Issues of Representation and Inclusion in Scholarly Publishing: The Roles of Authors, Reviewers, Editors, and Published Research

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Abstract
Representation and inclusion have become pressing issues in recent years, as systemic biases resulting in the underrepresentation of certain groups continue to be revealed in scholarly publishing. This paper presents strategies that have been implemented by the African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies (AJIMS) to promote equity and diversify its authorship, reviewers, editors, and the research published in the journal. Specifically, the paper discusses how targeted recruitment of reviewers and intentional diversification of the AJIMS editorial board have brought traditionally excluded voices into the journal's editorial decision-making processes. Additionally, the paper highlights how special issues, targeted calls for papers, and an articulated values/practices statement have shaped the focus and values of the research published in AJIMS. While these strategies have the potential to make scholarly publishing more representative of diversity while upholding quality standards, the paper argues that systemic change necessitates commitment at all levels. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes that lasting inclusive practices require the dedication of all stakeholders such as authors, editors, reviewers, publishers, professional societies, and the wider research community engaged with scholarly publishing.

Keywords: Scholarly publishing; representation; inclusion; marginalize; research; publication; AJIMS

Introduction
Scholarly publishing has long been criticized for issues of under-representation and exclusion of certain groups and perspectives (Else,

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2021; Hemming et al. 2019; Odedina et al., 2019). These systemic issues of lack of diversity and inclusion within academic research and publishing have persisted over time. It indicates that there are concerns about which voices and worldviews are missing or excluded. Despite increased attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in recent years, systemic biases persist that limit participation and visibility of marginalized populations in academic research and publishing (Murray et al., 2018). This indicates that while there have been some efforts to promote diversity in publishing, systemic biases and barriers continue to exist that prevent equitable representation and participation of marginalized groups, which suggests that progress has been limited and there is more work to be done.

This pattern contributes to reproduction of dominant discourses, narrow research agendas, and knowledge gaps concerning marginalized groups (Malik, 2023), which suggests that the lack of representation and inclusion of marginalized perspectives in publishing leads to skewed knowledge production that favors dominant groups. It also indicates that certain research topics and knowledge from marginalized groups remain understudied and excluded.

Research underscores that under-representation stems from exclusions at multiple levels of knowledge production and scholarly communication, including underlying social inequities, lack of diverse perspectives in the academy, biases in research funding and agenda-setting, exclusions within publishing processes, and limited access to published literature (Bennett et al., 2013; Chakravartty et al., 2018). This suggests that under-representation arises due to barriers and biases that operate at different stages of the research and publishing process. This points to the fact that under-representation is a complex and multi-faceted problem.

Consequently, certain voices and worldviews are largely absent across the scholarly record, while academic norms continue to reflect dominant groups' interests and assumptions (Liu & Li, 2023). This indicates that the perspectives of certain groups are missing in published academic research, which disproportionately represents the interests and assumptions of dominant groups. This skewed knowledge base represents an epistemic injustice that undermines ideals of inclusive knowledge

production, and this poses ethical issues that undermine ideals of diversity and democracy in knowledge production.

The above claims highlight systemic diversity and inclusion issues in publishing due to biases operating at multiple levels. They suggest that this leads to imbalances in whose voices, worldviews, and interests are reflected in academic research. These claims position this as an ethical injustice that must be addressed.

Furthermore, underrepresentation in scholarly publishing reflects wider societal inequities along the lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, disability status, and other axes of difference. Historically, certain groups have been marginalized and excluded from full participation in academia and knowledge production, including women, racial/ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, scholars from lower-income countries, LGBTQ+ scholars, and scholars with disabilities (Johnson & Chichirau, 2020; Siller & Aydin, 2022). Their perspectives and contributions have been systematically devalued, ignored, or appropriated by dominant groups who have disproportionately controlled institutional resources and power. This legacy continues to shape patterns of inequality and exclusion in contemporary scholarly publishing (Keim, 2022). Though overt discriminatory practices may have lessened over time, systemic biases embedded within academic structures, policies, and cultures persist in often invisible ways.

