

Let us stand up for female scientists



MARISA DUFFY ON ... A woman's place in the lab

You see, the trouble with crusty old male boffins is ...

I jest. I would never lump an entire demographic under one personality type. That would be ridiculous. But, as we know, intelligence in one niche area is no guarantee of general cleverness, a fact borne out by the comments of biochemist Sir Tim Hunt regarding female scientists.

At a conference in Korea, the 72-year-old Nobel laureate told his audience: "Let me tell you about my trouble with girls. Three things happen when they are in the lab; you fall in love with them, they fall in love with you, and when you criticise them they cry."

Was he still delirious from jet lag? Had he partaken too heartily of the hospitality, perhaps? Nope, even in the cool light of hindsight, he stood by his comments, saying he was trying to be honest. His regret is being within ear-shot of journalists at the time.

So, let me get this straight, Sir Tom. Your point is that, er, people fall in love. People who work together fall in love and therefore to avoid such "emotional entanglements" women should be evicted from the lab in case they go all weak at the knees. More hilariously, they should also be banned so that men don't fall for them. (Sir Tom, while we're dropping some truth bombs, some folks even fall for those of the same sex; don't know how that fits with your grand solution.) As for the tears, perhaps you ought to look to your interpersonal communication skills if people are routinely bawling their eyes out when you talk to them. So well done all you hard-working female scientists out

there, for probably going against the grain during your schooling and opting for sciences; for working your tail off at university and battling to secure yourself a job. Well done for slaving away in your field to bring the breakthroughs that will transform our lives, but essentially you are just an unwanted distraction, holding back the progress of science. Just let the big boys crack on.

But seriously, to the girls out there considering a science career, cast Sir Tom from your mind and focus instead on some of the Scottish women excelling in science. Look to Muffy Calder, computer science professor at Glasgow University, whose work earned her an OBE, or Anna Dominicza, also of Glasgow University and one of the world's top cardiovascular scientists, or Aberdeen's Professor Anne Glover, pictured, former Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission, without whose contributions the world of science would be far poorer.



You are just an unwanted distraction, holding back the progress of science. Let the big boys crack on

