majority of PubMed-indexed disciplines, authorship conventions mean that the first-listed author is often an

early-career researcher, while the author listed last is more likely to be a senior researcher leading a research team (Wren et al. 2007). Assuming that senior researchers are the main drivers of homophily and that there are enough papers with three or more authors, we predict that the last author's gender will be the strongest predictor of the remaining authors' genders (i.e. the gender of the last author will be more salient than that of the first author, or any other authorship position). This is because the first author's gender would simply be an imperfect correlate of the true causal effect, while the last author's gender would be the causal effect itself.

To test whether α' for last authors tends to be higher than α' for first authors for any given dataset, we used a linear mixed model implemented in the `lme4` and `lmerTest` packages for R, with *authorship position* (first or last) as a fixed factor, and *journal* and *research discipline* as crossed random effects. The response variable was α', and we weighted each observation by the inverse of the standard error from our estimate of α', meaning that more accurate measurements of α' had more influence on the results. We used a similar model to test for a difference in α' between the 2005-6 and the 2015-16 datasets, with two differences: we fit year range as a two-level fixed factor (instead of authorship position), and we used α' estimated for all authors (not first/last authors) as the response variable.

The relationship between the gender ratio of authors publishing in a journal and its α' value appeared nonlinear (see Results). We therefore fit a generalised additive model with thin plate regression spline smoothing, implemented using the `mgcv` package for R.

Theoretical expectations for α when the gender ratio differs between career stages

In many STEMM subjects, the gender ratio is more skewed among established researchers relative to early-career researchers (Shaw and Stanton 2012; Holman et al. 2018). We hypothesised that this skew could potentially create both Wahlund effects and 'reverse' Wahlund effects. For example, imagine that the majority of collaborations are between students and professors, and that the gender ratio differs between career stages: we will then see an excess of mixed-gender coauthorships (heterophily, $\alpha < 0$), even if gender has no direct, causal effect. Similarly, a hypothetical field in which students work only with students, and professors with professors, would have apparent gender homophily ($\alpha > 0$).

We can think of no tractable method of controlling for this issue using our dataset, which contains no information on career stage. Therefore, we instead decided to derive the theoretical expectations for α when there is a difference in gender ratio across career stages, in order to determine if and how this effect should alter our inferences. For simplicity, our calculations assume there are only two career stages, though we intuit that the general conclusions would also apply to a multi-tier career ladder. Under the null model that gender has no causal effect on collaboration, we calculated α for various combinations of the four free parameters, i.e. the gender ratios for early- and late-career researchers, and the relative frequency of collaborations between early-early, early-late, and late-late collaborations. We then used the theoretical expectations for α to qualify our main conclusions (see Results). The Online

Supplementary Material gives annotated R code used to derive the theoretical expectations.

Data availability and reproducibility

The Online Supplementary Material contains R scripts used to produce all results, figures and tables. The input data from Holman et al. (2018) is archived at https://osf.io/bt9ya/ along with the code used to obtain it.

Results

Gender homophily by discipline, time period, and authorship position

Figure 2 shows the distribution of α' estimates in 2015-2016 across all journals for which we recovered sufficient data, when α' was calculated for all authors, first authors only, or last authors only. The great majority of journals had $\alpha' > 0$, and for many of these the FDR-corrected p-values suggested that α' was significantly greater than zero (1469/2077 journals were significant in 2015-16, and 404/1192 in 2005-6). Only 2/2077 journals had statistically significantly heterophily (i.e. $\alpha' < 0$) in 2015-16, and 1/1192 in 2005-6. The remaining 606 or 787 journals (in 2015 and 2005 respectively) had a value of α' not significantly different from zero, consistent with the null hypothesis of random assortment with respect to gender.

α' was significantly higher in the literature sample from 2015-16 relative to 2005-6, though the difference in means was small (Figure S3; Effect of the fixed factor 'Time period' in a linear mixed model of the data for all author positions: Cohen's $d = 0.091 \pm 0.04$, $t_{953} = 2.42$, p = 0.016).