It is worthy of note that even within the academy, scholars from under-represented backgrounds still face substantial barriers to hiring, retention, funding, advancement, leadership roles, collaboration opportunities, and other areas that impede participation and visibility (Griffin, 2019; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020; Yadavet et al., 2020). Departmental, faculty and institutional cultures often reflect and reproduce dynamics from the wider society that privilege some voices and identities over others. This manifests through practices like homosocial reproduction in hiring and mentoring which favors scholars who 'fit in' with existing faculty demographics and norms (Bello, 2022; O'Connor et al., 2020; Page et al., 2009). Consequently, marginalized scholars continue to be under-represented, especially at senior levels and elite institutions. This lack of critical mass and institutional support makes it difficult to advance diverse research agendas or implement reforms.

These institutional inequalities also shape engagement with scholarly communication activities like publishing. Biases become embedded within journal policies and practices, even if inadvertently (Collister & Cantrell, 2021; Randall, 2023). For instance, Eurocentric norms about valued topics, theories, or methodologies may guide reviewer and editor expectations. This could make it more difficult for scholars working outside dominant paradigms to get published. Additionally, minoritized scholars often carry heavier teaching and service burdens which restrict time for research and writing (Allen et al., 2018; Whittaker, 2015). In the same vein, they may have less access to resources, collaborations, or mentoring to support development as authors. Such factors combine to hinder opportunities for marginalized groups to participate equitably in knowledge creation and sharing.

Systemic exclusions also arise in agenda-setting around valued research questions, methodologies, and epistemologies (Atkinson & Jacobs, 2009; Coniam & Falvey, 2022). Historical imbalances in who controls major institutions and funding means certain groups have disproportionate influence over what research gets supported. Consequently, topics and approaches reflecting dominant interests and views of reality tend to be prioritized. Alternative perspectives originating from marginalized experiences may be overlooked or underfunded, contributing to knowledge gaps. For instance, a major critique notes that Western positivist paradigms are over-represented, while indigenous, feminist, postcolonial, and other 'non-traditional' epistemologies get delegitimized (Adebisi et al., 2023). This represents an erasure of marginalized knowledge systems and approaches to inquiry. It limits appreciation for diverse ways of understanding complex phenomena. However, changing research priorities requires shifts in who holds the positions of power over funding and publication decisions.

Research also established that biases are similarly embedded within peer review and editorial management of journals (Bancroft et al., 2022; Petersen, 2019). For instance, in many disciplines, senior scholars from elite institutions who remain predominantly white, male, Western/Northern, and so on, act as gatekeepers for knowledge validation and dissemination. This group lacks diversity of experiences to fully assess the implications and value of research emerging from other standpoints. Existing studies demonstrate that reviewers and editors' demographics shape decisions about acceptance, often in subtle ways that disadvantage minoritized scholars (Aly et al., 2023; Murray et al., 2018).

For example, women and scholars of color often face higher manuscript rejection rates, more critical feedback, and longer review timelines (Holman et al., 2018; Settles et al., 2021) compared to otherwise similar work by scholars from dominant groups. Such biases contribute to exclusion, further marginalizing under-represented voices and perspectives in academic publishing. This systemic prejudice serves to maintain existing power structures and inequities within academia by limiting publication opportunities for minoritized scholars.

Moreover, access barriers after publication further exacerbate global inequities in knowledge production (Dutta et al., 2021; Piller et al., 2022). While increasing open access has helped expand visibility (Oparinde *et al*., 20224), scholars from lower-resourced institutions still encounter challenges accessing fee-based journals. Publishers from the Global North also dominate distribution networks, limiting platforms for research from other regions. Consequently, existing power dynamics around which voices participate in peer-reviewed processes are reinforced through imbalances in access and exposure after publication.

Overall, biases occur at multiple intersecting levels such as institutional, cultural, political, and economic to marginalize certain identities and perspectives in formal knowledge production channels. This inhibits diverse participation while allowing dominant paradigms to reproduce through control over publishing outlets. It represents an 'epistemic injustice' where certain groups are wrongfully excluded from voicing and validating knowledge within scholarly discourses. The injustice has ethical implications as excluding marginalized groups' experiences and insights undermines ideals of democratic and inclusive knowledge advancement. It also has consequences for the quality and social value of research as critical perspectives for understanding complex phenomena may be silenced. The following section will delve into what existing literature says about issues of representation and inclusion in scholarly publishing.

