

## **Discriminatory Rationalization: The Equity/Excellence Debate in Canada**

Wendy J. Robbins, Professor, Department of English, Co-ordinator, Women's Studies Interdisciplinary Program, University of New Brunswick

### **Abstract**

Virginia Woolf wrote that “the history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself.” Analyzing men’s resistance remains relevant to understanding gendered hierarchies, including those in academia. Recently, when women academics brought a human rights complaint against the Canadian government over the discriminatory distribution of prestigious Canada Research Chairs, officials defended the gender gap by pitting “excellence” against “equity.” Later, ignoring the complaint’s settlement agreement, they established a Canada Excellence Research Chairs Program, appointing no women at all.

This illustrates Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith’s observation that, because men have power, they have the power to keep it. Their strategies, which serve to reduce or eliminate competition, include defining differences as deficiencies, exclusionary gate-keeping that uses insider networks and discredits outsiders’ claims, custom-tailoring merit criteria, and perpetrating a “chilly climate” through such tactics as harassment and discriminatory rationalizations. Historically used to bar access to women students, arguments about women’s “natural inferiority” and “lowering the standard” have resurfaced to justify women’s underrepresentation in top research positions. The equity-versus-excellence construction is refuted by contemporary scholarship on gender schemas and implicit biases, but ultimately the debate is less about knowledge than about power. As Canadian dub poet Lillian Allen summarizes, “no one in power ain’t givin’ up nothin’.”

### **Introduction**

“The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself,” speculated pioneer feminist critic Virginia Woolf back in 1929 in *A Room of One’s Own* (54). And she noted how male professors’ treatises about women’s inferiority contributed to one of the “chief sources” of patriarchal power, namely, the “feeling [of a patriarch] that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself” (35). Analyzing men’s resistance to women’s equality—their self-serving arguments about women’s “intrinsic” lack of aptitude for top-tier scientific research, and blame-the-victim rationalizations about women’s professional and personal “choices”—remains relevant today in trying to understand the attitudes and behaviours that produce and maintain gendered hierarchies, including those in postsecondary education. Ongoing biases and discriminatory assumptions that impugn women’s intellectual capabilities rather than patriarchal institutional structures persist in twenty-first century North America, as was manifest in the inflammatory remarks about women in science made by former Harvard president Larry Summers in 2005, and in the ongoing

controversy surrounding two prestigious Canadian research programs, the Canada Research Chairs, established in 2000, and the Canada Excellence Research Chairs, established in 2008. Men's (and some male-identified women's) opposition to women's equality in postsecondary education, self-righteously defended with prejudices about women's potentially "lowering the standard," has a long history; though largely forgotten, this tradition of negative stereotyping of educated women still casts a long shadow that chills the campus climate. A solid, feminist counter-tradition of research on "gender schemas" and the effects of bias, which refutes patriarchal assumptions and documents women's achievements, exists, but it remains marginalized. For example, in the 1970s, research revealed that stereotypes led people to overrate men's abilities and underrate women's when the same academic resumé was rated more highly if assigned a man's name (Valian 1999, 127–28). In the 1990s, Cecilia Ridgeway explained that such biases create employment inequity by causing people to expect greater competence from men than from women, and thus to expect greater rewards to go to men than to women who are otherwise their equals; biases also lead men, on average, to pay less attention to information that undermines expectations based on gender. A 1997 study of scholarship made in Sweden found that "women have to be 2.5 times more productive than men in order to get the same peer review ratings" (Motiuk). Yet gender stereotyping remains a significant problem in the twenty-first century. As Donna Shalala et al. (2006) point out, "evidence establishes that most people—men and women—hold implicit biases ... most of us carry prejudices of which we are unaware but that nonetheless play a large role in our evaluations of people and their work" (3). Thus rationalizations and myths about women's competence or its lack still abound. Most are perpetrated by men and a few "token" women (or "men in skirts") to defend their privileged turf. As critics point out, "the unique role of the university is that it sits on the supply line for its own workers" (Williams and Emerson, 4), so the university self-reinforces by "groom[ing]" certain members for and discouraging others from seeking "positions of power" (Swartz, 413). Sometimes, sadly, myths about women's lack of merit are internalized by women, which leads to self-doubt, lack of self-confidence (Hill, Corbett, and St. Rose). When women measure up to male norms, the result may still be "feeling like a fraud," also known as the "imposter syndrome," for participating in patriarchal competition and hierarchy may not accord with feminist principles and values. Many women and minorities feel "fraudulent" since, if they hold more egalitarian views, they may not want to claim to be an authority or an expert; also, they may retain a skeptical outsiders' perspective that those who happen to get the high titles and acclaim are not always "the best and the brightest," as Peggy McIntosh argued in "Feeling Like a Fraud" (1985).