When comparing pairs of α' values estimated for the first and last authors for the same journals, we found that α' tended to be higher for first authors than for last authors (Figure S4; Effect of the fixed factor 'Authorship position' in a linear mixed model: Cohen's $d = 0.065 \pm 0.02$, $t_{2024} = 4.28$, p < 0.0001). This suggests that the gender of the first author was a slightly stronger predictor of the remaining authors' genders than the gender of the last author, i.e. the opposite of what is predicted if senior scientists are causally responsible for homophily.

Variance in homophily between disciplines

Figure 2 illustrates the variance in journal homophily values (α') across scientific disciplines. All disciplines had a positive average α', although homophily appeared somewhat stronger in some disciplines than others (e.g. mean α' was 0.12 ± 0.02 for Urology journals and 0.03 ± 0.01 for Veterinary Medicine journals; Figure 2, Table S3). However, there was no evidence for consistent differences in α' between disciplines: the random factor 'Discipline' explained
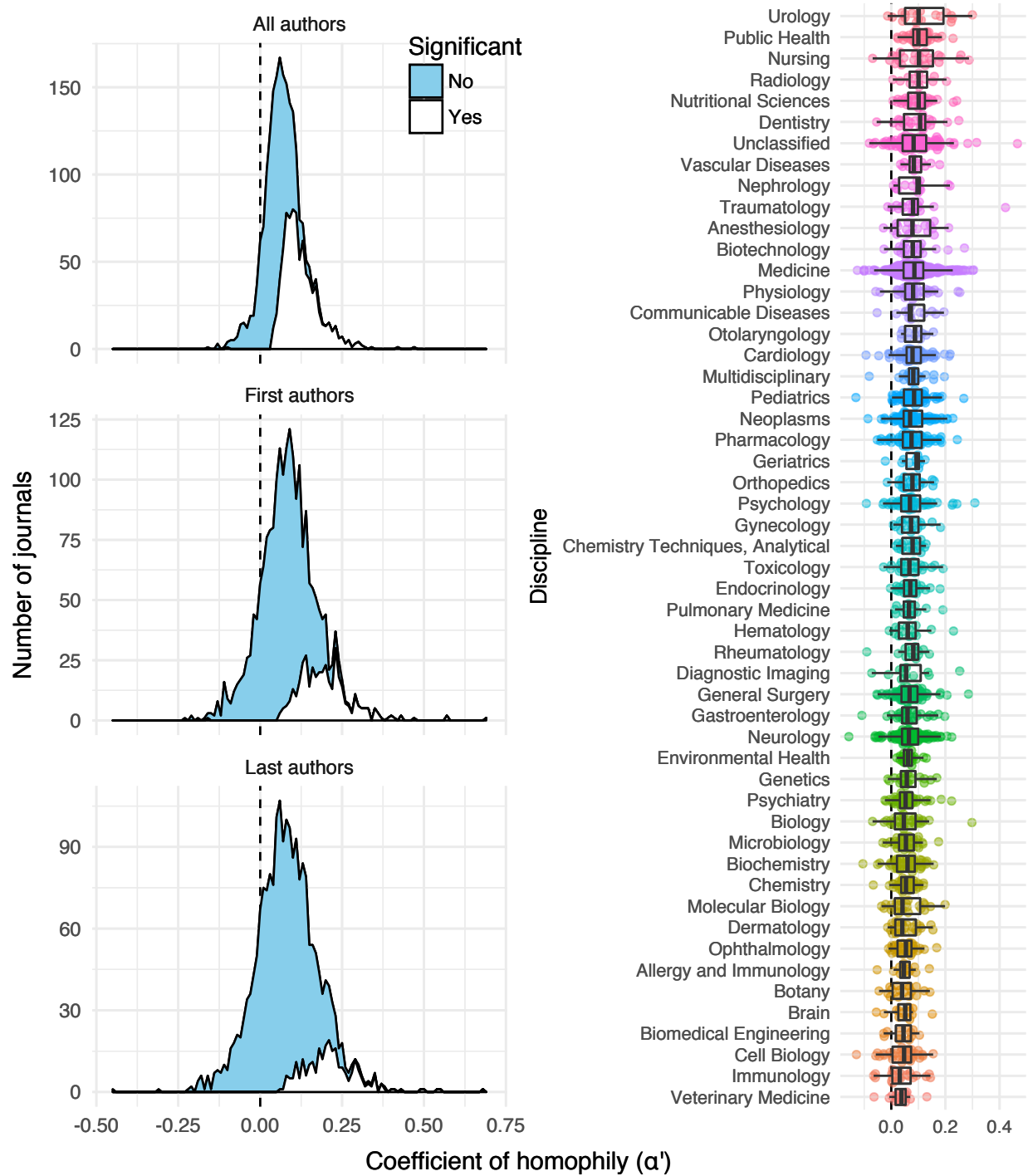
Figure 2: Of the 2116 journals for which we had adequate data in 2015-2016, 825 showed statistically significant evidence of homophily (denoted by $\alpha' > 0$), and 1 showed statistically significant evidence of heterophily ($\alpha' < 0$), after adjusting p-values using Benjamini-Hochberg false discovery rate correction. The white area shows the number of journals for which homophily was significantly stronger than expected under the null hypothesis ($p < 0.05$), while the blue area shows all the remainder. Patterns were similar whether α' was calculated for all authors, for first authors only, or for last authors only.