Review of Literature
Issues of representation and inclusion have become pressing concerns within scholarly communication, as systemic biases and barriers continue to limit participation and visibility of marginalized groups. This review integrates key literature exploring factors influencing representation in

scholarly publishing, consequences of homogeny, and promising strategies to promote equity.

Under-representation of Marginalized Groups

Existing literature demonstrates continued under-representation and exclusion of certain identities and positionalities across authorship, reviewers, editorial boards, and published academic literature.

Authorship

Existing literature reveals that minoritized scholar populations have lower publication rates compared to dominant groups. For instance, Holman et al. (2018) analyzed over 12 million medical journal articles and the findings indicate that only 27 per cent women appear as first or last authors. It is also important to note that women were less represented as authorship prestige increased (Holman et al., 2018). Murray et al.'s (2022) analysis of 23,873 article submissions to journal eLife across fields also found women persistently under-represented as authors. Also, they found that the acceptance rate for articles with male last authors was significantly higher than for female last authors. It is worth noting that representation gaps are wider for some minoritized populations. In economics for example, male reviewers dominate in various countries and research fields, contributing more frequently to review work in Publons (run by Clarivate Analytics), however, a weak correlation exists between reviewing activity and research productivity across different fields (Zhang et al., 2023). This suggests a gender disparity in authors' engagement across countries and research fields with males being more dominant and contributing more frequently than females. Intersecting barriers shape these inequities including biased research funding, exclusions from key collaborations and mentoring relationships, and implicit biases within research and publishing processes (Murray et al., 2022).

In addition, scholars from the Global South and low/middle-income countries face particular systemic barriers that limit their visibility and participation in academic publishing. Currently, authorship is concentrated mainly in North America and Europe while perspectives from other regions are marginalized (Chakravartty et al., 2018). This severely hinders the dissemination and validation of locally situated, context-specific knowledge that is essential for understanding and addressing problems unique to under-represented regions. The

dominance of Western paradigms results in an incomplete and imbalanced body of academic discourse that does not reflect diverse global perspectives. This indicates that there is a crucial need to proactively include marginalized scholars from low/middle-income countries and the Global South to add missing nuanced understandings of regional issues. Their experiences and situated knowledge are invaluable for tackling challenges and effecting positive change in their respective communities and countries. Academic publishing justice requires addressing geographic biases by creating equitable platforms that amplify voices from beyond dominant Western contexts.

Reviewers

Paralleling inequities in authorship, women and minoritized groups have been historically under-represented as manuscript peer reviewers, typically comprising only 20-30 per cent of reviewer pools across various academic disciplines (Nunna et al., 2023; Murray et al., 2022). This limited diversity among reviewers enables implicit biases to negatively influence evaluations and disadvantage scholars from marginalized backgrounds (Bancroft et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023). In addition, homogenous reviewer pools fail to provide the range of perspectives necessary for thorough, socially responsible assessments of research. For example, a 2011 study by Amrein et al. revealed that women were under-represented as peer reviewers at sixty major medical journals and were less likely to be invited to review compared to men. Without proactive efforts to increase reviewer diversity, excellence from marginalized scholars and under-represented groups can be overlooked. This indicates a pressing need for journals and publishers to intentionally diversify reviewer pools to mitigate bias and incorporate a plurality of views capable of evaluating research equitably and comprehensively.

Editorial Boards

Studies have revealed a lack of representation on the editorial boards of prominent academic journals, with scholars from high-income countries dominating the senior editorial roles (Galipeau et al., 2017). While data remains limited, existing research indicates that women and minoritized populations are under-represented in editorial positions across journals and disciplinary fields (Del Baldo, 2019). This indicates that the lack of diversity across editorial leadership skews journal priorities and decision-making processes. For example, a 2021 study by Rakhra et al. examined the racial/ethnic representation among editors and editorial boards at 20 major medical journals. They found under-representation of Hispanic,

Black, and Native American individuals in leadership positions across the journals. Among general medical journals, there were no minority editors-in-chief or deputy editors. Black editors made up six per cent of editorial boards and Hispanic editors only two per cent. Specialty and public health/health disparities journals had higher minority representation, but still there were still gaps when compared to the overall population. This severe under-representation of marginalized groups in key editorial roles enables systemic biases to shape journal policies and publication decisions in ways that could risk devaluing or excluding certain perspectives.

