# Editorial of Issue 2024. More than Editorial Work: A Project Recap

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**Abstract:** The editorial offices of scholar-led journals fulfil numerous tasks that go far beyond mere editorial work. In order to promote a journal and develop it further according to the needs and standards of scholarly publishing, they need resources. The Open Gender Journal has received support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation, DFG) for the past two years. During the Expansionshilfe-Projekt (expansion support project) (2022–2024) we have implemented a number of processes to further develop the journal, particularly in the areas of quality assurance and promotion. We have adapted acquisition strategies and formats, and developed transparency measures. The project also has enabled us to become actively involved in communities in order to work more closely with stakeholders in the open access community and to raise awareness of open science in gender studies.

**Kathrin Ganz and Sabrina Schotten**

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## Introduction

To initiate various processes of further development in order to make the Open Gender Journal even more attractive as an interdisciplinary journal for inter-sectional gender studies: With this aim, the project Open Gender Journal – Expansionshilfe (expansion support) was funded from July 2022 to October 2024 within the framework of the of the German Research Foundation's (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)) program infrastrcutures on scholarly publi-shing.[1] The collaborative project was led by Prof. Dr. Martin Lücke (Margherita von Brentano Centre, Freie Universität Berlin (FU)) and Prof. Dr. Susanne Völker (Central Institute for Gender Studies in Cologne, University of Cologne (UoC)). Sabrina Schotten (FU) and Sara Tewelde-Negassi (UoC) were responsible for realising the project goals as research assistants, supported by two student assistants. Dr. Kathrin Ganz (Editor-in-Chief) and Dr. Anita Runge were involved as part of the editorial team in the project. The project is coming to an end with the completion of this annual issue, so it is time to look back and show what topics a Diamond Open Access Journal deals with, what it works on behind the scenes – and what it needs money for.

The work of the last two years has centred on the goal of further developing the journal in a qualitative and sustainable manner, and addressing the specific needs of interdisciplinary gender studies. In 13 work packages, the aim was to increase the visibility and discoverability of gender studies research in open access, to promote open science approaches, and to secure the organisational basis for long-term funding. Some of the specific developments we have initi-ated as a result will be discussed in more detail below.

## Quality Assurance: Reviewing Standards

Since the journal was founded in 2016, the editorial team has been engaged in rigorous and sustained efforts to guarantee the quality of the journal, both at the level of individual articles and in relation to the journal as a whole. As part

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1    Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) – project number 471748397.

of the project, these measures have been subjected to a process of review and, where necessary, updating and extension.

For the first time, the publication ethics were formulated in writing.[2] In addition to our own experience and working processes, we have taken into account the "Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice" (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft 2022) and the requirements of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).[3] It is now possible for readers, (potential) authors, and other interested parties to find out how we deal with, for example, conflicts of interest and scientific misconduct.

We have also taken a close look at the article review process, as peer review is a central means of ensuring the quality of academic publications. Since the Open Gender Journal was founded, research articles have been peer-reviewed using a double anonymised procedure. However, we are always interested in exploring the possibilities of Open Science beyond Open Access for our trans- and interdisciplinary community. As part of the Open Gender Collection "Digital Gender" (2022–2024), we therefore tested the effects of open peer review without anonymisation ("open identity"; for a comparison of the various forms of open peer review, see Ross-Hellauer 2017). However, the subsequent evaluation showed that double anonymisation is currently the best option within gender research, which is why it will continue to be used (Ganz/Schotten/Tewelde-Negassi 2023).

Despite conscientious peer review and editorial supervision, articles may need to be corrected or even retracted after publication. Such changes are delicate, as trust in scientific publications depends in part on the fact that they are not revised in a non-transparent manner after the publication. Since 2023, an upgrade to the OJS editorial software has made it possible to make corrections transparently using versioning. The project team has analysed how this versioning can be used – and where it has its limits, for example in cases where discriminatory content would be reproduced or personal rights violated. (Ganz/Schotten 2024).

## Acquisition Strategies and Formats: Meeting Expectations

For a journal to be perceived as an attractive publication venue within its community, it must meet (or help to develop) the needs of said community, not least with regard to the publication formats it offers. In this respect, we have in

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2   https://opengenderjournal.de/publicationethics (accessed 15.11.2024).
3   https://publicationethics.org/ (accessed 15.11.2024).

the past offered the Open Gender Collections, sections within the annual issue in which conference papers could be published as anonymised peer-reviewed research articles, rather than appearing in non-peer reviewed edited volumes.

However, it has become clear that this strong focus on research articles does not do justice to what constitutes many conferences in our community. From 2025, we will therefore be giving conference organisers and other research contexts the opportunity to publish Special Issues. These Special Issues can have various categories: In addition to peer-reviewed research papers, they can include articles reviewed by the editors, conference reports and reflections, interviews, and even artistic contributions. A total of three Special Issues are currently being prepared for publication in 2025.

