

E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS

Entrenched and aggressive attitudes will remain the basis of discrimination for the next generation of young women**KAREN KEMPSSELL**

In my personal experience there are two facets to discrimination from male peers in the work place. One facet is basic chauvinism -- men appear to not actually like to see women out of their traditional roles and have problems relating to them as equals. The second facet of this discrimination is that men appear to be able to relate best to other men. They prefer to work within peer groups where they feel most comfortable, share substantial common interests and methods of relating. Here they can jostle, bond or compete with their fellow male workers by the same rules. Both scenarios lead to the exclusion of women from certain circles and as the socialising and bonding aspect of male relating is the means by which they recruit others like themselves to high office this perpetuates the cycle. Any attempt for women to break into these hallowed environs is either met with aggression or is misinterpreted and the individual concerned can become the target of rather unpleasant gossip.

Some say that things have moved on and that we can await 'rewards-tomorrow'. All I can say to this is that much of the discrimination we face in the work-place is not derived solely from 'the establishment' figures who make many of the decisions about recruitment, but also from our peers, the male students we came through the system with. This is disappointing. It is hard to know how to change their attitudes as they also grew up in our relative age of equality. I think sexual discrimination is often used by the latter group as a last ditch 'stiletto in the back' in a male-dominated competitive work-place, where if you can't win by fair means win by foul.

These combined entrenched and aggressive attitudes are the basis for much of the discrimination against women in science -- a subject where peer review and acceptance is essential in all facets of working life (particularly in publishing and attracting funding). I would like to think that the future would be different for the next generation of young women scientists, but I think it unlikely given what I see around me of the obvious grooming of 'the establishment' in waiting.

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