A search for "the best and the brightest"—world-class research "stars"—to enhance Canada's research "excellence" and international ranking lies at the heart of two twenty-first century government-university partnerships, the Canada Research Chairs and Canada Excellence Research Chairs. In 2003, a group of eight women academics brought a human rights complaint against the Canadian government alleging discrimination in the distribution of Canada Research Chairs, where women—who are a third of full-time university faculty—are still only a quarter of

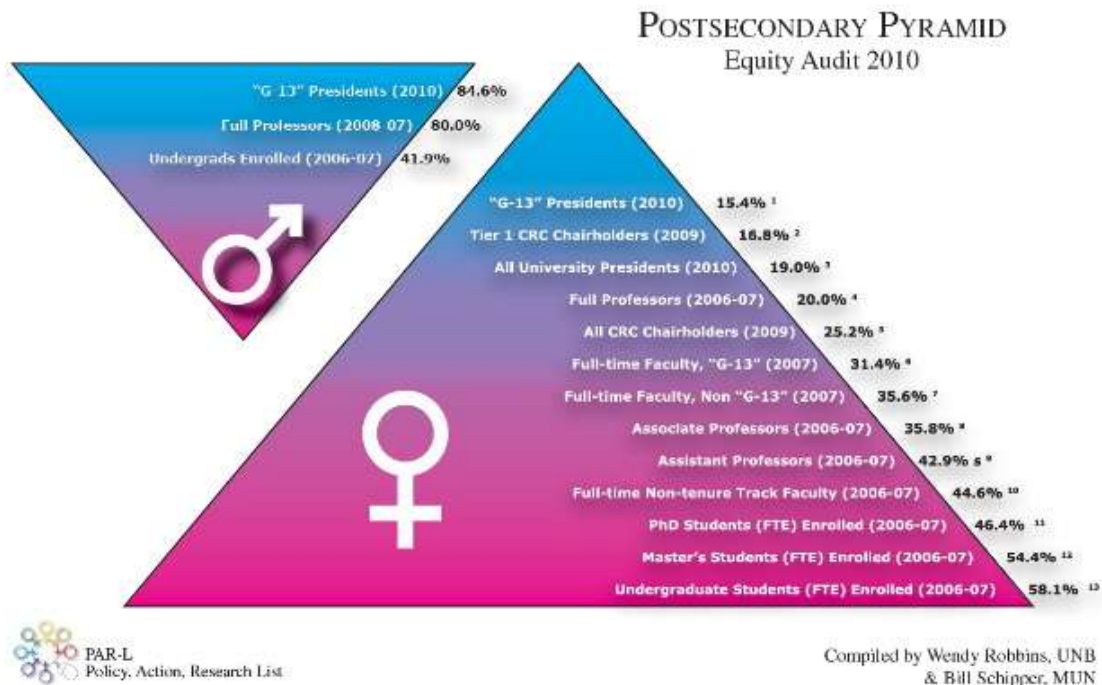
CRC chairholders (Dowdeswell, 13). At first, CRC Program officials defended the gender gap by pitting “excellence” against “equity.” After arguments about widening the pool by opening up the competition to include women and minorities persuaded them to issue a public statement disavowing their initial position, the government then blithely went ahead, two years later, to establish new Canada *Excellence* Research Chairs (CERC) outside the complaint’s settlement agreement.