around 1% of the variance in α' in the two linear mixed models described in the previous section (see Figure 2 and mixed models in Online Supplementary Material). Thus, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the processes causing positive α' are similarly strong in all the disciplines we examined.

There was no indication that journals publishing on a wide range of topics have higher α' values than more specialised journals, due to the Wahlund effect. For example, the journal category 'Multidisciplinary' – which includes journals like *PLoS ONE*, *Nature*, *Science*, and *PNAS* – did not have notably elevated α' (Figure 2). This result suggests that our estimates of homophily, and estimates from some earlier studies, are not notably inflated by the presence of disparate research topics (with variable author gender ratios) being published within individual journals.

Relationship between gender homophily and gender ratio

We next tested whether researchers are more or less likely to publish with same-gendered colleagues in strongly gender-biased disciplines (e.g. Surgery or Nursing), relative to disciplines with a comparatively gender-balanced workforce (e.g. Psychiatry). We found a positive, non-linear relationship between the overall gender ratio of all authors publishing in a particular journal (as estimated in Holman et al. 2018), and the estimated value of α' for all authors and for first authors (Figure 3). Journals with a balanced or female-biased author gender ratio tended to have higher α' than journals with a male-biased author gender ratio (GAM smooth terms p < 0.001; Online Supplementary Material). The relationship was not statistically significant when α' was calculated for last authors (GAM, p = 0.142), though the trend appeared similar (Figure 3).

Relationship between journal impact factor and gender homophily

We observed a noisy but statistically significant linear relationship between standardised journal impact factor and α', such that journals with a high impact factor for their discipline had weaker gender homophily than did journals with a low impact factor for their discipline (Figure 4; linear regression: $R^2 = 0.043$, t_{1415} = -8.0, p < 0.0001).

