

brought against Hadizadeh, who is 54 years old. He had open-heart surgery 10 years ago and, since his arrest, he has developed diabetes and other health problems, according to his wife. He has spent his imprisonment mostly in solitary confinement at an unknown location.

Iran's physical society, its science ministry, and science academies, human rights organizations, and individual scientists from around the world have been pleading with Iranian authorities for Hadizadeh's release. Brazilian physicist Aldo Craievich, for example, canceled a trip to Iran in July, writing to Reza Mansouri, who heads the Physical Society of Iran, "I presently feel that I should not visit your country while Prof. Hadizadeh, a serious scientist that I appreciate and the person that invited me, is under arrest." And more than two dozen Nobel laureates signed a private letter to Khatami urging that Hadizadeh be released on humanitarian grounds.

In late August, a few of the other detainees were released, raising hopes that Hadizadeh would be freed soon too. "Every moment we are expecting him to ring us," says Hadizadeh's wife. "But there is nothing yet."

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Superstring Theory Is a Theatrical Hit

A play about a suicidal astrophysicist, based loosely on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is proving to be a critical and financial success at London's Royal National Theatre. *Humble Boy*, Charlotte Jones's new comedy, is a scientific fantasy and a tough family drama.

Felix Humble, played by Simon Russell Beale, is a theoretical astrophysicist in his thirties who has returned home for the funeral of his father, a biologist and beekeeper. Like many scientists depicted in popular culture, Felix has bad fashion sense, although instead of the lab coat, he wears ill-fitting cricket whites. He discovers that his mother Flora (Diana Rigg) intends to marry George Pye, a suitor he loathes. Complicating matters, Felix earlier had an affair with George's daughter Rose, who gave birth to a child he has never known.

The play tries to convey Felix's excitement about trying to work out, as the character says, "a unified field theory that will reconcile relativity and quantum mechanics," and the split desire he feels for loneliness

Professor Surveys Physics Faculty Makeup

The ones and zeros in the table compiled by Donna Nelson don't come as much of a surprise. But they are a stark reminder that the overwhelming majority of physics professors at top US universities are still white men. Earlier this year, Nelson, a chemistry professor at the University of Oklahoma, surveyed the makeup of faculty in chemistry and chemical engineering by rank, race, and gender for the country's 50 best-funded universities. Now she has done the same for physics.

The 50 universities surveyed have a total of 1987 physics faculty members. The full data can be viewed online at <http://www.awis.org/statistics/physicsTable.html>. Here are some highlights:

- ▷ Of the physics faculty members at the 50 universities, 131, or 6.6%, are women.
- ▷ Twelve physicists at the 50 universities, or about 0.6%, are African American. They are all men.
- ▷ Half of the 10 Hispanic physics faculty members are women.
- ▷ There is one Native American physics professor at the universities surveyed; he is at Yale University.
- ▷ Asian Americans represent 11.2% of the physics faculty; of those, about 10% are women.

"Nelson's data agree pretty well with ours," says Rachel Ivie of the American Institute of Physics's statistics division. (AIP's most recent report on employment by gender and race, *2000 Physics Academic Workforce Report*, is available on the Web at <http://www.aip.org/statistics/trends/reports/awf01.pdf>.) "What Nelson has that we don't is women by race and the breakdown by rank," says Ivie. Most black academic physicists are at historically black colleges and universities, Ivie adds. "The question is, Why are they there? Are they not going to the top 50 universities because they don't get offers, or because they choose not to? I don't think anyone knows the answer."

Nelson, who is one quarter Native American, started doing her own surveys after seeing one that showed the breakdown of chemistry faculty by gender and wondering why it didn't look at minorities. She compiled the data by sending out questionnaires and then following up aggressively. When universities didn't respond, she says, "We got the information from the Web and from talking to people in the department. That's how we got a 100% response rate." Physics, she adds, "is doing a pretty good job in using the available female base, but it lags in hiring minorities." One surprising result, Nelson says, is that chemical engineering outstrips both chemistry and physics in hiring from their respective pools of African American PhDs.

"My students were extremely interested in the surveys," says Nelson. "I think the females have been taught they will have a full chance, and they expect it. And when they see this sort of statistics, they are even more outraged than professors. All I am asking is for people to listen—and not to punish females and minorities when they try to discuss the disincentives for going into these fields."

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CHRIS BRAMMER

NELSON

and companionship.

"There aren't many playwrights bold enough to relate personal relationships to cutting-edge theoretical physics," Beale told the *Guardian* newspaper. All the actors had lessons in physics during rehearsals to help them understand superstring theory.

Jones says that she decided to

write a play about a physicist after she visualized a man pottering around the garden like a bumblebee, and "according to the laws of physics, the body shape of the bumblebee should make flight impossible." The idea of incorporating superstring theory came after she heard string theorist Brian Greene from Columbia University in New York discuss his book, *The Elegant Universe* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), on the radio.

"I have been surprised and gratified by the number of undertakings in the arts of late that have some connection to string theory," says Greene. He points to a dance piece in New York, an independent movie being shot in Los Angeles, and a play called

Feynman in New York

"QED," with Alan Alda starring as Richard Feynman, will run in Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater in New York on Sunday and Monday evenings until 17 December. The play opened in California this past spring (see PHYSICS TODAY, April 2001, page 29).