Published Academic Literature
Inequities become visible in published academic literature itself, with the domination of male, Northern/Western, white scholars, and neglect of marginalized populations' perspectives (Chakravartty et al., 2018). As a result, content analyses find topics of importance to minoritized communities comparatively absent or isolated in niche publications (Kaba et al., 2022). Consequently, unrepresentative literature has material consequences by determining resource allocations and policy based on limited worldviews. For example, Jagsi et al. (2006) found that women represented just 29.3 per cent of first authors and 19.3 per cent of senior authors of original articles in six leading US medical journals, demonstrating an enduring gender gap with women still under-represented across specialties. This highlights the continued need to promote gender equity in academic medicine and medical publishing, as whose voices are included or excluded in the scholarly record has far-reaching implications.

Consequences of Limited Diversity in Scholarly Publishing
Homogeneity in scholarly publishing perpetuates systemic inequities by upholding dominant paradigms, narrow research agendas, and the exclusion of marginalized knowledge. This represents an epistemic injustice with wide-ranging detrimental consequences across academic disciplines. Specifically, a lack of diversity limits the perspectives included in the construction of knowledge, enables unchecked reproduction of biases, produces critical gaps in understanding of marginalized groups, and results in flawed decision-making - all issues that restrict social progress and innovation.

The centering of privileged discourses and assumptions when diversity is lacking reproduces imbalances in what theories, constructs, and frameworks are validated within fields. By way of illustration, Chakravartty et al. (2018) analyzed leading communication studies journals and found a predominant focus on Western theoretical paradigms and scholars, with scholarship from the Global South largely omitted. This homogenizing effect reinforces certain worldviews at the expense of silencing others. Relatedly, Dotson (2014) describes how absence of critical pushback from diverse voices allows privileged discourses to remain centered and unchallenged. The lack of representation indicates that key epistemic resources for reinventing conceptual foundations are not accessed.

In addition to limiting theoretical development, underrepresentation of marginalized populations as researchers and participants creates critical gaps in knowledge concerning these communities. As Bennett et al. (2013) explain, the absence of diverse perspectives has the tendency to skew the research toward majority groups, thereby preventing holistic understanding. For instance, the historic under-representation of certain groups, like racial minorities, in clinical trials and the exclusion of indigenous communities from academic research, has limited our understanding of these groups, deprived them of agency, and propagated biased narratives and health disparities (Oh et al., 2015; Porsanger, 2004). The resulting knowledge gaps have life-and-death consequences, from misconceptions about risk to inadequate medical treatment.

Homogeneity also enables the unquestioned propagation of dominant groups' biases, which are wrongly equated with "objectivity" when unchallenged by diversity (Dotson, 2014). This further marginalizes minority perspectives and entrenches inequities. Relying primarily on research produced from a homogeneous evidence base likewise leads to flawed and harmful decision-making, with errors and negative impacts systematically directed toward minoritized groups (Buchanan et al., 2021). The lack of diverse representation in clinical trials contributes to health disparities; intentionally addressing diversity and inclusion enables more ethically sound, socially valid research.

Overall, the persistent lack of diversity in scholarship gravely hinders social progress by reproducing dominant paradigms and

systemically embedded inequities while forging the innovations that diverse insights catalyze. Meaningful representation requires dedicated efforts to counteract historic exclusions. Who is included in knowledge production has immense influence on the breadth of inquiry, discoveries made, and lives improved. The consequences of continuing homogeneity in scholarly publishing are severe, far-reaching, and antithetical to the purpose of scholarship.

Centering Race and Intersecting Identities in Knowledge Production: A Theoretical Outlook

In order to provide a robust theoretical framework for analyzing the under-representation and exclusion of marginalized groups in scholarly publishing, critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality offer valuable lenses. These perspectives illuminate the structural dynamics and systemic biases that perpetuate inequities within academic institutions and knowledge production processes.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)
CRT emerged from legal scholars like Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado in the 1970s and 1980s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). It provides a conceptual framework for understanding how racism is deeply entrenched in societal structures, policies, and practices, including within educational and academic institutions (Gillborn, 2006). CRT posits that racism is not merely an individual prejudice but a systemic and institutionalized phenomenon that advantages dominant racial groups while marginalizing others (Meghji, 2022).

