

A Scientist is Leveling the Playing Field, One Load of Laundry at a Time



By Julianna LeMieux — March 8, 2018



Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard [1]

It is well known that women make less money than men. And, we know that, in general, women who spend the same amount of time in the office (or lab) as men also do more work in the home - a divide that only gets larger as children come into the picture.

One scientist saw how this imbalance was affecting the female members in her lab and decided to do something about it.

Dr. Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard is a leader in the field of developmental biology. In fact, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1995 (along with Edward B. Lewis and Eric F. Wieschaus.)

But, this article is not about Dr. Nüsslein-Volhard's scientific achievements. This is about the quiet, but meaningful, role she plays in promoting women in science. Dr. Nüsslein-Volhard started a foundation in 2004, the "Foundation for the promotion of science and research", that helps women balance family obligations with the duties of an independent researcher.

The website states:

*"Are you a female graduate student or postdoctoral fellow with one or more children? Do you often lack the time and flexibility to pursue your academic work? Then apply for a grant from the [Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard-Foundation](#) [2]. The grants **aim to help talented young women** through the period in which they face this double burden and enable them to produce good research nonetheless."*

The fellowship is a monthly grant of 400 euros per month for a period of one year. It is designed to

give German female scientists money to pay for assistance in either household chores and/or additional childcare. The goal is to remove some of these additional tasks from the workload of the scientist so that she can spend her nights and weekends doing what her male peers are doing - reading, writing or working in lab - if she so chooses.

The funding can be used to hire help at home, buy appliances such as a dishwasher or washing machine or to hire additional childcare. In short, the money is used to target the challenges that make life difficult for many female scientists, namely balancing family obligations with the duties of an independent researcher.

These grants give a scientist the freedom and mobility that is needed to advance their career. In turn, the foundation states, they they "hope to contribute towards increasing the proportion of highly qualified women participating in high-level research in Germany."

Unfortunately, the foundation is only available in Germany. However, perhaps someone with deep pockets will see the value in this program and bring it stateside. I know, because I had my first child during my graduate work, just how valuable this kind of extra money could be. Lab work cannot be done at home and, when the days were long or the experiment went through the weekend, my infant son would come into lab with me. Even if that meant taking his naps on the couch in my advisor's office. Some extra money to cover more babysitting may not seem like a big deal to those who have not been in that situation. But, from all of us who have, we send a big thank you to Dr. Nüsslein-Volhard for doing something to try to level the playing field.

Sources: <http://www.cnv-stiftung.de/en/goals/> [3]

<https://www.research-in-germany.org/en/infoservice/newsletter/newsletter...> [4]

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Links

[1] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christiane_N%C3%BCsslein-Volhard_mg_4406.jpg

[2] <http://www.cnv-stiftung.de/en/goals.html>

[3] <http://www.cnv-stiftung.de/en/goals/>

[4] <https://www.research-in-germany.org/en/infoservice/newsletter/newsletter-2016/august-2016/grants-from-the-christiane-nuesslein-volhard-foundation.html>