

Gender gap: Selection bias snubs scholarly achievements of female scientists

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Women scientists must confront sexism when competing for scholarly awards, according to a new analysis.

Research funded by the National Science Foundation and sponsored by the Association for [Women](#) in Science found that female scientists win service or teaching awards in proportion to the number of women in the PhD pool for their discipline, says [sociologist](#) Anne Lincoln at Southern Methodist University. That's not the case, however, for awards for their research, says Lincoln, one of three authors on the analysis, which was reported in *Nature*.

The number of women who win scholarly awards is far fewer, the authors report.

"Using data in the public domain on 13 disciplinary societies, we found that the proportion of female prizewinners in 10 of these was much lower than the proportion of female full professors in each discipline," the authors write.

Why the gap? Lincoln, an assistant professor in the SMU Sociology Department, and her co-authors point to the award selection process.

An analysis of selection practices found that selection committees carry out their duties with few guidelines, minimal oversight and little attention to conflict-of-interest issues, the authors write. The researchers' investigation found that the chances a woman will win an award for her

research improve if a woman is serving on the committee. The analysis found, however, that many committees have no female members, that few have female chairs, and there are few female nominees, said the authors.

Nomination letters for women typically include personal details and contain stereotypically female adjectives, such as "cooperative" and "dependable," the authors report in the article.

"Notices soliciting nominations, by contrast, tend to use language that fosters male images, such as 'decisive' or 'confident,'" they say.

Co-authors were Stephanie H. Pincus, founder of the RAISE Project, sponsored by the Society for Women's Health Research; and biochemist Phoebe S. Leboy at the University of Pennsylvania and past president of the Association for Women in Science.

More information: [www.nature.com/nature/journal/ ...
31/full/469472a.html](http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/.../31/full/469472a.html)

Provided by Southern Methodist University

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