## Monitoring und Reporting: Creating Comparability

Much of the editorial work takes place behind the scenes: how many articles are submitted and how many are rejected, how many reviews are received or how long the process from submission to publication takes on average stays invisible to the outside world. To give interested parties this information and the opportunity to compare the Open Gender Journal with other journals, we have been publishing transparency reports since 2023.[4] In these reports, we not only publish the key figures mentioned above, but also contextualise them with background information on our editorial work. These metrics also help us to reflect internally on our editorial work.

## Public Relations: Making Research Visible

The articles in the Open Gender Journal – and the journal itself – should be as visible as possible and reach the community and interested readers worldwide. In the early years of the journal, the focus was on increasing the visibility of the Open Gender Journal in literature databases. In the last two years, we have increasingly focused on outreach.

As part of the annual conference of the Fachgesellschaft Geschlechterstudien (German Association for Gender Studies) in 2023, the project team held a workshop on "Making one's research visible", which included a discussion of different communication channels and how to use them. We also invested in some promotional materials: flyers, stickers, and writing pads to keep the Open Gender Journal in the public eye. A fundamental step was a new design that is

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4   https://opengenderjournal.de/monitoring (accessed 15.11.2024).

consistent throughout the website, promotional material and social media presence, and ensures recognisability.

The social media work itself was also marked by the acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk in 2022. In addition to being renamed to X, this sale also led to the scientific community questioning whether it should continue to be active on this platform. The Aktionsbündnis neue Soziale Medien (New Social Media Action Alliance) summarises the criticism as follows: "On X, anti-science is tolerated, anti-science is promoted and hate speech is insufficiently moderated" (Aktionsbündnis neue Soziale Medien n.d., translated by the authors). Based on a needs assessment survey for a specialised information service conducted in 2024, it can be assumed that many actors in German-language gender studies have now left X, but without deciding on a common new digital location (Ganz 2024, 31). However, this process does not take place everywhere: While the discussion in Germany has been quite noisy, we have noticed that international cooperation partners such as the Mexican journal Debate Feminista, with whom we work on the issue of sexual harassment, discrimination and violence at universities, continue to use this platform.

It is not yet clear whether a common, central hub will emerge again or whether fragmentation will be the new normal. As the target group(s) were spread across several networks, the Open Gender Journal had to become visible on other channels as well. Accordingly, most of the communication now takes place via Bluesky. This account can also be accessed on Mastodon, as both Bluesky and Mastodon are decentralised social networks that can be connected to each other.[5] The Margherita von Brentano Centre's Instagram channel also provides information about the journal's new publications. In order to be less dependent on social networks, we also send out a biannual newsletter in which we report on new articles, calls for papers and events and provide insights into our editorial work.[6] In this way, we have deliberately built up a variety of alternatives and could therefore leave X/Twitter for good at the end of 2024.

## Participation and Community: Learning Together

When the Open Gender Journal was founded in 2016, we decided to establish an open access journal with a high degree of creative freedom that is independent of established publishing structures. For this reason, it was a big step to join the

5   You can find the Open Gender Journal on BlueSky via https://bsky.app/profile/opengender.bsky.social and on Mastodon via @opengender.bsky.social@bsky.brid.gy (accessed 15.11.2024).
6   To the registration: https://t4a6ef3be.emailsys1a.net/218/256/3a3b1422ec/subscribe/form.html?_g=1683096914 (accessed 15.11.2024).

open access publisher Berlin Universities Publishing (BerlinUP) at the beginning of 2024 – even though there is strong personal and organisational continuity between our previous infrastructure provider at Freie Universität Berlin and the joint open access university publisher of Freie Universität, Humboldt-Universität, Technische Universität Berlin and Charité. At BerlinUP, we can participate directly in new technical developments, and hope for an exchange with its other journals. This exchange with other journal editors and stakeholders in Open Access infrastructures helps us to further develop the journal and to explore new avenues for Diamond Open Access.

One such new avenue is the collaborative funding of Diamond Open Access journals: We have been participating in KOALA's[7] consortium funding programme since 2023. This currently enables us to fund the editorial management as well as expert copyeditors, and promotional materials. We are very interested in exploring, together with other journals and Open Access stakeholders, to what extent consortial funding models can be a way to provide long-term and reliable funding for editorial work. This is because the funding of scientific editorial offices and the importance of this work is often ignored in debates about Diamond Open Access, which currently focus primarily on publication infrastructures. We are therefore trying to intervene here and bring in the editor's perspectives. We are also making this appeal (Ganz et al. 2024) as part of the scholar-led. network. There, we network with actors who "collaborate on, and advocate for, an independent non-profit publishing culture" (scholar-led.network 2022).

Our approach is based on our own work, our contacts with other (Diamond) Open Access journals as well as in conversation with journals whose governance is very different from ours, some of which are owned by traditional publishers and some of which have no experience with Open Access. Examples include the SoGez! network of social science and humanities journals[8] and networking with other gender studies journals. In these networks, we can compare our own experiences with those of other journals, face current challenges together – and, where appropriate, also report on our experiences with Open Access and provide impetus for opening up.

