



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Women's History Month: Don't Put a Man on the Cover

There should not be a man on the cover of the Women's History Month issue of the *Notices* [March 2017 issue].

I have been told that this choice was made to avoid giving the impression that a woman was featured due to her gender and not her mathematics. To avoid tokenizing us you have erased us, and indicated "Women's History Month" in the margin.

A moment's thought produces many alternatives. Feature a figure or formula or diagram from an influential paper by a woman, or an illustration of a woman's theorem. Feature several historical women in mathematics, or several living women in math with a group interview inside, or some of the young women that have won the Sloan recently. And do this throughout the year. Take a break from men on the cover. Give women some visibility.

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margin.*

Give our mathematics some visibility. Show young people the powerful work that has been done, and continues to be done, by women. Marina Ratner's theorems on unipotent flows, Alice Roth's approximation theorems, Karen Uhlenbeck's compactness theorems, Maryam Mirzakhani's volume formula, Mary Ellen Rudin's counterexamples, Karen Vogtmann's work on Outer Space, Alice Chang's work in analysis, Ivelisse Rubio Canabal's work in finite fields, Karen Smith's work on tight closure, Suzanne Weekes's work in applied mathematics, Amie Wilkinson's work in dynamics, Melanie Matchett Wood's work in number theory and algebraic geometry, Mariel Vazquez's work in mathematical biology, Nathalie Wahl's work in algebraic topology, Chelsea Walton's work in noncommutative algebra, Katie Mann's work in topology, Lillian Pierce's work in number theory, Minerva Cordero's work in finite geometries, Ingrid Daubechies's work in wavelets, Xenia de la Ossa's work in mathematical physics,...

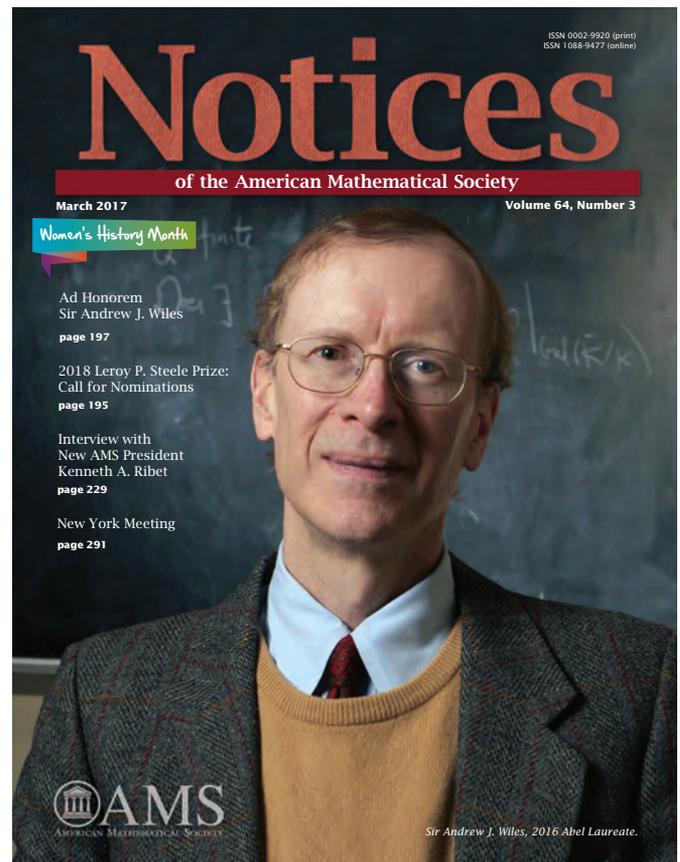
Marginalized people are frequently and systematically erased the way that women were this March in the *Notices*, the way that black people were erased in the February issue.

Next year's March issue would benefit from a discussion of sexism in academia. It would be a good follow-up to a February issue addressing racism.

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The March 2017 cover.

Survey on Math Post-docs

In connection with my article on “Disruptions of the Academic Math Employment Market” in the October 2016 *Notices*, I report on a pilot survey about math post-docs sent to chairs of 14 doctoral mathematics departments in October 2016. Most were at public universities in the northeastern quadrant of the US. Respondents were promised anonymity to encourage frankness. Eleven replies provided data for 162 mathematicians leaving research post-doc positions in 2012–13, 2013–14, or 2014–15.

- 41 (25%) obtained tenure-track positions in doctoral departments
- 36 (22%) moved to another post-doc position
- 14 (9%) moved to tenure-track jobs in the US at bachelors or masters institutions
- 14 (9%) moved to non-US academic institutions (tenure status and title unknown)
- 15 (9%) took full-time non-tenure-track academic jobs
- 13 (8%) moved to business, industry, or government
- 29 (18%) were reported in the category “other/unknown”

Assuming optimistically that two-thirds of those moving to an additional post-doc eventually find a tenure track job in a doctoral university, the pipeline from post-docs to academic research careers appears to leak. Better tracking by post-docs’ employers might give a more encouraging picture. Certainly, post-docs who move into business, industry, and government contribute to the nation’s STEM workforce.

The flow from one post-doc to another may result from the increasing number of post-doctoral positions since the economic downturn of 2008, the decreasing number of tenure-eligible jobs in doctoral departments, and the increasing reliance of academic institutions on full-time, non-tenure-track doctoral mathematicians as teaching-intensive faculty. The heavy teaching loads of most (certainly not all) such faculty are not conducive to research.

Some post-docs in this study were already in a second post-doc and moved to a third post-doc. This may reflect the attraction of geographic mobility, or the unavailability of attractive tenure-track jobs. An employment pattern of 6 years or more of post-doctoral support is not generally attractive to early career mathematicians (male as well as female) concerned about stability and work-life balance.

Methodology. Results of a pilot survey are not conclusive but should spur discussion and further study. For this survey, a research post-doc position was defined to be a multi-year but non-renewable position intended to support the transition from directed thesis research to an independent research program. The definition explicitly included not only positions formally called post-docs but also positions serving the same purposes under other titles such as named instructorships, named assistant professorships, and certain one-year positions anticipating renewals for up to three years.

The survey was not sent to directors of research centers. It is unclear how many departments reported on post-docs located in centers. In most cases, the department filled out an on-line survey. In one case, no survey was returned, but the names of research post-docs were available on the department’s website for survey

personnel to track using search engines. In another case, the responding department filled out most sections of the survey but provided names of research post-docs for survey personnel to track. Too little data was available to compare the recent situation with that a decade earlier.

References. A fuller account of my survey, including prior jobs and preparation provided for future careers, is posted at arXiv.org. Consistent results from an AMS survey on job placements of post-docs moving in 2015 will appear in the *2015 CBMS Statistical Abstracts*. See also the article on “Math PhD Careers: New Opportunities Emerging Amidst Crisis” in the March 2017 *Notices* (www.ams.org/publications/journals/notices/201703/rnoti-p260.pdf).

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