

Changing the scientific ecosystem

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The Brazilian Materials Research Society—Sociedade Brasileira de Pesquisa em Materiais (SBPMat)—held an international panel discussion on September 2, 2021 on *Women in Science*. Similar to other presentations on this topic, panelists provided data on the gender gap in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). However, during the discussion session, Silvina Ponce Dawson of the University of Buenos Aires and the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (Argentina) said, “What we are after is a cultural change.”

Dawson served on the panel together with Débora Menezes, President of the

Brazilian Physical Society (Brazil); Katemari Rosa of Universidade Federal da Bahia (Brazil); and Marissa Reigel, R&D Manager at the Savannah River National Laboratory (United States), with Andrea de Camargo, Scientific Director at SBPMat (Brazil) and Mônica Cotta, President of SBPMat (Brazil) as moderators. The cultural change they look to goes beyond empowering women to believe they can be scientists.

Rosa said that scientific success is currently defined in terms of finances and capitalism. Within this framework, a prestigious task for a scientist is that of fundraising for research funding,

whereas the task of ensuring a “comfortable” work place or academic environment is considered less esteemed. Furthermore, these tasks are traditionally delegated according to gender, prompting Dawson to caution scientists to pay attention to how the tasks are allocated.

The purpose of changing the culture is to relook at how “success” is determined. Rosa said that she switched research interests based on how her scientific passions shifted and simultaneously she worked numerous jobs not related to science in order to financially support herself. She advocated for a change in perspective: instead of saying “I can’t do this” against the expectations projected on women scientists, it is more important to acknowledge the scientific culture that is a problem.

All of the panelists provided examples of where specific changes can be made. One example is the criteria for awards. Awards that are age-specific exclude scientists who interrupted studies or careers due to children or caring for elderly parents. Such awards can specify “early career” of the scientist’s experience rather than the scientist’s age.

Changing the culture may eliminate discrimination based on gender but also based on age, race, ethnicity, and economic status. The aim of changing the scientific ecosystem is to enable all researchers to do their best work. The panel presentation is available on the SBPMat YouTube channel, <https://youtube.com/c/SBPMat-BMRS>.



Credit: Donatas Dabravolskas.

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