Gender Equity Improving among Award Winners and Leaders at the Society for Investigative Dermatology


TO THE EDITOR

More women are graduating from medical school than ever before, but women’s representation as leaders in academic medicine has not kept pace (Shah et al., 2018). Women are less likely to be full professors even after adjusting for age, specialty, experience, and productivity (Jena et al., 2015). Fewer than 36% of academic department chairs are women (Wehner et al., 2015). Although there is evidence of increasing gender equality in clinical dermatology—more than half of board-certified dermatologists and residents in the United States are women (Bae et al., 2016)—little is known about gender equity in investigative dermatology (Sadeghpour et al., 2012; Shi et al., 2017).

The goal of this study was to understand how representation of women leaders in investigative dermatology has changed over time. Specifically, we examined the gender breakdown of award winners, invited lecturers, and directors and officers at the Society for Investigative Dermatology (SID) annual meetings and the editors of the Journal of Investigative Dermatology. We also examined the degrees of the award winners to measure another aspect of diversity in investigative dermatology.

We conducted a retrospective review of SID and International Investigative Dermatology meeting programs from 2009 to 2019, and we reviewed all SID award winners from 1961 to 2019 (Dermatology, 2017; International Investigative Dermatology, 2018). For each year, we evaluated the number of women who were (i) award winners, (ii) invited lecturers, and (iii) SID directors and officers. Awards included the Stephen Rothman Memorial Award, Julius Stone Lecture, William Montagna Lecture, Naomi M. Kano Lecture, Herman Beerman Lecture, Albert M. Kligman/Phillip Frost Leadership Lecture, Eugene M. Farber Lecture, and the Rising Stars Lectures at the International Investigative Dermatology. Invited lecturers included those from State-of-the-Art plenary lectures I, II, III, and IV, and the Clinical Scholars Program sessions.

We coded each individual’s gender based on pronouns used in the lecture descriptions or professional websites. Gender was not identifiable through pronouns for 3 of the 225 individuals, and in these cases, we used their first name to identify gender. We obtained current SID membership demographic data from the SID administration.

We collected the highest degree of each award winner as PhD, MD, both, or other. This information was found through past SID meeting programs and Google searches and was available for all except one individual.

The proportion of award winners who were women was low before 1990 but has increased over time. Of the 67 total SID award recipients between 1961 and 1989, only 2 were women (3.0%). However, this number increased to 7 women awardees (17.5%) between 1990 and 1999, 6 women awardees (11.3%) between 2000 and 2009, and 17 women awardees (26.6%) from 2010 to 2019 (Figure 1). Table 1 shows the number and percentage of women and men who were award winners, invited lecturers, and SID directors and officers between 2009 and 2019. Approximately one-third of invited lecturers (32.3%) and SID directors and officers (35.7%) were women during this period. For comparison, 39.9% of SID members were women in 2018.

The percentage of women editors for the Journal of Investigative Dermatology (including editor, principle deputy editor, deputy editors, and section editors) also increased slightly over time, although our data are limited to the past 4 years. There were 3 (13.0%) female editors in 2016, 3 (13.6%) in 2017, 7 (28.0%) in 2018, and 7 (26.9%) in 2019.

Of the 224 SID award winners for whom degree information could be found, 56% (126) had MDs, 25% (56) had PhDs, 16.5% (37) had both PhDs and MDs, and 1.8% (4) had neither.

Our findings are encouraging because they show that the proportion of women who are invited lecturers and SID directors and officers is similar to that of current SID members. As women have increased in number in the dermatology workforce and SID membership, more women are being recognized as leaders in investigative dermatology. This is important because leadership positions may influence recruitment and retention of women in investigative dermatology as a whole.

More work, however, is needed to achieve gender equity in other important aspects of investigative dermatology, where it is still lacking. This includes academic promotion (Qiu et al., 2016), resources (Jena et al., 2016), departmental leadership (Wehner et al., 2015), and federal grant support (Cheng et al., 2016; Wehner et al., 2015).

Although not directly addressed by this study, the issue of gender equity relates to the broader goal of building diversity in investigative dermatology (Lester et al., 2016; Pandya et al., 2016). There is growing evidence that supporting diversity in the physician workforce directly benefits patients (Alsan and Graziani, 2018; Lester et al., 2016; Marrast et al., 2014). Diversity also matters in scientific research, because women and minorities are underrepresented in clinical trials, and the diseases that affect these patient groups are understudied. Building diversity among the physicians, scientists, and leaders of
our investigative dermatology community is essential to improve the care for the populations we serve.

Our study was limited by the dates of available online data (starting in 2009). We did not collect data on all meeting speakers because we believe that influential lectureships and awards are a more accurate reflection of leadership in investigative dermatology. Finally, because our analysis used data from final meeting programs, we do not know the number of speakers who may have been invited and declined the invitation, which may influence the gender balance of final programs.

Our study shows that women’s representation among SID meeting award winners and influential speakers has increased over time. These findings suggest that leadership opportunities for women are improving within investigative dermatology. We hope to see this pattern continue over time, building diversity among both the community and leadership of investigative dermatology.

**Data availability statement**
(Datasets related to this article can be found at http://iid2018.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/IID_ProgramBook_webversion6.pdf; hosted at SID, International Investigative Dermatology (International Investigative Dermatology, 2018)

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**
The authors state no conflict of interest.

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TO THE EDITOR

Shukla et al. (2019) show that the Society for Investigative Dermatology (SID) has improved gender diversity of its awards, lectureships, and its leadership. Additional initiatives that promote participation in the Society based on education, gender, race, sexual orientation, and other types of diversity can improve the quality of investigative dermatology and clinical progress for skin diseases.

Several recent studies demonstrate that when business teams have higher diversity, they are more successful and solve problems best. A 2015 study of over 350 companies showed that when teams have more ethnic and racial diversity, their success, as indicated by financial returns, is 35% higher than companies that have less diversity in their teams (Hunt et al., 2015). Furthermore, when six teams with differing diversity in perspective or information processing styles, known as cognitive diversity, were asked to solve a problem, the teams with higher cognitive diversity solved the problem faster with innovative solutions (Reynolds and Lewis, 2017).

Measures to impact gender and racial diversity have increased the number of women and underrepresented minorities (URMs) in PhD and MD students. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, over 50% of 2019 MD students are women and almost 40% are URMs (American Association of Medical Colleges, 2018). Data from the National Science Foundation from 2015 show that women also make up half of PhD students in the life sciences, whereas only 22% of PhD students in these programs are URMs (National Science Foundation, 2016a). However, women and URMs are not represented as well in later career stages (National Science Foundation, 2016b; Valantine et al., 2016). The persistence of diverse scientists in investigative dermatology and promoting the proper representation in its membership and programming is a priority for SID.

Shukla et al. (2019) analyzed the gender diversity of (i) award winners, (ii) invited lecturers at the SID annual meetings, and (iii) SID directors. Their analysis indicates that strides in addressing gender diversity in SID accelerated after 2010. Before 1990, only two SID awards went to women investigators. Yet, starting in 2010, women have earned at least one award per year. Similar increases in invited lecturers and SID directors also occurred after 2010. These results suggest that the active measures to address gender inequities within SID have improved one aspect of diversity within the leadership and awards.

SID initiatives to increase diversity SID has taken active steps to address diversity and inclusion within the Society (Table 1). Below, we discuss

Abbreviations: SID, Society for Investigative Dermatology; URM, underrepresented minority

References


IID. Meeting program. IID; 2018.