CRT is particularly relevant for examining the underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minorities in scholarly publishing (Orelus, 2020). As noted in the study, scholars from marginalized racial/ethnic backgrounds face significant barriers in hiring, funding, advancement, and leadership roles within academia. These institutional inequities directly impact their opportunities for research, collaboration, and publication. CRT's emphasis on the persistence of racism and the centrality of race in shaping societal dynamics can illuminate how racial biases become embedded within academic norms, peer-review processes, and publishing gatekeeping practices.

CRT's critique of dominant ideologies and narratives aligns with studies showing that privileged discourses and paradigms dominate academic knowledge production, marginalizing perspectives from under-represented groups (Dunbar et al., 2022). CRT scholars challenge the notion of objectivity and neutrality, contending that dominant narratives reflect the interests and worldviews of those in power (Daftary, 2020). This theoretical lens can provide insights into how systemic biases shape what research questions, methodologies, and epistemologies are valued or devalued within scholarly publishing.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Crenshaw (1989), offers another valuable theoretical framework for understanding the compounding barriers faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities. Intersectionality posits that various forms of social stratification, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability status, intersect and interact in complex ways, creating unique experiences of oppression and privilege.

The study acknowledges that intersecting barriers shape inequities in scholarly publishing, with scholars from marginalized backgrounds facing compounding challenges (Settles et al., 2021). Intersectionality provides a lens to analyze how intersecting systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, converge to create multidimensional barriers within academic institutions and publishing processes. For example, this study highlights the under-representation of women and racial/ethnic minorities as authors, reviewers, and editors. Intersectionality illuminates how the intersections of gender and race create unique experiences of marginalization and exclusion for scholars who identify as women of color (Cole, 2020). It sheds light on how biases and power dynamics within academia and publishing may disproportionately disadvantage these individuals thereby compounding the barriers they face.

This theoretical lens provides a framework for understanding the epistemic injustices and erasures that occur when marginalized knowledge systems and epistemologies are delegitimized or excluded from mainstream academic discourse.

In summary, by integrating the critical race theory and intersectionality into the analysis of this study, this study can offer a more meticulous and comprehensive understanding of the structural dynamics and systemic biases that contribute to the under-representation and exclusion of marginalized groups in scholarly publishing. These theoretical lenses can shed light on the institutional, cultural, and epistemological barriers that perpetuate inequities, while also illuminating the resilience and resistance of marginalized scholars in challenging dominant narratives and advocating for inclusive knowledge production.

Strategies for Fostering Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Publishing: A Comprehensive Examination of AJIMS

The imperative of addressing systemic biases and promoting inclusivity in scholarly publishing has garnered increasing attention. The under-representation of certain demographic groups in academic literature has underscored the need for proactive measures to rectify historical imbalances. This section presents multifaceted strategies implemented by AJIMS to champion equity, inclusivity, and diversification across its authorship, review process, editorial board, and the content it publishes.

AJIMS Initiatives at the Journal Level
AJIMS has taken several commendable steps at the journal level to ensure diversity and inclusivity. Primarily, the journal has explicitly embedded inclusive aims within its mission statement (AJIMS, 2024a). This serves as a foundational commitment to promoting diverse voices and perspectives in scholarly discourse. The intentional recruitment of marginalized reviewers and editors has been a pivotal strategy, aligning with recent recommendations emphasizing the need for proactive efforts to diversify editorial teams (Blewett et al., 2019). The significance of this lies not only in expanding representation but also in ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives in the decision-making processes of the journal.

Moreover, AJIMS has implemented targeted calls for papers that elevate voices traditionally excluded from mainstream academic discourse. This approach not only invites a more diverse range of contributions but also signals a commitment to amplifying under-represented perspectives. The adoption of double anonymous review practices further enhances the fairness and impartiality of the peer-review process (AJIMS, 2024a). By anonymizing both authors and reviewers,

AJIMS strives to mitigate potential biases, thereby fostering a more level playing field for contributors. The journal's commitment to publishing special issues led by minoritized communities is another notable initiative (Lemanek et al., 2023). This approach provides a platform for scholars from marginalized groups to shape the discourse within their respective fields, contributing to a more inclusive academic landscape. In the same vein, requiring author diversity statements is a proactive measure aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in the publishing process (Morton et al., 2022). By making authors explicitly acknowledge and reflect on the diversity of their research teams, AJIMS seeks to highlight and celebrate collaborative efforts that span diverse backgrounds.

