

Women, Science and Media

Where is the FairerScience?

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Why Worry?

1905: Based on research it was concluded:

"The woman who uses her brain, loses her mammary function first and has little hope to be other than a moral and medical freak."

2006: Based on research it was concluded:

"Men are smarter than women."

We have not been effectively communicating our findings on women and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in ways that allow the public to understand and evaluate these findings and, where appropriate, make decisions based on them. FairerScience is committed to changing that.

Why Care? A Range of Reasons

Common sense: If you don't see it; you can't be it.

Research: Exposure to press coverage of an article which reported a major sex difference in the math aptitude of gifted seventh graders and postulated the difference was genetic, changed parents' attitudes to their children's math ability: mothers of daughters and fathers of sons became more gender stereotyped in their beliefs.

Thank you Shirley Malcom for the common sense and Jacque Eccles for the research.

Women Scientists in the News

The title of one research study pretty well sums it up:
“Spotlighting women scientists in the press: Tokenism in science journalism.”

Male scientists are proportionately more apt than women to be interviewed

Women are more apt to be described in terms of such characteristics as height, figure, hair color, outfit

Women scientists in the US are more apt to be presented as exceptions as opposed to for example Finland where they are most apt to be presented as "ordinary researchers in their work.”

Women Scientists in the News

Women scientists represent women; men represent themselves.

“[Heidemarie] Stefanyshyn-Piper, one of only six women in NASA's history who have taken part in this country's 159 spacewalks. Having the eyes of the world upon you would give most rookies the jitters, which is why it's worth noting that it was actually astronaut Joe Tanner who dropped a bolt and a spring into the cosmos on their spacewalk together. It could have happened to anyone, but many of us on firmer ground were relieved it didn't happen to the only woman on the crew. Just imagine what the late-night comics could have done with that.”

Laura Billings Pioneer Press, 9/21/2006

Women Scientists on TV: Progress?

1986

We had *LA Law* (sexy, hardworking, white female and multicultural male lawyers).

We needed *DC Engineer** (sexy, hardworking, multicultural female and male engineers).

2006

We have *Grey's Anatomy* (sexy, hard working, multicultural female and male doctors).

We need *Ilene's Machines* (sexy, hardworking, multicultural female and male engineers).

*Suggested first by Eleanor Blum.

Sample Public Awareness of Science and Engineering Recommendations

Develop better ways of supporting writers and producers in researching and developing suitable stories, whether financial (ie script development grants) or intellectual (ie advice and support from the scientific community).

Create a new level of dialogue between Writers and TV Producers and SET (Science, Engineering and Technology) professionals in order to provide modern role models of scientists and engineers.

Encourage writers and broadcasters to routinely cast scientists and engineers as members of the community, for example as characters in soaps.

Explore ways of highlighting individual charismatic scientists and engineers and of promoting relevant expert databases.

What Can We Do?

Become Better Communicators.

Learn more about what journalists want.

Learn more about what to watch out for when dealing with journalists.

Look at language use.

Reframe how findings are presented.

Set up a rapid response structure to let folks know, in user friendly ways about the findings of women scientists (and about research and interpretations related to gender and science.)

Make diversity (gender, race/ethnicity and disability) the default option.

What Can We Do?

Promote Women Experts

FairerScience.org has Talk to the Experts for gender and science issues. AAAS could have Talk to the Experts for different science areas with mostly women on the list.

Give Women Scientists Credit

Sue is the largest, most complete, and best preserved *Tyrannosaurus rex* fossil yet discovered. Why is she named Sue? Not because of the Johnny Cash song? Thanks to WingsWorldquest.org, we know it is because Susan Lee Henderson discovered her, but it's not easy to find that out on Sue's Field Museum site.

What else?