

Trying to Break the Glass Ceiling – Forum for Nordic Dermato-Venereology Focuses on Women in Science

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When I was a PhD student my supervisor and co-supervisor were named Richard and Richard. Richard is a good name for a scientist, because statistically many Nobel laureates have been named Richard. Not as many as Robert or William but a fair number have been called Richard. If your name is John, congratulations. John is the most common name for a Nobel Prize recipient. Throw in an American citizenship and you have increased your chances even more to get your hands on that coveted golden medal. Kidding aside, of course name or nationality has nothing to do with whether you are likely to receive the Nobel Prize or not. However, gender certainly seems to play a role. Of all Nobel Prize laureates, only 17 women have received the prize in Chemistry, Physics, Medicine/Physiology or Economics, which are often considered the 'hard' categories (1).

This skewed balance in science can be seen in most countries and fields both in pay gap and in attitude. The much-cited experiment from 2012 by the group of microbiologist Jo Handelsman, published in PNAS, showed the biases of science faculty members against women. What they did was to ask 127 professors from 6 universities to evaluate the CVs of 2 fake applicants for a job as a laboratory manager, one named John and the other named Jennifer. Although the CVs were identical, the professors offered John \$3,700 more per year and were more willing to mentor John than Jennifer (2). Another classic Swedish study by Wennerås & Wold (3) reported that women who applied for postdoctoral fellowships needed to publish 2.5 times more papers to be judged as equally competent as men.

Reports from the EU show similar trends. In 2010, women earned less than men in every country in the EU despite legislation to fight gender inequality, as listed in the report She Figures (4), which analyses the gender pay gap in science and research. Although 46% of PhD students were women, only 17.8% of professors in medical sciences were women. This discouraging number was even lower in engineering and technology (7.9%), which is proof of a still existing and seemingly unbreakable glass ceiling for women.

The EU did its best to attract women to research in a campaign from 2012 I think we all want to forget: Science: It's a Girl Thing! with the intention to "challenge stereotypes of science and show young girls and women that science is fun and can

provide great opportunities". Coinciding with the campaign launch, a video was released on YouTube depicting a man in a lab coat eying 3 women strutting around in high heels and mini-dresses, writing science stuff in lipstick. Due to the public outcry, where scientists all over the world gasped in horror by the sexist portrayal of young women, the video was quickly removed. "The EU have funded a campaign to make women in science wear shorter skirts", epidemiologist and Bad Science author, Ben Goldacre tweeted after the launch.

On a more positive note, Lego, criticised for its stereotypical gender-based toys, will be releasing a female scientist series after an online campaign. Ellen Kooijman, a geochemist in Stockholm, proposed the series 'Research Institute', which includes a paleontologist with a dinosaur, an astronomer with a telescope and a chemist in a lab. The series was released in August 2014. Until we can all get our hands on these exciting new toys, Forum for Nordic Dermato-Venereology will in this issue highlight the research of female dermatologists from the Nordic countries (see pages xx-xx).

References

1. Statistics from <http://www.nobelprize.org>.
2. Moss-Racusin CA, Dovidio JE, Brescoll VL, Graham MJ, Handelsman J. Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A* 2012; 109: 16474–16479.
3. Wennerås C, Wold A. Nepotism and sexism in peer-review. *Nature* 1997; 387: 341–343.
4. EU Commission, She Figures 2012. http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/she-figures-2012_en.pdf.



A woman in science according to Lego. Photograph from Lego.