Analysis accounting for differences in author gender ratio between countries

When we restricted the analysis by country, we observed statistically significant homophily for 72 of the 325 journal-country combinations tested (64 unique journals and 18 unique countries), and no significant evidence of heterophily (Figures S5-S6). Additionally, the values of α' calculated for each journal-country combination were mostly very similar to the α' values calculated for the journal as a whole (i.e. when pooling papers from different countries); on average, α' was only inflated in the main (non-country specific) analysis by
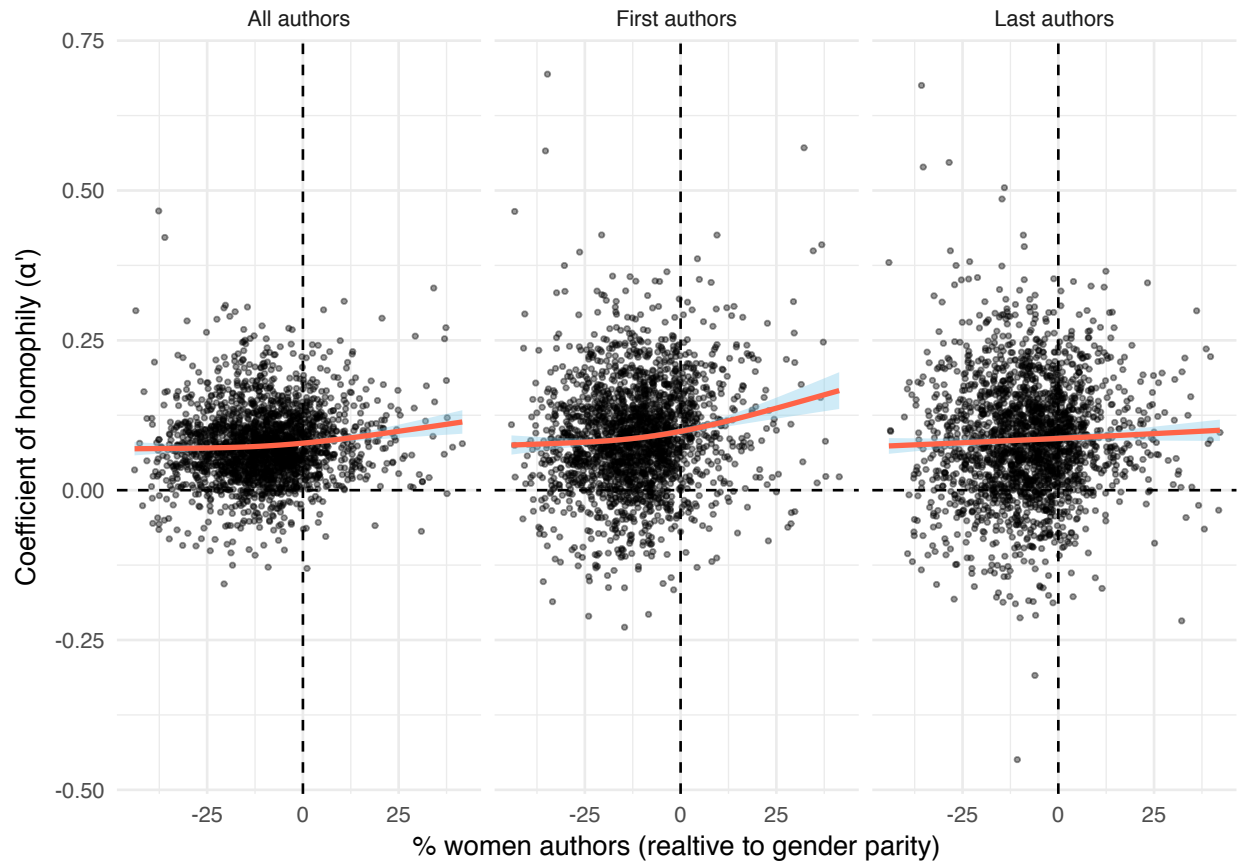
Figure 3: There is a weakly positive, non-linear relationship between the gender ratio of authors publishing in a journal, and the coefficient of homophily (α'). Specifically, journals with 50% women authors or higher tended to have more same-sex coauthorships than did journals with predominantly men authors. This relationship held whether α' was calculated for all authors, first authors only, or last authors only. A negative value on the x-axis denotes an excess of men authors, a positive value denotes an excess of women authors, and zero denotes gender parity. The lines were fitted using generalised additive models with the smoothing parameter k set to 3.
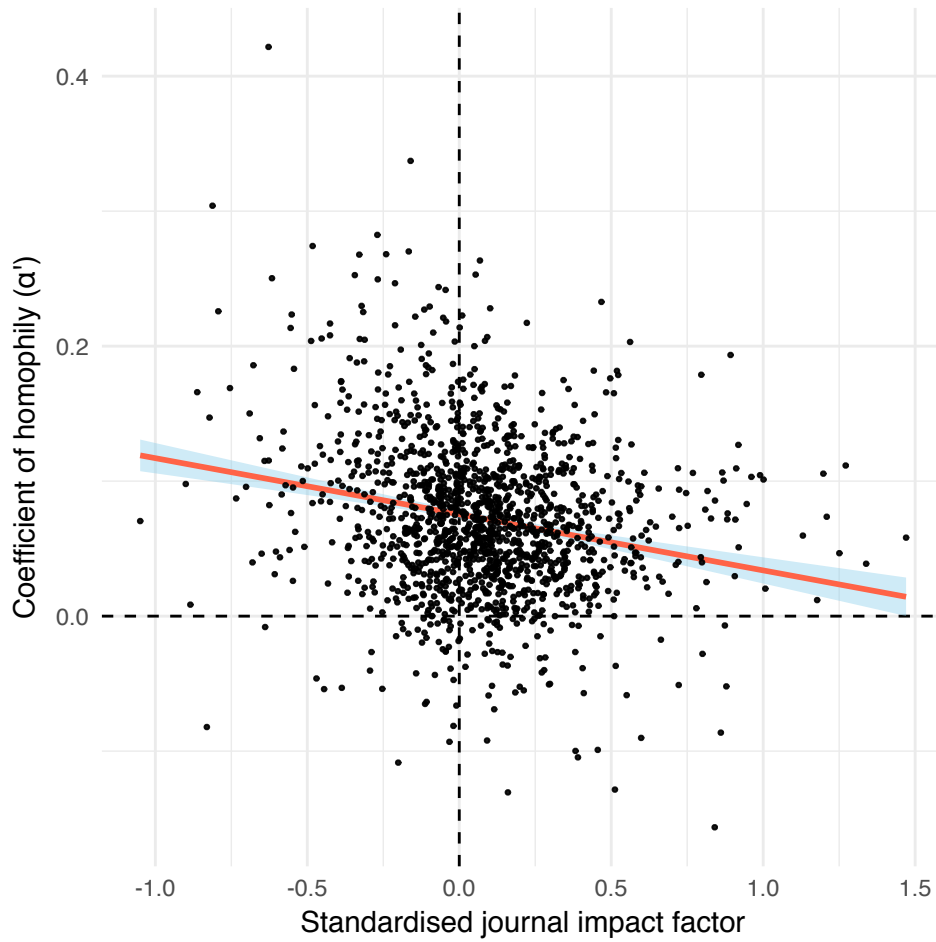
Figure 4: Journal impact factor (expressed relative to the average for the discipline) is negatively correlated with α'. The relationship is noisy ($R^2 = 0.043$), but the results suggest that journals with strong homophily tend to have lower impact factors than journals with weak homophily in the same discipline.

