



## ANS Diversity and Inclusion Committee Mission Statement

ANS strives for a diverse and inclusive culture to drive creativity, exploration and innovation and to better connect us to each other and to our patients.

## Creating a Culture and Climate of Diversity and Inclusion

By Stephanie Moody Antonio, MD, FACS

By now diversity and inclusion are likely familiar terms, as these topics have been presented in popular culture as well as in the domains of business, education, surgical teams, and organizational medicine. Some suggest that the ANS, as a professional organization, should not be involved in the “cultural politics”. On the contrary, the Consensus Study Report from the NIH in 2019 [Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering and Medicine](#) states,

*“Professional societies exist to advance and support their specific disciplines and communities...Through journals, media, conferences, workshops, student programs, and professional training, they are a powerful influence and important part of the career and advancement of those in science, engineering, and medicine.”*

Thus, the ANS has an important role to play in creating, promoting, and maintaining a diverse and inclusive culture and climate. The culture of an organization includes the collective *beliefs, assumptions and values* held by its members while climate is comprised of *perceptions* of individuals. It is important to address both. The ANS has developed a definitive strategy to transform the culture of our society which includes data collection, communication, education, identification and mitigation of barriers to diversity and inclusion. While the culture can be defined and promoted by leaders and members, the climate can sometimes be slow to change.

To that end, in this newsletter, we will highlight one area that has been a major source of dissatisfaction among different minority groups, specifically, opportunities for speaker and panel positions. We will report data that show the current demographic makeup of ANS committees as well as speaker and panel positions with respect to gender. (Please take note upfront that while much of the conversation to follow attends to data and literature on gender diversity, which represents one of the largest of the minority groups within the ANS, it holds equally true for the experience of other minority groups such as, African American, LGBTQ, or training pedigree, to name a few.) Then, we will examine one of the root causes for disparity in speakership opportunities and career advancement in general for women and minorities, a major issue negatively impacting our climate. Finally, we will propose sponsorship as one means of supporting and promoting women and minorities in the Society and Neurology in general.

### The Problem of “Manels”

It is important we recognize that a homogeneous population of invited speakers, panelists and individuals delivering named lectureships is not healthy for our discipline. This awareness is not limited to our field, but has deservedly been highlighted on a national and international level. Dr. Francis Collins, the Director of the National Institutes of Health, set a bold example when he recently wrote:

*“I want to send a clear message of concern: it is time to end the tradition in science of all-male speaking panels, sometimes wryly referred to as “manels.” Too often, women and members of other groups underrepresented in science are conspicuously missing in the marquee speaking slots at scientific meetings and other high-level conferences...Starting now, when I consider speaking invitations, I will expect a level playing field, where scientists of all backgrounds are evaluated fairly for speaking opportunities. If that attention to inclusiveness is not evident in the agenda, I will decline to take part. I challenge other scientific leaders across the biomedical enterprise to do the same.”* “Time to End the Manel Tradition,” Dr. Francis Collins, <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/time-end-manel-tradition>

The results of the membership survey taken in the Fall of 2018 and presented in the D&I Newsletter in the Spring of 2019 demonstrated the temperature of the climate of diversity and inclusion in the ANS. The survey suggested that the culture of our organization is supportive of diversity and inclusion with the vast majority of the membership indicating they believed diversity and inclusion is good for the ANS and should be promoted. However, the survey also showed signs that there are still *perceptions* of unfairness in gender, ethnicity and race representation in educational events. 61% of women members who responded to the survey **disagreed** that gender diversity is fairly represented, i.e. the “manel” problem.

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### ANS DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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Are women underrepresented in educational events of the ANS? While in the past, the number of women in leadership and speakership positions was low, the percentage of women in the society has also been low. More recently, the demographics have changed considerably, the percentage of women in our society is growing, and representation on the podium is likewise increasing. Currently, there are 581 members of the ANS, and 10% are women, up from 5% in the previous decade. Over the past 10 years, women participating on the Executive Council accounted for 0-17% of members, while currently, the Executive Council is represented by 3 women (33% of 9 members.) In 2019, **31% of committee positions** are occupied by women and 50% of the committees are chaired by women.

ANS educational meetings provide opportunity for women to participate on every level. In 2018, women presented 13% of invited lectures, **58% of panel positions** (42% as panel moderators), and 32% of selected scientific presentations. Scientific presentations are selected solely based on scientific merit, with the reviewers blinded to authors and institution, and the robust percentage of involvement shows that women are seeking and making significant contribution to the scientific content of the meetings. For the Fall program in 2019, 2 of 3 panels are moderated by women and 4 of 10 panel positions are occupied by women.

