

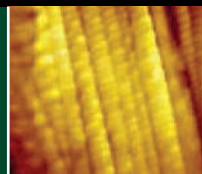
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LETTERS

edited by Etta Kavanagh

Editorial Expression of Concern

IN THE 17 FEBRUARY 2006 ISSUE, WE PUBLISHED THE STUDY “*CDX2* GENE EXPRESSION AND trophectoderm lineage specification in mouse embryos” by K. Deb *et al.* (1). It has come to our attention, through communication with Robert Hall of the Provost’s office at the University of Missouri Columbia and the senior author of the paper, R. Michael Roberts of the University of Missouri Columbia, that there is an ongoing investigation of this study by the University of Missouri. We are therefore informing readers that the results reported therein may not be reliable.

DONALD KENNEDY

Editor-in-Chief

Reference

1. K. Deb, M. Sivaguru, H. Yul Yong, R. M. Roberts, *Science* **311**, 992 (2006).

On the Lack of Women in Academic Science

REFLECTING ON MY OWN EXPERIENCES IN the 1950s and 1960s with discrimination against the hiring of women in physics and the foolish and transparent excuses that were offered to me, the report of the U.S. National Academies of Science on the paucity of women scientists in academia (“Universities urged to improve hiring and advancement of women,” A. Lawler, *News of the Week*, 22 Sept., p. 1712) is not new information. However, I was confident 40 years ago when I was offered the opportunity to start the physics department at George Mason University that talented women would apply for positions in our department. Women realized that the presence of a senior woman in a decision-making role signified that their application would be looked at equitably. This simple fact meant that we were always able to select good faculty from both genders. We never set out to specifically hire women. It was self-fulfilling. During these 40 years, seven men and two women have served as chairs of the department. Currently, our department, with its 10



women faculty, is 35% female among the tenured and tenure-track faculty. According to a 2005 survey by the Committee of the American Physical Society on the Status of Women in Physics (1), this statistic makes it the nation’s leader among departments having more than 10 faculty members.

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Reference

1. “Women in Physics and Astronomy, 2005” (American Institute of Physics, College Park, MD, 2005).

THE RECENT ARTICLE (“UNIVERSITIES URGED to improve hiring and advancement of women,” A. Lawler, *News of the Week*, 22 Sept., p. 1712) discussing the U.S. National Academies of Science (NAS) report *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering* (1) highlights several crucial issues. Among these is the conclusion that the culture and institutions of science—not a lack of talent or inherent differences between men and woman—drive inequalities in hiring, promotion, and retention. A key aspect is the finding that more than half of male faculty members have a stay-at-home

spouse, whereas only 10% of women faculty are in the same situation. This implies that female faculty have greater familial and/or parental responsibilities, often in conflict with essential career activities. The imbalance is addressed by recommendations in the NAS report urging universities to enact policies allowing “flexibility that faculty need across the life course” [(1), p. 139]. However, the situation is more complex. Often overlooked is subtle discrimination against married academic couples attempting to equalize child-rearing and other familial arrangements. For example, although many employers have generous family leave policies, they may differ for men and women, leading to substantial financial, professional, and personal costs to couples that attempt to share responsibilities. (My husband and I discovered this when our second child was born. My husband’s employer, although having generous child leave policies for women, allowed only a single day of parental leave for men at the time.) Moreover, if men with substantial familial responsibilities are also promoted more slowly than women, then fewer colleagues at higher levels have faced the same difficult tradeoffs, leading to lack of appreciation for the complexity of these issues. Clearly, in addition to policies that target explicit discrimination against women, there is a need to more carefully consider how the academic culture selects against both men and women who have substantial child-rearing or other familial responsibilities.

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Reference

1. Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering and the Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering* (National Academies Press, Washington, DC, 2006) (available at http://darwin.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=11741&page=R1).

IN THE U.S. NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE (NAS) report *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering*, the 18-member panel found underrepresentation of females in academia to be “deeply troubling and