The total absence of women amongst the 19 CERC appointments announced in May 2010 made front-page, national news. Most articles and interviews mentioned widespread dismay, angry criticism, and reference to contemporary research on the bias and barriers still facing women in science, engineering, and technology. The Minister of Industry, Tony Clement, who is ultimately responsible for both the CRC and CERC Programs, reportedly expressed “total shock,” and he hastily commissioned an ad hoc report after the fact (Church, 20 May 2010; Dowdeswell, 3). In both traditional media and blogs, many clichés were repeated about women’s lack of world-class merit, self-limiting “choices,” and professional “lag time,” while feminists who pointed to the “old boys” network and patriarchal power structures in the research hierarchy were accused of introducing political concerns rather than trying to correct them (Kheiriddin). One adjunct professor offered the unsubstantiated opinion that “any systemic bias that might have existed in science is finished” and that “‘equity’ and ‘excellence’ are simply incompatible” (Rajagoplan). The head of the National Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), Suzanne Fortier, was quoted as saying, rather naively, “I know [women researchers] are there, they are coming, and in 10 years time, watch out!” (Delacourt). This “lag time” or “pipeline” theory ignores both the outstanding women researchers who have earned international acclaim, including in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math), as well as compelling evidence of a “glass ceiling” at the more senior ranks for academic women, in Canada, as in the US, Sweden, and elsewhere (Drakich and Stewart, Shalala et al; Hill, Corbett, and St. Rose; Motiuk). It also ignores evidence that women tend to be under-represented at the top ranks even in fields where women have been PhD graduates in significant numbers for over 30 years (Shalala, 5). The massive *Beyond Bias and Barriers* report of 2006 concludes that it is not about “lag time.” Continuing positive action is needed if lasting change is to be achieved, and such measures do not lower the standard. The Shalala group reported that women faculty hired in science as a result of special measures achieved tenure at the same rate as men and achieved at least the same level of professional success as their male colleagues, as measured by election to the National Academy of Sciences. In Canada, discriminatory rationalizations and stereotyping notwithstanding, the majority (nearly 70%) of respondents to an online poll conducted by the Toronto *Globe and Mail* in the week following the CERC announcements was of the opinion that women are not adequately represented in the upper echelons of science research in Canada (*Globe and Mail*). In fact, women are not fairly represented in the upper echelons of the overwhelming majority of Canadian universities (Drakich and Stewart; CAUT, “The Changing Academy?”).

### Atop the Postsecondary Pyramid

The traditional, gendered pattern of “men on top,” which persists in postsecondary education in twenty-first-century Canada, means that the rule for women remains “the higher, the fewer” (Smith, Robbins and Simpson, Robbins and Schipper). The data illustrated in the *Postsecondary Pyramid Equity Audit 2010* show that, at the foundation of the postsecondary education structure, about 60% percent of students graduating are women, including 46% of new PhD’s. Nearing the summit of prestige and authority, only 20% of the country’s full professors are women, and merely 17% of the top “Tier 1” permanent Canada Research Chairs. This means that 131 women have been selected as top tier CRC’s, out of a national pool of 2,600 women full professors in Canada. Many times that number of women at the top rank are in the international pool and are also eligible for appointment. For example, in the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand the percentage of full professors who are female is larger than in Canada (CAUT, Mar. 2006, Table 1.) Merely two women (15%) are presidents at Canada’s largest “research-intensive” universities, the self-styled “G-13.” Stuningly, of the 19 Canada Excellence Research Chairs (CERC’s), recruited in an aggressive, international process that reportedly included hard-fought bidding wars, there are zero women. No woman even made the short list (Church, 20 May 2010).

Figure 1. Postsecondary Pyramid Equity Audit 2010



Following the announcement in May 2010 of the results of the CERC appointments, worth nearly \$200 million, some officials, journalists, and bloggers trotted out the familiar victim-blaming arguments about women's individual career and family "choices" leading to their underrepresentation in the government's currently favoured disciplines, where apparently the objective of "commercialization" of research can be most readily met: science, engineering, and technology, all of which depend heavily on math. There was also reference to women's unwillingness to relocate for work, given their family responsibilities; and women's relative lack of merit or research excellence, allegedly manifest in their relative scarcity at the top-most academic ranks or on the list of Nobel laureates. Women have won barely 5% of Nobel Prizes over the last century—in competitions that, like the CERC's, depend on nominations, which are evaluated by male-dominated selection committees (McGrayne; Nobel Prize website). Others, however, including the Canadian Association of University Teachers, roundly criticized women's "shut out" from the lucrative CERC appointments as "unconscionable" (CAUT, "Statement on Canada Excellence Research Chairs").

