Tuesday, July 21, 2015

Science/AAAS
1200 New York Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear *Science*/AAAS Editors:

We are writing about four recent AAAS publications and communications in the past 12 months that reinforce damaging stereotypes about underrepresented groups in STEM fields. It is particularly concerning that two of these four pieces originated from *Science Careers*, which purports to be "*the leading resource for job listings and career advice in science, technology, engineering and mathematics*", given that these incidents risk deterring people from underrepresented groups from pursuing careers in STEM, and (in the fourth case) appear to mock criticisms from the scientific community in response to these communications.

Below we summarize the four recent incidents:

1) The recent article in the *Working Life* section of the journal made statements about gendered career roles that reinforce sexist stereotypes ("*...I worked 16 to 17 hours a day, not just to make progress on the technology but also to publish our results in high-impact journals. How did I manage it? My wife—also a Ph.D. scientist— worked far less than I did; she took on the bulk of the domestic responsibilities…*") [1].

2) An online *Science Careers* post in response to a postdoctoral researcher requesting advice about her advisor's tendency to look down her shirt implied that employees should tolerate inappropriate behavior because they would otherwise risk career advancement ("*...As long as your adviser does not move on to other advances, I suggest you put up with it, with good humor if you can…..His attention on your chest may be unwelcome, but you need his attention on your science and his best advice.*")
[2]

3) The cover photo of headless transgender sex workers of color with the caption "*Staying a step ahead of HIV/AIDS*" [3] fed into stereotypes associating prostitution and HIV/AIDS with three underrepresented communities - women, people of color and transgender people - along with its general harmful representation of disembodied female representations.

4) A tweet from the @SciCareersEditor account stating "Am I the only one who finds moral indignation really boring?" [4] in apparent response to comments made on Twitter criticizing the offensive *Science* cover photo described above.

We request that *Science*'s editorial staff and reviewers work more diligently to ensure that *Science*'s web and printed material does not reinforce harmful stereotypes that hinder the advancement of underrepresented groups in STEM fields. Such material is counter to the AAAS's stated mission to: "*advance science, engineering, and innovation throughout the world for the benefit of all people*".

In particular, we suggest STEM diversity training for *Science* and *Science Careers* editorial staff and additional scrutiny of published materials, columns, and comments that are posted on *Science*'s online blogs and Twitter feeds, which illustrate the opinions and priorities of *"the world's leading outlet for scientific news, commentary, and cutting-edge research"* and "*the world's largest general scientific society".*

[1] 10 July 2015 *Working Life* article "Getting noticed is half the battle" by Eleftherios Diamandis (*Science* Vol. 349 no. 6244 p. 206).

[2] The 1 June 2015 Science Careers post on the online advice column by Alice Huang (since retracted).

[3]11 [July 2014 Science cover photo of headless transgender sex workers of color](#) with caption "*Staying a step ahead of HIV/AIDS*".

[4]The [16 July 2014 tweet "*Am I the only one who finds moral indignation really boring*?"](#) by Science Careers Editor Jim Austin @SciCareersEditor (Twitter account since deleted).

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