

THIS WEEK

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Nature's sexism

The editors of this publication need to improve how we reflect women's contributions to science. For this, we must inject an extra loop into our thinking.

Earlier this year, we published a Correspondence that rightly took *Nature* to task for publishing too few female authors in our News and Views section (D. Conley and J. Stadmark *Nature* **488**, 590; 2012). Specifically, in the period 2010–11, the proportions of women News and Views authors in life, physical and Earth sciences were 17%, 8% and 4%, respectively. The authors of the Correspondence had taken us to task in 2005 with a similar analysis for the authorship of our Insight overview articles, and gave us slight credit for having improved that position.

Our minds were further focused on the problem by a much-discussed paper published in September (C. A. Moss-Racusin *et al. Proc. Natl Acad. Sci. USA* <http://doi.org/jkm>; 2012). The disturbing message of this blinded, randomized study was that US academics discriminated in hiring decisions and in salary against women who applied for a lab-manager position. Notably, female faculty members were as significantly discriminatory as males.

So here is a fuller litany of facts about *Nature's* performance in this arena, based on internal surveys.

Of the 70 editors and reporters around the globe who commission, select, write or oversee *Nature's* daily and weekly content, 38 (54%) are women. This proportion is reflected among team leaders. We feel confident that there is no discrimination in the recruitment and hiring practices of *Nature* and its publishers; the same applies to the writers whom we employ as freelancers.

Our performance as editors is much less balanced.

Of the 5,514 referees who assessed *Nature's* submitted papers in 2011, 14% were women.

Of the 34 researchers profiled by journalists in 2011 and so far in 2012, 6 (18%) were women.

Of externally written Comment and World View articles published in 2011 and so far in 2012, 19% included a female author.

There are well-known external factors that will lead to some imbalance. The proportion of female researchers active in certain disciplines is low. The proportion of women active in the upper reaches of all disciplines is low. As a result, women in science will be asked to help to ensure a gender balance on committees and will therefore collectively experience greater pressure of that sort than men, leaving less time for writing and reviewing. One can speculate that there also may be a tendency for women to be less willing than men to push themselves forward, which may lead to editors being less aware of them. But it is certainly the case that women typically spend more time than men as homemakers and looking after children, further reducing the time available for journal contributions.

However, we do not believe that these considerations can fully account for, or excuse, the imbalance in *Nature's* pages. Nor do we believe that our own editors consciously discriminate against women.

That leaves the unconscious factors, and here we believe that there is work to do. We believe that in commissioning articles or in thinking

about who is doing interesting or relevant work, for all of the social factors already mentioned, and possibly for psychological reasons too, men most readily come to editorial minds. The September paper speculated about an unconscious assumption that women are less competent than men. A moment's reflection about past and present female colleagues should lead most researchers to correct any such assumption.

"There is a need for every editor to ask themselves, 'Who are the five women I could ask?'"

We therefore believe that there is a need for every editor to work through a conscious loop before proceeding with commissioning: to ask themselves, "Who are the five women I could ask?"

Under no circumstances will this 'gender loop' involve a requirement to fulfil a quota or to select anyone whom we do not know to be fully appropriate for the job, although we will set ourselves internal targets to help us to focus on the task. It is not yet clear just what difference this workflow loop will make. But it seems to us to be a step towards appropriately reflecting in our pages the contributions of women to science. ■

Too much to ask

A market-based malaria-control programme may not be perfect, but it deserves to continue.

The ravages of malaria are most damaging where they are hardest to combat: in rural areas in Africa that have little or no public health infrastructure. In response to that quandary, scientists and economists in 2004 dreamed up a scheme called the Affordable Medicines Facility — Malaria (AMFm). It aims to get artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs) — the most effective malaria treatments known — into the private pharmacies and village shops that are the only source of medicine in many rural African areas. Now, this grand experiment seems likely to end, its successes under-rated and potential improvements not yet explored.

The high costs of ACTs have often meant that few rural outlets stocked them. Instead, shops sold cheaper but often ineffective drugs such as chloroquine — or, worse, artemisinin monotherapies, which are a recipe for the emergence of drug resistance. To overcome these problems, the AMFm first secures much cheaper prices from makers of ACTs by generating and negotiating massive bulk orders. Next, it offers importers subsidies to bring prices down further, to levels that are affordable in rural Africa. The scheme has been tested since 2010 at the country level in Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Niger, Nigeria,