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7   KOALA stands for "Konsortiale Open-Access-Lösungen aufbauen" (Building Consortial Open Access Solutions) and is a project of the TIB Leibniz Information Centre for Science and Technology and the Communication, Information and Media Center of the University Library of the University of Konstanz.

8   https://zeitschriftennetzwerk.wordpress.com/ (accessed 15.11.2024).

# Open Science: Giving Impulses

Finally, Open Science was also an important area of work in the project. While Open Access stands for free, unrestricted access to research results, Open Science concerns all elements of the research process and therefore also approaches such as Open Source, Open Hardware, Open Educational Resources, and Open Research Data, the open handling of research material and data. The aim is to promote a culture of collaboration and exchange – both within science and between science and society. This also includes the diversity of knowledge in order to enable the most inclusive research practice possible (UNESCO 2021).

Gender studies work with a wide variety of research materials: In addition to data sets, questionnaires, and transcripts from quantitative and qualitative empirical research, researchers often work with observation protocols, archive materials, audio/video/image material or text corpora. The term research data includes all digital and digitized "data, documents, and objects […] produced in the course of a research process and/or that are the object or result of such a process" (Freie Universität Berlin 2021). Especially in the area of research data, Gender Studies still lack adequate infrastructures and a broad awareness of the opportunities and challenges of Open Science. We have therefore been working intensively on the question of how we, as a journal, can promote awareness of Open Science. A central aspect of this has been the development of a research data policy to make the handling of research data more transparent.[9]

In the future, we will enrich articles with information about the research process, including details on research funding and data availability statements. In order to strengthen the transparent handling of research data where possible, authors will be asked to indicate whether, where, and under what conditions their research data can be accessed and, if necessary, reused.

During this project, we also reflected on where gender research stands in the field of Open Science. This led to the idea of organising an event to learn more about Open Science together with the community. The discussions at the conference "Open Science in Gender Studies", which took place on 16 and 17 May at Schloss Wahn in Cologne, show that it is essential for gender studies to engage intensively with Open Science for many reasons. The conference focused on different disciplinary approaches to Open Science and considerations on the inter- and transdisciplinarity of gender studies, which could be stimulated by Open Science. In addition, the conference discussed in-depth how the rela-

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9    https://opengenderjournal.de/research-data-policy (accessed 10.12.2024)

tionship between academic research and non-university or activist research can be strengthened through Open Science.

Last but not least, the issue of research ethics also played a central role, as the open handling of research data requires careful reflection on the protection of sensitive data, the handling of confidentiality and the protection of the rights of research participants. These considerations naturally also flow into the work of our journal, where we aim to promote Open Access to research data wherever it is appropriate and possible.

## Outlook

The expansion grant has allowed us to explore new avenues and develop workflows that can be continued after the project ends. Examples of this include monitoring, which we will be able to continue with less effort in the coming years, and the editorial wiki, which serves as a "living" editorial manual that we use to document all the workflows involved in the journal.

In addition, the project team and the editorial team have also developed new ideas for the future development of the journal. We want to further develop the theme of Open Science by developing process-oriented and data-based publication formats and quality assurance procedures with pilot projects from the community as part of Special Issues.

One issue that we want to address more intensively in the coming years is international networking and visibility. Already today, a third of our authors come from non-German-speaking countries and the proportion of English-language research articles is 54 percent. Working with international authors poses specific challenges, for example in selecting suitable reviewers with local knowledge. One possible approach would be to improve international networking with other journals in our field, which could facilitate exchange between the editorial teams.

Finally, we're observing with great interest a number of developments that we hope will improve labour-intensive editorial workflows. Next year will see the launch of the DFG-funded Diamond Open Access Service Centre, which will provide services to journals such as the Open Gender Journal. Developments in the field of artificial intelligence are also of interest. This year, BerlinUP has already published a first guideline and a handout on the use of generative artificial intelligence by authors and reviewers, which we have implemented (Berlin

Universities Publishing 2024a, 2024b).[10] In addition, we plan to explore possible application scenarios for AI-based systems in editorial work.

The now completed project is part of the ongoing development of the Open Gender Journal. Our vision remains to strengthen the journal as a community-oriented platform for innovative and collaborative scholarship and to remain open to new impulses and challenges. In order to achieve this, we are dependent on resources. The coordination of editorial work and the continuous and professional work on policies, workflows and networking go beyond what scientists can achieve on a part-time and voluntary basis. In this respect, the issue of sustainable funding in particular will continue to occupy us, as this is the only way to put into practise the many ideas that have emerged in recent years.

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10 Among other things, the guidelines recommend transparent information on the aids used. The following information on tools applies to this text: ChatGPT was used to support the creation of individual sections and for the linguistic revision of parts of the text. Sections from own lecture manuscripts were used as the basis for the prompts. The English version of this editorial was translated using DeepL translate and DeepL write.

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