0.002 (Figure S7). These results suggest that our findings of widespread homophily in the main analysis were not driven solely by a Wahlund effect resulting from gender differences between countries.

Theoretical expectations for α when the gender ratio differs between career stages

As shown in Figure 5, we predict that α is expected to be non-zero, even if collaborators are randomly selected with respect to gender, provided that there is a gender gap between career stages. The extent to which α deviates from zero depends on the relative frequencies of collaboration within and between career stages. When >50% of collaborations were between early and established researchers, we expect gender heterophily ($\alpha < 0$). Conversely, when >50% of collaborations occured within career stages, we expect gender homophily ($\alpha > 0$). In a few parameter spaces (shown in red; Figure 5), α was quite high, and overlapped with the values that we estimated (Figure 2).

Despite this overlap, Figure 5 suggests that our main conclusions (and those of other studies of gender homophily) are probably robust to this career stage issue. We only expect strongly positive α when A) the gender ratio is highly skewed across career stages (e.g. a 5-fold difference), and B) collaborations between early and established researchers are very rare (e.g. <10% of the total). Both of these conditions are untrue for most fields: the gender gap across careers stages is generally less pronounced (e.g. Shaw and Stanton 2012; Holman et al. 2018), and it is very common for early-career researchers to co-publish with an established mentor (Macaluso et al. 2016). However, one can get $\alpha > 0$ for realistic combinations of parameters, e.g. a moderate shortage of women in senior positions coupled with a moderate excess of within-career stage collaboration, suggesting this effect might contribute to some of the observed homophily.

