

## E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS

**Geophysics - 'I really don't think it's what women should do'**DARYN VOSS

The discrimination against women in science is appalling. It is not only unjust, but inefficient as well. But I am inclined to disagree with the notion that an increase in the number of women in scientific fields will sway the overall direction of research.

In the modern world, I suspect that the direction of scientific research is determined principally by 'what the market will bear', rather than the feelings and propensities of the scientists individually or en masse. Most people can't afford to fund their own research, and the scholarships (and such) lean heavily towards short-to-medium term economic benefits for the nation or industry. In any case, I would be unlikely to accept that women are generally more interested than men in societal or humanitarian goals without being presented with some actual evidence.

With regard to the cause of the retardation of science women's careers: the cultural attitudes in academia and scientific industry, in my opinion, play a negative role, and no doubt there are some high school teachers out there who secretly don't think science is 'lady-like' and emit negative vibes to that effect. However, the general attitudes of people in all walks of life probably do damage as well. My impression is that women scientists are less accepted by society at large than are men scientists and non-science women.

An illustrative anecdote: I have just graduated as a bachelor level geophysicist, and I would guess that the percentage of those graduating in geophysics today that are women is about 25 per cent, lower than the overall percentage of today's science graduates that are female, in this country. (The female percentage of all geophysicists is much lower again due to the fact that most of them graduated at a time when there were hardly any women in the 'hard sciences' at all.) When I was at university recently, the wife of a geophysicist lecturer was in the office while I was working with a woman enrolled on the same course. The lecturer's wife is a linguist. Before she left, she went up to my colleague and said, "Is this really what you want to do?" Student - "What?" Linguist - "Geophysics. I don't mind when the boys do it, but I really don't think it's what women should do. Have you really thought about it? Are you sure you wouldn't be happier with arts, or something? Think about it, won't you."

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