### **Human Rights Complaint about the CRC Program**

My analysis is based in part on my experience, together with seven other women, in laying a complaint about discrimination in the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program in 2003 against the government of Canada at the Canadian Human Rights Commission in Ottawa. This led to a negotiated settlement agreement in 2006, which has been more honoured in the breach than the observance, and whose terms were so clearly ignored in the fraught process of the Canada Excellence Research Chairs (CERC) appointments that the Ad Hoc Panel on CERC Gender Issues, appointed in the aftermath, included a reminder in their report in April 2010 of some of the agreement's key terms (Dowdeswell, 12-13).

The CRC Program, established in the year 2000, is intended to make Canada more internationally competitive and more innovative in the knowledge-based (*i.e.*, technology-driven) economy of the twenty-first century, all in the name of research "excellence." The CRC Program has created 2,000 elite research professorships at 67 universities across Canada—primarily for full professors (commonly referred to as research "stars") and associate professors ("rising stars"). CRC's are allocated primarily to Canada's big "research intensive" universities. Somewhat akin to the American designation "R 1," they call themselves the "G-13." CRC's are allocated primarily in the fields of science and engineering (45%), and health (more than a third, 35%). Humanities and social sciences, which employ more than half the faculty in Canada and enroll more than half the students, have an allocation of only 20%. Thus by its structure the CRC Program (and, subsequently, the CERC Program) privileges full professors, in research-intensive universities, in science and engineering. Women, Aboriginals, racialized minorities, and people with disabilities are not heavily represented in any of these categories. So the CRC and CERC programs—two publicly-funded, multimillion dollar programs—are bound to disadvantage even further people who are already marginalized in the academy. And that is illegal, according to

both domestic and international commitments, as was laid out in *Cohen et al. v. Industry Canada*, our human rights complaint filed in 2003 (*Cohen et al.*).

When the initial rounds of CRC appointments were announced in spring 2001, women received only 14% of them. A heated, national equity-versus-excellence debate ensued (Side and Robbins) with some consciousness-raising taking place, as well as some finger-pointing back and forth between government officials, who set policy, and university administrators, who nominate candidates. Slowly more women were appointed, so that the figure increased to 20% by fall 2006 when our negotiated settlement agreement was signed; in spring 2010, it stands at 25%. The gap remains more serious at the level of Tier 1 research “stars” (17%) than of Tier 2 “rising stars” (31%). Initially, program and university officials generally “explained” the gender gap by citing the main criterion of “excellence,” which they saw as having nothing to do with, or even being inimical to, “equity.” Although the early CRC positions were rarely advertised, officials did not consider that the candidate pool might thereby have been restricted. Nor did they consider the potential for bias given the composition of key decision-making bodies: the initial CRC Steering Committee was 100% male, its international team of peer reviewers was 83% male, and Canadian universities remain heavily male-dominated at the senior decision-making levels. They simply refused to consider structural biases in the program’s design and administration or the influence of the “old boys” network. Unwittingly, some officials even repeated arguments that had been used a century and a half earlier to bar women students from access to universities.

### **A Long History of Justifying Women’s Exclusion**

Arguments about the innate inferiority of women, their ill-suitedness to intellectual pursuits, and their “lowering the standard” have been made from the time of Aristotle, through Schopenhauer, to nineteenth-century North American medical doctors and academic leaders, to twenty-first century Canadian bureaucrats and bloggers (Holland, Spender, Sydnie). Historically, male gatekeepers justified barring access to university to women students with spurious claims about women’s “natural inferiority” both physical and mental, and warnings about the dire consequences of rigorous studies on the health of college women. “Proof” included the sudden death of “Miss G—,” a brilliant nineteenth-century Harvard co-ed who was a top student, “leading the male and female youth alike,” simply collapsed and died. Just as women were succeeding in overturning discriminatory policies that had barred them from higher education, male authorities devised new rationalizations to hold them back. “And so Miss G— died, not because she had mastered the wasps of Aristophanes...and the secrets of chemistry, but because, while pursuing these studies...she steadily ignored her woman’s make,” according to a Harvard medical expert, Dr. Edward Clarke. He summarized her story as follows: “Believing that woman can do what man can, for she held that faith, she strove with noble but ignorant bravery to compass man’s intellectual attainment in a man’s way, and died in the effort.” (Reinterpreting her story through a feminist lens, a group of young Ontario women university students was

inspired to form the Miss G— Project, which succeeded, in 2009, by lobbying the Ontario government, to gain approval for a required course in gender studies in the province's high schools.)