Lastly, we note that if there is a gender gap between career stages and coauthorships between early-career and established researchers comprise >50% of the total, then the baseline expectation for α is actually less than zero (blue areas in Figure 5). Therefore, our results might under-estimate the extent to which researchers preferentially select same-gendered collaborators in some cases.

Discussion

We found evidence that researchers preferentially publish with same-gendered coauthors, even after implementing stringent controls for Wahlund effects (Figure 1). Our study therefore reaffirms earlier studies' conclusions (e.g. Ferber and Michelle 1980; McDowell and Smith 1992; Bentley and Adamson 2003; Crow and Smykla 2015; Ghiasi et al. 2015; Araújo and Elsa 2017a; Fahmy and Jacob TN 2017; Jadidi et al. 2017; Teele and Kathleen 2017; Zettler et al. 2017) and establishes their generality across the life sciences. Relatively few journals had α' values below zero, and almost no journals showed statistically significant gender heterophily
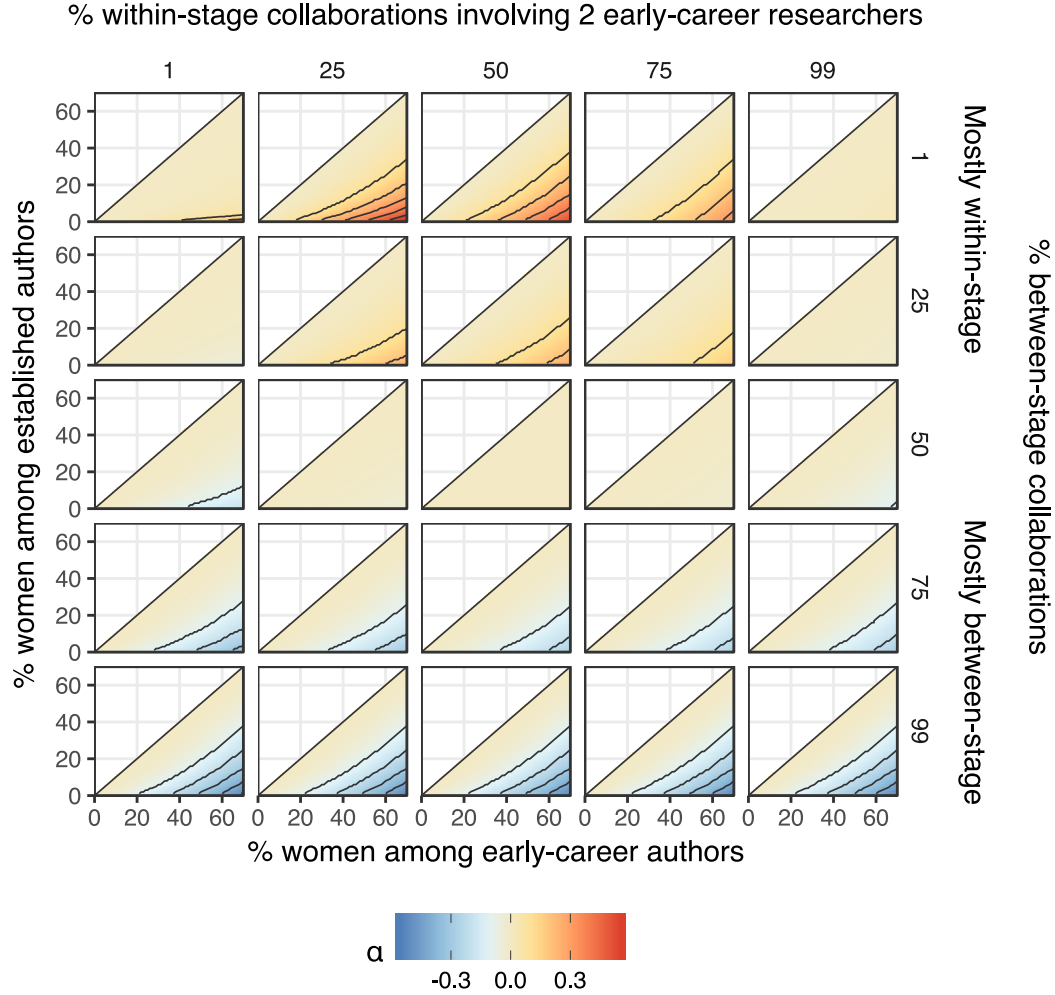
Figure 5: When there is a difference in gender ratio between early-career and established researchers, and collaboration is non-random with respect to career stage, the null expectation for α deviates from zero. An excess of collaborations between career stages gives the appearance of gender heterophily (lower rows, blue areas), while an excess of within-career stage collaborations produced apparent gender homophily (upper rows, red areas). However, the conditions required for strong gender homophily are quite restrictive, making it unlikely that this issue explains all of the homophily observed in Figure 2. Contour lines denote increments of 0.1.

