

Conference on Minority Women Scientists

Minority women have been excluded from the scientific mainstream by a double bind of racial and sexual discrimination. This group represents a disturbingly small part of the total scientific manpower pool, but it is a significant component whose needs seem not to have been addressed by existing programs for minorities or women.

The unique and complex problems faced by minority women and the various solutions to them were discussed 12-14 December 1975 by minority women scientists during an intensive working conference. This meeting, the first ever held to specifically address such problems, was organized by the AAAS Office of Opportunities in Science under the sponsorship of the National Science Foundation. Jewel Plummer Cobb, dean of Connecticut College and the only minority woman on the National Science Board, served as chairperson.

The 30 participants in the conference were drawn from a larger pool of almost 200 persons nominated by their colleagues. These Black, Mexican-American, Native American, and Puerto Rican women represented various areas of science, engineering, and medicine, as well as a variety of educational and work experiences, geographical areas, and ages. Distinguished in their respective fields, they had overcome many obstacles in their attempts to obtain education and employment in science. Despite the fact that they personally had been able to surmount monumental barriers, the conferees expressed concern for the hundreds of thousands of minority group members, especially minority women, who have been excluded or systematically "tracked" out of the pool of potential scientific and technological manpower.

Noting that minority women represent less than 0.5 percent of all U.S. doctoral scientists and engineers (although they are approximately 8.6 percent of the total U.S. population), conferees called for an immediate end to the discriminatory practices which have made their achievements so difficult and which they felt to be largely responsible for the smallness of their numbers. While they strongly supported the

principle of affirmative action, they expressed dissatisfaction with the ways in which it has been enforced and, indeed, the general lack of enforcement.

The conferees asserted that if the pool of minority women scientists is to be enlarged, vigorous leadership will be needed at the highest administrative levels in public and private institutions. More women and minorities, and especially minority women, must be moved into scientific management in the academic, government, and private sectors, and affirmative action should be actively applied to education and training as well as to recruitment and promotion.

The participants strongly opposed the double counting system, by which employers count minority women twice, thus distorting statistics to escape their obligations to hire more minorities and women. The minority women scientists also objected to systems which they observed often penalized and rarely rewarded them for engaging in activities specifically designed to address the exclusion of minorities and/or women from training and careers. In addition, they agreed to oppose both institutions and programs which pit minority groups against one another and minorities against women in the competition for training and jobs. They noted that much

larger financial resources must be committed to redressing past discriminatory practices experienced by all minority groups and all women, and they called for special programs tailored to the needs of each group as necessary.

Expressing strong dissatisfaction with an educational and professional system which fails to prepare, advise, support, and include all people, whatever their color, heritage, or sex, the conference participants underscored the need for programs addressed to the specific concerns of minority women scientists. Those concerns stem from the problems associated both with ethnicity and with sex. A pattern was suggested whereby ethnic group membership seems to be the more significant barrier during the early school years, with discrimination based on sex surfacing somewhat later, especially in graduate and professional schools and in employment.

Throughout the conference, participants noted the impact on minority women of stereotyping in the choice of a career. The attitudes encountered by many of them that a career in science or engineering would be incompatible with the interests and abilities of women had been found to be especially inhibiting. Conferees felt that role models are especially needed to dispel these stereotypes. Informed and unbiased counseling at all levels was also identified as a critical need, especially at crucial decision-making times.

Essential to any programs developed for minority women scientists would be an active communications network, such as the one that began informally at the weekend conference, the participants pointed out. Such a network would be useful for disseminating information on educational and career opportunities, institutional programs, and financial assistance; for building mutual support; for identifying other minority women scientists; and for expanding the effectiveness of their efforts and of any programs aimed specifically at their needs.

A report summarizing the conclusions and recommendations of the conference will be presented to the National Science Foundation early this year and will be available through the Office of Opportunities in Science.

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1976-77 Congressional Science Fellowships

Applications are now being accepted for 1976-77 Congressional Science Fellowships. The deadline for application is 31 March 1976. The 1-year fellowships will begin 1 September 1976. For further information and application materials, contact Richard A. Scribner, director, Congressional Science Fellow Program, AAAS, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.