Illustrating the common medical wisdom of the day, Miss G—'s fatal problem was said to be using her brain, which was regarded as incompatible with the demands of a uterus. Investigating the allegedly deleterious effects on women's health of a university education was the goal of the first piece of research commissioned by the American Association of University Women. Its impressive survey of American women graduates, published in 1885, solidly refuted the male medical establishment's weak-women hypothesis (Howes).

Avoiding Miss G—'s fate, Grace Annie Lockhart became the first woman graduate in the British Empire in 1875 when she received her Bachelor of Science degree from Mount Allison University, in Sackville, New Brunswick. (At the time, an education in the classics was more prestigious and generally took a year longer than education in science.) In order to gain admission to the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, Canada's oldest English-language university, where I teach, another lone woman student, Mary Kingsley Tibbits, hired a tutor (poet Bliss Carman) so that she could study Greek, a subject required for admission to university but not available to women students in the course of instruction for high school matriculation. Once duly qualified and having tied for first place in the provincial matriculation examinations, she then hired a lawyer who argued successfully, in 1886, that she was legally a "person" (Tibbits) and that, if the university did not admit her, their funds should be withheld by the provincial government for not fulfilling the conditions in their charter. Men's arguments for barring women's access to university as students thus has been justified by the precepts of male-centric medicine (Miss G—), educational practises (Grace Annie Lockhart), and misogynistic policies and laws (Mary Kingsley Tibbits).

They have also included alarmist threats about women's distracting men from their studies (which had led to the requirement in 1840s New Brunswick that Martha Hamm, the first woman admitted to the Saint John Normal School, wear a veil) and the widespread assumption that women would cause harm to a university's reputation. The president of Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, from 1869 to 1896, was an American Baptist minister (originally from Vermont), the Reverend Artemas Wyman Sawyer; he was initially of the entrenched, conservative opinion that admitting women would certainly "lower the standard" (Sawyer qtd. in Hansen, 4). He abandoned this position when he realized that his cash-strapped Baptist college could benefit substantially by admitting this new pool of students, and ironically his claim to fame now rests on his having made this reform (*Dictionary of Canadian Biography*).

Contemporary justifications of inequity are not too dissimilar. What we heard from officials representing Industry Canada between 2003 and 2006 as we pursued our complaint over systemic discrimination against professors from four equity-seeking groups (women, Aboriginals, persons with disabilities, and racialized minorities) was that the Canada Research Chairs Program was about "excellence," not "equity," as if the two were—to this day—mutually exclusive (Bowen). This sexist, ablist, racist prejudice lies behind the snide article in the right-

wing *National Post* in 2010 that defended the new all-male Canada Excellence Research Chairs Program and dubbed the earlier and now presumably tainted and mediocre CRC program the “Canada Equity Chairs Program” (Kheiriddin). The main point about not restricting the recruitment pool by neglecting women scientists has been emphasized elsewhere, however, including in the report of the Ad Hoc Panel on CERC Gender Issues (Sheinen, Dowdeswell).

In response to negative media attention and the looming human rights complaint, the CRC Secretariat commissioned a partial investigation (Bégin-Heick, p. 18, Table 3). There are numerous flaws with their report, which faults universities for nominating too few women, not the CRC itself for appointing too few, and, in another blame-the-victim maneuver, asserts that women have “less research maturity” than their male counterparts (5), which ignores documentation of the “glass ceiling” in Canadian universities (Ainley, Drakich and Stewart, CAUT “The Changing Academy?”). Moreover, this research commissioned by the CRC Secretariat speculated that, if targets were set for appointing women, the “prestige” of the Chairs would be diminished; no such dire warnings were issued about the targets already set for the allocation of Chairs by granting council, university, and discipline (Bégin-Heick). Thus it would appear that it is not target-setting per se that is the problem: it is women, or, more precisely, ongoing prejudice about women’s alleged inferiority.

