

Hubble team finds male led teams still getting more telescope time than those led by females

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Researchers at the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) which runs the Hubble Space Telescope program, have found that there continues to be a gap between the number of projects given the go-ahead by male principle investigators (PIs) versus those headed by females.

PIs are typically listed as the lead on proposals and when they are male, the researchers report, the chances are greater that their project will be approved. In their paper uploaded to the preprint server *arXiv* (soon to be published in *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific*) the researchers note that efforts have been made to get rid of [gender bias](#)

, but there still appears to be room for improvement.

It's not easy getting time on Hubble, researchers must form teams and then come up with something relevant and interesting to study. After that, they have to write a proposal and submit it to STScI—after review the proposal is accepted or rejected—only a quarter of those submitted wind up getting telescope time. Unfortunately, it seems that the odds are diminished even further if the PI is female. Not by much, the researchers report, just by four or five projects each proposal cycle—but that's enough to cause concern, especially in light of the fact that program officials have been trying to eliminate such perceived bias. They've tried giving talks to reviewers, to explain the problem in the hopes it will cause them to be less biased, they've tried moving team members name to the back page—and even using just an initial for the first name of the PI. None of its worked, and the researchers don't know why. They acknowledge that it's possible that female led proposals are simply not as interesting or as well thought out or written, in some cases, but also point out that very few if any proposals are written by only female teams—they're all filled with both men and women. Gender appears to only play a role for the PI.

The researchers have been studying the problem for two years, and are still mystified by the lack of change—they note that the problem is more pronounced when the PI is more senior—the difference is smaller for recent graduates, suggesting that the problem may solve itself given time. They also note that Hubble isn't the only program with the problem—some small studies have suggested that female led proposals meet with less success on other observatories as well.

More information: Full paper: arxiv.org/abs/1409.3528

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