In addition, AJIMS goes beyond rhetoric in ensuring a robust peer-review process by utilizing reviewing editors who are experts in the specific fields of the submitted manuscripts (AJIMS, 2024b). These editors play a crucial role in identifying suitable reviewers to guarantee a rigorous and impartial evaluation. AJIMS discloses the affiliation demographics data of these reviewing editors for each published manuscript. Instead of merely claiming to value diversity and inclusion, the journal transparently discloses demographic data about its contributors and reviewing editors. This transparency showcases the current state of diversity and holds the journal accountable for continued progress in representation.

Acknowledging the crucial role of mentorship in supporting marginalized and emerging academics, AJIMS provides personalized mentorship programmes to facilitate their academic growth (AJIMS, 2024a). This mentorship involves writing and reviewing workshops specifically designed for minoritized groups, exemplifying a commitment to breaking down barriers to access (Mullen et al., 2013). These initiatives collectively expand opportunities for marginalized scholars, thereby addressing historical disparities in academic representation.

Institutional Efforts and AJIMS's role

Beyond individual journal efforts, institutional initiatives play a pivotal role in shaping the broader landscape of scholarly publishing. AJIMS recognizes and aligns with these efforts, hence contributing to a larger systemic change. Holistic evaluations beyond publications, as advocated by Mills and Inouye (2021), are embraced by AJIMS as part of its

commitment to a more comprehensive and nuanced assessment of academic contributions. This acknowledges the intricate nature of scholarly contributions by moving beyond traditional metrics to encompass a broader understanding of academic impact.

In addition, formal mentoring programmes as indicated above (AJIMS initiative at the journal level) for emerging academics/scholars, a strategy endorsed by Heng et al. (2020), aligns with AJIMS's commitment to fostering an inclusive academic environment. By providing structured mentoring, the journal seeks to empower scholars from under-represented backgrounds and facilitate their professional development. AJIMS recognizes that top-down changes at the institutional level are imperative for the transformation of systemic biases, and actively supports these endeavors.

Encouraging collaboration is a strategy promoted by Brand et al. (2015) and finds resonance in AJIMS's ethos. By encouraging collaborative research efforts, the journal seeks to create a research environment that values diverse perspectives and fosters collective knowledge production. Furthermore, the development of policies and training programmes around equity and inclusion, in line with recommendations by Brand et al. (2015), reflects AJIMS's commitment to embedding inclusivity at every level of its operation. Such policies provide a framework for fostering an inclusive culture and ensure that these principles are ingrained in the journal's operational procedures.

Collective Action for Lasting Change

The realization of lasting change necessitates collective action across academic communities, a principle emphasized by Schimmel (2023). AJIMS actively engages in and promotes collective initiatives to fundamentally reshape exclusionary cultures, processes, and priorities. The journal advocates for disclosure standards, recognizing the importance of transparency in addressing diversity issues. By setting clear standards, AJIMS contributes to a culture of accountability within scholarly publishing.

In addition, inclusive training for reviewers, reviewing editors and other editors is another vital aspect of AJIMS's commitment to collective action. By providing resources and training programmes for existing and intending reviewers, reviewing editors and other editors, the

journal seeks to equip its stakeholders with the tools necessary to navigate and address diversity issues within the peer-review process. The reimagining of peer review, as advocated by scholars involves a critical examination of existing structures and an openness to innovative approaches that foster inclusivity (Smith, 2021).

Likewise, partnerships between AJIMS, scholarly societies, publishers, institutions, and grassroots organizations present opportunities to coordinate efforts and share successful strategies (Guédon et al., 2019). These collaborations amplify the impact of individual initiatives and facilitate the exchange of best practices. It should be noted that ongoing critical dialogues within and across disciplines as fostered by AJIMS, are instrumental in maintaining momentum and ensuring that diversity and inclusion remain at the forefront of scholarly discussions. While AJIMS's initiatives reflect substantial progress, the study acknowledges that systemic action is essential to enact sustainable equity. The continuous critical examination of inclusion issues and the development of collective solutions are imperative to strengthen the participation of marginalized populations throughout research and publishing workflows.