after controlling for multiple testing. The excess of same-gender coauthorships was quite large: many journals had $\alpha' > 0.1$, indicating that the gender ratio of men's and women's coauthors differs by $>10\%$ in absolute terms. In relative terms, our findings are even more striking: for example, if men have 20% female coauthors and women have 30% (i.e. $\alpha' = 0.1$ for a field with a male-biased gender ratio), then women publish with women 50% more often than men do.

An important limitation of our study is that we cannot reliably determine the cause(s) of the observed excess of same-gender coauthorships. As well as conscious or unconcious selection of collaborators based on gender, our results could be partly explained by uncontrolled Wahlund effects. However, we suspect the contribution of these to be minor, for four reasons: we found positive α' after controlling for three obvious sources of Wahlund effect; there was no inflation of α' in highly multidisciplinary journals; restricting the data by country yielded similar estimates of α'; and we showed that differences in gender ratio between career stages are unlikely to fully explain our results. On balance, we believe the data provide good evidence that researchers preferentially select same-gendered collaborators, although the strength of this preference is uncertain.

We hypothesised that disciplines with a strongly skewed gender ratio might show the strongest gender homophily, e.g. because being in the minority might increase motivation to seek out same-gendered colleagues. Contrary to this hypothesis, we found no evidence that gender homophily is restricted to particular disciplines: α' was similarly high across the board (Figure 2). Moreover, α' was lower for journals with a male-biased author gender ratio relative to those with an even gender ratio. Interestingly, α' was highest in journals with a female-biased author gender ratio. This may suggest that men are more likely to preferentially seek out male collaborators in fields where men are a minority, relative to the homophily displayed by women in fields where women are a minority. However, this latter result is only tentatively supported since there are few journals in which most authors are women (Figure 3).

We also found that gender homophily was marginally stronger in 2015-2016 relative to 2005-2006. Although this trend might reflect a change in the gender preferences of researchers seeking collaborators over time, there are alternative (and perhaps more likely) explanations. For example, this trend might result from the increasing number of women working in senior positions in STEMM over the past decade (**???**, **???**; e.g. Shaw and Stanton 2012; Bendels and Bauer 2018). As shown in Figure 5, if enough coauthorships are between junior and senior researchers, a large gender gap between career stages can give the appearance of heterophily. As this gender gap between career stages lessens, the observed values of α may increase.

Our study begs two questions: what causes gender homophily in science, and are our results cause for concern? These questions are closely related. For example, some of the homophily we observed might be caused by women seeking to avoid harassment or sexism from men (Jagsi et al. 2016), which would clearly be concerning. Additionally, Sheltzer and Smith (2014) concluded that 'elite' male academics (defined as recipients of major honours) have a higher proportion of male students and postdocs than non-elite male academics. This finding could contribute to the homophily we observed, and is cause for concern since Sheltzer and Smith (2014)'s results might reflect discrimination against women during hiring (Moss-Racusin et

al. 2012), or avoidance by women of elite research groups (e.g. due to 'imposter syndrome' or the perception that these groups are sexist). We also found a little evidence that gender homophily is detrimental to research quality, in that high-impact journals tended to have weaker homophily. Assuming that papers published in high-impact journals are of higher average quality (which is contentious; Garfield 2006), this result provides non-experimental support for the hypothesis that mixed-gender teams produce better research than single-gender teams (**???**; Hong and Scott E 2004; Bear and Woolley 2011; Campbell et al. 2013).