These data suggest a significant **change** in the demographics of representation in leadership and speaker positions in the ANS and that today, it fairly reflects the proportion of female membership. To be sure, this was no accident – it was the result of a **concerted effort** by ANS leaders, Education Committee members, panel moderators, and other engaged individuals. With the number of new members represented by a significant proportion of women (21% between 2015 and 2019) and a higher proportion of women in residency and fellowship training (37% of current fellows), the demographics of our society will continue to change, and the ANS is committed to educational programs that reflect the diversity of our membership and patients. Other societies, organizations, and academic institutions may not provide ample opportunity, as demonstrated by literature documenting gaps in compensation, rate of and timing of promotion, first authorship, industry partnership and hospital leadership, among other things, all together leading to a perception of disparity.

### The Role of Sponsors and Mentors

In our last newsletter, we highlighted one of the most significant potential barriers to diversity and inclusion, bias and microaggressions. We offered several countermeasures toward mitigating these concerns and hope that each of us will continue to identify and resist our own unconscious biases and increase our use of microaffirmations on a daily basis.

The next barrier we would like to address here is selective mentoring and sponsorship. Mentoring, networking, and sponsorship have a major impact on the trajectory of a career. Women and minorities find it particularly difficult to seek, secure and cultivate mentorship and sponsorship and therefore their careers could easily flounder. Sponsorship is the public support from a senior leader with significant influence who often invests their own reputation and relationship capital on behalf of the chosen protégé. Sponsors choose the sponsee, and the relationship is often informal and unstructured, but it is transformative. Sponsors are professional champions, actively pursuing opportunities on behalf of an individual and super-charging a sponsee's career as a result of increased exposure, enhanced credibility, and wider reputation. The sponsor's confidence inspires and motivates the sponsee. In return, the sponsee should reciprocate by upholding the sponsor's vision, performing and exceeding expectations.

The mentor's role, on the other hand, is more practical and private, focused on professional and/or research development, typically with some formality. Mentorship increases productivity and achievement and is critical to achievement of research and career goals. However, it is clear that meritocracy isn't enough. Sponsorship is required to raise the visibility and facilitate the rising protégé's ability to compete for and attain high-profile roles in a community or an organization. Sponsors also benefit from this relationship, gaining both personal and professional satisfaction in identifying undiscovered talent and adding value to their profession and organizations.

#### Hints for Program and Panel Organizers

- Understand why diversity matters
- Develop a diverse planning committee
- Look beyond titles and focus on abilities
- Look beyond people you know well or have served with on other panels
- Avoid choosing a program comprised only of the "usual suspects"
- Beware of training lineages
- Get to know more people
- Ask for recommendations
- No one wants to be the token; be respectful when you make the invite
- Invite people at different stages of their career
- Use database or other resources (WiN, WIO, etc)

### The Next Steps Forward

We have established that diversity is good for the ANS as well as our profession as a whole, because it drives innovation and outcomes. Successful implementation of diversity requires nurturing a culture and climate of inclusion over time. As individuals and an organization, there are several actions we can pursue now to increase opportunity as well as improve the perception of belonging for women, minorities and under-represented groups.

First, organizers of panels and conferences should make a concerted effort to cast a wide net and actively seek out qualified candidates from different educational backgrounds, practice settings, ethnicity/race, gender, and geographic area. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee is preparing an expert database to be made available to panel moderators and program organizers in order to raise awareness for a diverse pool of candidates. See the adjacent box for additional ideas.

Second, in as much as mentorship and especially, sponsorship are critical in developing the careers of future innovators and leaders, senior leaders and those with influence must make an intentional effort to seek out and invest in high-potential individuals with an eye toward diversity. Pursue mentoring/sponsoring opportunities beyond those with whom you have a natural, comfortable connection, which may be solely due to superficial similarities. Actively seek people who may be outside your natural groups, identify shared interests and learn from one another's perspective and experiences. Encourage others to expand their sponsorship networks, so that the combined pool of candidates in each individual's network is increased.

Finally, if you are an individual that is seeking opportunity for advancement, speakership, and leadership, seek mentors and sponsors. Present yourself as someone who has high potential, is focused and motivated, and can be relied on to produce quality and timely results. Ask for opportunities. Build relationships outside your local and training network. Write, present posters and podium presentations, find research mentors and collaborators, speak locally and regionally, attend meetings, join committees, and volunteer whenever possible.