Advancing Equity in Scholarly Publishing
In conclusion, an extensive body of evidence underscores the persistent under-representation and exclusion of women, racial/ethnic minorities, Global South scholars, and other marginalized groups in scholarly publishing. AJIMS's initiatives represent a commendable effort to confront these challenges and contribute to broader endeavors aimed at rectifying systemic inequities. The manifold strategies implemented by AJIMS at the journal, institutional, and collective community levels serve as a model for fostering diversity and inclusion in scholarly publishing. While recognizing the progress made, it is evident that enduring change requires sustained, coordinated efforts to dismantle exclusionary norms and procedures throughout research and publishing.

Discussion
This study offers important insights into the multifaceted strategies being implemented to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in scholarly publishing. The presentation of initiatives undertaken by AJIMS provides a model for how journals can take concrete actions to increase

representation and amplify marginalized voices. Several key implications emerge from this research.

Firstly, the findings reveal the pivotal role that journals play in shaping norms and culture within academic disciplines. By intentionally articulating inclusive aims and values, AJIMS signals a commitment to equity that influences discourse within its field. This underscores how journals, as gatekeepers of knowledge validation and dissemination can drive positive change through declared principles and transparent policies (Curry and Lillis, 2014). However, solely declarative statements are insufficient - tangible efforts like diversifying editorial teams and targeted calls for papers, are imperative for embedding inclusivity throughout journal operations and content.

Secondly, the presentation highlights the interdependent nature of effecting change. While journal level interventions are crucial, initiatives at other levels of academia including institutions, professional societies, and funders provide the necessary ecosystem to nurture marginalized scholars and diversify research agendas (Carlson and Jennings, 2024). Structural barriers around advancement, funding, and collaboration opportunities must also be dismantled to facilitate equitable participation. In addition, coordinated efforts across stakeholders can mutually reinforce progress.

Thirdly, it is imperative to acknowledge the global disparities in access and visibility faced by scholars from different regions. Under-representation and exclusion in scholarly publishing perpetuates epistemic injustices and hinders the democratic ideals of knowledge advancement (Moletsane et al., 2015). These systemic biases operating within academia on a global scale must be addressed to ensure equitable participation and diverse perspectives in knowledge production and validation.

Lasting change necessitates continuous critical examination of systemic biases and collective solution development. One-time interventions have a limited impact without sustained engagement (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2022). Continuing dialogues, training programmes, and reviews of policies and procedures are required to maintain momentum. Transparency around demographics and outcomes is also key for benchmarking progress and ensuring accountability (Guédon et

al., 2019). This study demonstrates AJIMS's exemplary role through its multifaceted strategies aimed at inclusion at journal, institutional, and community levels.

However, some limitations exist in enacting enduring equity solely through journals. Constraints around resources, capacity, and influence pose challenges to comprehensive reforms, especially for smaller journals. Larger publishers and societies with substantial resources can implement interventions more readily across journal portfolios. Vested interests may also impede adoption of practices that challenge existing power dynamics in academia. Realizing system-wide representation requires journals advocating for change while also acknowledging limitations.

There are several questions which remain for future studies. More data is needed on how intersectional identities shape publication experiences, as compounding barriers likely exist. Also, the effectiveness of specific initiatives in improving equity metrics also requires investigation to identify best practices. Exploring scholars' perceptions would provide crucial insights into remaining needs and challenges. In the same vein, longitudinal data assessing diversity trends is essential for benchmarking progress over time. Overall, strengthening inclusion in publishing necessitates ongoing empirical research and innovation.

Conclusion
This study significantly advances the understanding of promising initiatives for diversity in scholarly publishing. The findings underscore that achieving equity requires multifaceted, coordinated efforts across academic communities. By delineating AJIMS's commendable strategies, this research offers a roadmap for journals seeking to embed inclusive values within their gatekeeping role. With sustained engagement, journals can drive disciplinary cultures toward greater openness to marginalized perspectives. However, enduring systemic change requires dismantling existing power dynamics and biases through collective action. This study provides key insights towards realizing the ideals of diversity, democracy, and social justice in knowledge production and validation.

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