Homophily might also have more benign causes. Collaboration is often most enjoyable and productive when working with like-minded people, who might be same-gendered more often than not. We also suppose that some people consciously choose to preferentially collaborate with women in order to help close the gender gap in the workforce; this would create homophily if women do this more than men. In support of this interpretation, women appear more likely than men to promote the work of female collagues by inviting them to give talks (Débarre et al. 2018; Nittrouer et al. 2018). Related to this, Ghiasi et al. (2015) concluded that women in engineering are "compliant [in reproducing] male-dominated scientific structures" because they do not collaborate often enough with other women; their data suggest that coauthorships between two women are about 30% more frequent than expected under the null (see their Figure 7). In contrast, we propose that men as well as women should ensure that they are not inadvertently overlooking or excluding female colleagues, particularly since men are disproportionately represented among senior researchers (Shaw and Stanton 2012).

Why does gender homophily exist in science? Collaboration often leads to co-authorship, publications, citations and additional professional recognition, therefore first authors should always be considering collaborators that are most likely to enhance their productivity and in the long term also their academic success, rather than pick co-authors according to their gender. First of all, it is likely that decades ago, the probability to meet a female colleague working on the same area of expertise was slimmer than now. Even though the number of women in STEMM is increasing, i.e. it is not likely to be an obstacle to collaboration anymore; we cannot forgo that female representation in science is still not equal to that of males. Second, the most basic source of homophily is space, scientists are more likely to collaborate with colleagues closer to them in geographic location (McPherson et al. (2001)). In the case of women, personal considerations (e.g. family commitments) represent the principal restrictions on their international mobility. As a result women are less likely to originate collaborations with foreign colleagues (Lemoine 1992; Lewison 2001; Webster 2001; Larivière et al. 2011). Lastly, men and women think differently on average (REF) and are more likely to initiate collaborations based on similarity of thoughts to progress their scientific output (REF).

Academic publishing is one of the most (if not the most) important tool for a researcher to display their work and is frequently used as an indicator of success for being promoted and hired as a faculty member. Our finding that researchers are more likely to publish with same-gendered co-authors implies that co-authorship listing is not a random process, but instead creates additional gender imbalance. Homophily could make it harder for women to find collaborators in disciplines where women are in the minority (i.e. almost all STEMM

fields; Holman et al. 2018). Because women make up for as little as 30% of the STEMM scientist community (Holman et al. 2018), they are less likely to be picked as coauthors, and, as a result, gender homophily creates further gender imbalance and disadvantages for women. Men tend to publish more in high impact journals as first author (Holman et al. 2018), and generate more citations than papers lead by first author women (Long 1992; Larivière et al. 2013). As a consequence, gender homophily is also likely to contribute to lower publication rates for women (McDowell and Smith 1992).

Although the proportion of women in science has significantly increased over the last decades, women still tend to leave their academic careers behind considerably more often than their male counterparts [REF]. Lack of scientific recognition (Lincoln et al. 2012), lack of research funding (Bozeman and Elizabeth 2004), lack of invitation to speak at scientific events (Isbell et al. 2012; Klein et al. 2017; Débarre et al. 2018), discrimination during hiring (Reuben et al. 2014; C A et al. 2017) and discrimination when writing a recommendation letter (Trix and Carolyn 2003; Schmader et al. 2007), are only some of the small disadvantages adding up to drive women out of science. Whether their decision to leave academia is deliberate or not, it will negatively impact science overall, as mentoring, networking, and supporting younger women scientists are especially important for women in academia.

Altogether, our findings suggest that researchers preferably collaborate with same-gendered colleagues in STEMM research. Despites using a more stringent analysis method (e.g. Wahlund effects) as well as the largest dataset to date, our results were in accord with longstanding and recent research, while adding new details, reasoning and insight for the current situation. Gender homophily in science not only reinforces the less favorable status of women in science, but also creates long term problems as described above. It is paramount to explore the causes and implement measures to readdress the gender disparity. We advocate for the introduction and implementation of gender policies in order to support opposite sex collaboration, to give men and women a chance to collaborate across gender, fields, and to promote scientific and innovative excellence.

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