

**Issue 2021 Editorial:  
On the Selection of Contributions by the Editors**

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**Abstract:** Now in its fifth year, Open Gender Journal publishes articles from the field of intersectional Gender Studies. Running a publisher-independent journal means that the editorial team must deal intensively with a variety of issues related to scholarly publishing, not least is the organization of the editorial process, including mechanism of ensuring quality. By making its operations transparent, the editorial board of Open Gender Journal aims to assert the principle of openness, not only for access to published articles, but for the entire editorial process: the complex procedures in the black box of the editorial system are to be made comprehensible through this editorial.

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*Open Gender Journal Editorial; translated from German*

## **Issue 2021 Editorial: On the Selection of Contributions by the Editors**

Now in its fifth year, Open Gender Journal publishes articles from the field of intersectional Gender Studies. Running a publisher-independent journal means that the editorial team must deal intensively with a variety of issues related to scholarly publishing, not least the organization of the editorial process, including mechanisms for ensuring quality. The growing number of article submissions and published articles in Open Gender Journal over the last five years is also accompanied in our case by a comparatively high rejection rate: half of the submitted articles are published in the journal after successfully going through a process of peer review and revision.

Dealing with quality assurance procedures and the associated mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion – mechanisms in which, consciously or unconsciously, prejudices as well as personal, substantive, or methodological biases are (or can be) reproduced – is one of the central research ethics challenges, not only for journals. Research fields such as Gender Studies, in which a scientific examination of these mechanisms takes place, are not necessarily immune to prejudice-driven decisions; however, they have instruments at their disposal that enable a reflexive approach to their own work.

In addition to reflecting on their own role, it is important for the editors of Open Gender Journal to make the mechanisms of selection, rejection, and acceptance of articles transparent, not only in terms of the review process, but also by disclosing the principles that govern the editors' work. Editorial boards have a powerful and often underappreciated function in scholarly journals, and those involved often do not account for it sufficiently.

By making its operations transparent, the editorial board of Open Gender Journal aims to assert the principle of openness, not only for access to published articles, but for the entire editorial process: the complex procedures in the black box of the editorial system are to be made comprehensible through this editorial.

### **Openness in Open Gender Journal**

Open Gender Journal is oriented towards the principle of openness, i.e., openness in the sense of free access to knowledge (Open Access); openness in the

conceptual-content sense for contributions that transcend disciplinary boundaries and are thus inter- and transdisciplinary in orientation; openness in the sense of detachment from restrictive publication routines such as publication deadlines, thematic issues, focus specifications; openness in the sense of reusability, also of the material used, the sources and methods (Open Science).

Openness does not mean that everything gets published.

The traditional task of a journal is to select and publish what is relevant and worth reading. In this context, scientific journals have traditionally taken on the role of bringing together scientific results that are authoritative for a particular field, and of serving as places where these results become accessible. These tasks are changing under the new technical conditions of digital journals: the articles are predominantly found via search engines. As a result, the context in which they originally appeared recedes in importance. This also changes the activities of the editorial offices and can be shaped toward more openness: the selection of articles is less about whether the paper is perfectly appropriate for the journal's thematic focus or a special issue, or whether there is still enough space available. Other selection and evaluation criteria for submitted articles must be found, applied, and openly communicated.

## **Selection and assessment criteria in editorial practice**

Journal editors bear responsibility in several directions: They are obliged to provide readers with informative, scientifically relevant, and high-quality articles and thus to facilitate the dissemination of scientific results in a particular field - in other words, to select and curate. They have an obligation to authors to carefully consider submitted articles, to organize a fair review process, and to prepare the texts for publication in the best possible way through editing, proofreading, and layout.

This results in a fundamental consideration for us that guides our practice in the quality-control process: the decision on the quality of contributions should be made by multiple persons with the greatest possible expertise. In practice, all contributions are first reviewed by the editorial team according to formal criteria. These include easy-to-judge points such as the length of the manuscript and the handling of literary references. However, the editorial team also check whether the article addresses a research question, considers the current state of research, and deals transparently with methods, concepts, and terms.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://opengenderjournal.de/about/submissions> (25.04.2021).

If a manuscript meets these criteria, it will be reviewed anonymously by two reviewers. When selecting reviewers, the editors consider the heterogeneity of knowledge cultures within Gender Studies in order to avoid a favoritism of schools of thought and approaches. Research fields in which expert knowledge is excluded from the scientific community for reasons of structural discrimination deserve special sensitivity. To counteract possible reservations, references to the qualification level are omitted from the manuscript in addition to the names of the authors. A review form helps reviewers to carefully evaluate the aspects that are relevant from the editorial point of view and to make a consistent recommendation. Based on the reviewers' recommendations, a team of two editors then decides on whether an article is accepted or rejected (after revision). As a rule, four people are involved in assessing the quality of contributions, and they can also provide appropriate editorial advice if necessary.

However, there are cases in which the editorial board decides to reject a manuscript before it enters the review process. In journals with a broad content profile such as *Open Gender Journal*, so-called desk rejections are formally justified and are explained in detail to the authors. At the same time, we are aware that desk rejections can be particularly influenced by prejudice and resentment, since contributions are not anonymized at this stage of the editorial process. The reverse is also true: positive preconceptions can lead to the preferential treatment of submissions whose scientific level falls short of the journal's standard.

The interests of the recipient (selection) and the producer (as many publications as possible) cannot always be reconciled. Not every submitted article can be submitted to the review process, since the time of possible reviewers is limited. Responsible editorial practice therefore also includes not to burden reviewers with the assessment of papers that will most likely have to be rejected anyway. Under the current publication and qualification pressures that apply to scholars at all levels, scientists tend to submit "unfinished" papers in the hope of getting a peer-reviewed publication for their publication list. The pre-review by the editors and the possible rejection before entering the review process can protect the authors from investing unnecessary time and work in an unfinished contribution, and ultimately, from discouraging criticism by the reviewers and possibly an unconvincing publication after many time-consuming revisions.

## Conclusion

The journal editorial board is the interface between the different roles in the publication process. It mediates between authors, reviewers, editors, and readers.

At the same time, it brings together the various interests by giving the journal a profile from which all participants benefit: a good scholarly environment and high-quality editorial process are important for all who contribute to the journal, publish in it, and ultimately use it as a source of further scholarly debate.

Addressing questions of power and dealing with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion shapes both the organization of workflows in general and the decisions on individual submissions. The aim is not to fix abstract criteria, but to engage in an ongoing, open discussion process.