

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE LAB

Brain cancer researcher and grant recipient DR MISTY JENKINS, 39, is used to working in a male-dominated industry. Just don't expect her to give up her bright red lipstick anytime soon

If I were to go into any primary school classroom and ask the kids to draw a scientist, nine times out of 10 those pictures will be of a white, middle-aged balding man wearing a white coat and spectacles. And that wouldn't be too far from the truth. The STEM field (science, technology, engineering and maths) is very much a male-dominated industry. For the biological sciences, about 25 per cent of the leadership team is women, so 75 per cent are blokes. With maths and engineering, you will be lucky to get 10 per cent of women in leadership roles.

I've definitely had pressure placed on me over the years to conform to a certain stereotype. To dress down, to not wear floral skirts in the laboratory, to not wear make-up, to not worry about brushing my hair. I remember when I went through my PhD, someone said, "You're not going to give a presentation wearing that bright red lipstick, are you? Aren't you worried people won't take you seriously?"

My attitude has been to challenge that stereotype. My IQ isn't linked to wearing cosmetics. It doesn't matter what any of us look like; whether we're black or white, male or female, gay or straight. We should be celebrating all diversity in our workplaces because ultimately it's diversity that drives innovation - having all these different points of view and experiences brings alternate creativity into the workplace.

Both innovation and creativity are important aspects of my work, which



Tips on how to avoid the guilt-trap

- 1 You can't be everywhere. My daughter may not have a homemade costume for the book fair, but she can name all the different kinds of germs.
- 2 Escape the people-pleasing track. You don't have to fit a stereotype to excel in your work. Success is a mindset.
- 3 Stop feeling guilty. Sometimes you can't make a friend's birthday dinner and that's OK.

is the study of brain cancer. This is an area where mortality rates are high, and where medical research makes so much difference. I believe that in the next 10 or 20 years, cancer will no longer be a death sentence. More and more, we're able to treat it as a chronic disease. Hopefully, one day we will cure it altogether. That's why I've dedicated my lab [at the Walter & Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research] to studying brain cancer.

I wouldn't mind curing sexism, too. I have seen a lot of change in attitudes

over the past decade, particularly in the past two years. Women are now more confident to call out inappropriate behaviour and stand up for themselves. Often I'm the only senior woman at the table with senior men, and it's easy to be talked over, cut off or dismissed. We need to set the standard for the generation coming up behind us. Because you can't be what you can't see. ★

Dr Jenkins is a grant recipient of Carrie's Beanies 4 Brain Cancer. Beanies on sale May 1 from carriesbeanies4braincancer.com.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CZESIA MARKIEWICZ. STELLAR PICKS: SASKIA TILLERS

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things to try this week



READ Australian mothers reveal what they wish they'd known about life as a first-time mum in Jamila Rizvi's *The Motherhood*. The collection of letters (to themselves) includes insights from Zöe Foster Blake and Em Rusciano. Out tomorrow, \$34.99; penguin.com.au.

WATCH After moving cities to escape her stalker, Sawyer (Claire Foy) visits a therapist, who admits her to a mental institution for a 24-hour stay. Once inside, she faces her biggest fear. Shot entirely on iPhone, Steven Soderbergh's *Unsane* is in cinemas now.

EXPERIENCE Adelaide Hills wine country is relocating to Sydney for one night only at the *Hills Heist*. You can meet the winemakers while enjoying snacks, live music and bountiful vino. On May 8 at Winebar One, Surry Hills; tickets at eventbrite.com.au.