The CRC Executive Director at the time, René Durocher, pointed to women’s alleged passivity: “Some people are saying that the big difference between men and women is that men will fight more to obtain something—women want to be recognized for their merit and are less likely to fight than men” (Pappone, A5). This is not entirely dissimilar to the widely condemned remarks made by former Harvard University president Larry Summers, in which he identified women’s unwillingness to work long hours, as well as differences in “intrinsic aptitude” as key factors holding women back at top research institutions (Summers 2005). While the jury may still be out about differences in the organization of the typical male and female brain, Summers’ naïve comments about women’s innate inferiority and “choices,” not substantiated by references to scholarly research, created a firestorm of controversy, outrage, and ridicule. For example, a cartoon in *Slowpoke’s “Science Korner”* showed a lecturer pointing to an image of a brain and explaining: “We believe that a synaptic misfiring—which we’ve named Summers Syndrome—is responsible. It causes extreme slowness in grasping the significance of history and culture” (Sorenson).

A subsequent massive review of studies of brain structure and function, human cognitive development, and human evolution clearly shows that there are no significant biological differences between men and women that can account for the lower representation of women in faculty and leadership positions (Shalala, 2). “Unintentional biases and outmoded institutional structures... are hindering the access and advancement of women” (Shalala, 1). These two issues—implicit bias and workplace bias—are highlighted again as key concerns in work published in 2010 by the American Association of University Women and go a long way to answering its title question about women scientists and engineers: *Why So Few?* While many researchers are exploring root causes of bias against women, others would prefer to bolster the



status quo. For example, while he was writing his recent book on the history of “the world’s oldest prejudice,” misogyny, American author Jack Holland was stunned by the response of some of his male associates: “From those men who knew what the word ‘misogyny’ meant, there came a nod and a wink in an unspoken assumption that I was engaged in justifying it” (268). Discriminatory rationalizations continue to hamper progressive transformation of universities, professions, and society at large.

### **Setting aside the Settlement Agreement**

With legal counsel provided by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), the eight complainants and Industry Canada and CRC Program officials reached a negotiated settlement agreement in 2006. The CRC Program was obliged to state publicly that equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive, but rather the opposite, since widening the pool of qualified candidates contributes to a more competitive process; to advertise all openings in order to widen the pool of potential candidates; to develop a methodology for setting numerical targets for the appointment of people from four equity groups; and to set up suitable rewards for university administrations using “best practices” and sanctions for those who failed to comply with the new guidelines. Given that one of the men appointed to a CRC in the field of health under the initial “old boys” system of identifying “excellence” was found guilty of criminal fraud in falsifying his research, we thought that everyone could clearly see that more transparent processes would be a net good (Dalton).

Since then, the CRC management has not only *not* implemented the agreement, they made an end-run; with 200 million new dollars for starters, they created another program, presumably unsullied by equity considerations, called, pointedly, the Canada *Excellence* Research Chairs. According to the CERC website, the program seeks “to attract and retain the world’s most accomplished and promising minds.” Now 13 universities, no longer 67, have been allowed into the inner circle of those eligible for funding. There are 3 women amongst the 15 people responsible for its main decision-making (20% female). Its 19 appointments, made in May 2010, have all gone to men. The Minister of Industry, Tony Clements, reportedly had no knowledge of the prior human rights complaint or the relevant settlement agreement, although section F15 of the agreement required gender-based analysis training within this very department and it is cited in the report of the Ad Hoc Panel that he commissioned in April, prior to the official announcement of the inaugural round of CERC appointments in May. This end-run is an illustration of what Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith has noted: those who have power have the power to keep it (Smith).

### **The Best Defence is a Good Offence**

In a collection of memoirs by some of the founders of women’s studies in Canada, titled *Minds of Our Own*, which I co-edited in 2008, feminist historian Alison Prentice, now retired, recorded

her experience as a married student mother of two at the University of Toronto back in the 1960s. She writes: “I chanced to encounter a physicist colleague of my husband’s on campus. He wanted to know what I was doing at the university. “A PhD ...,” I replied. “Oh,” he exclaimed, “if *my* wife did that, I’d *kill* her” (Prentice, 100).

Male harassment and overt hostility towards women, especially those “uppity” women seeking postsecondary education, is intimidating, and it serves to keep women “in our place,” which is to say, out of competition with men altogether, or seriously disadvantaged, not only facing challenges to our competence and authority from others, but also oftentimes internalizing feelings of self-doubt or worthlessness ourselves (McIntosh; Hill, Corbett, and St. Rose). In short, it means that often both women and men, consciously or unconsciously, perpetuate discriminatory stereotypes.

Problems encountered by women seeking knowledge stretch back at least as far as the Genesis story of Eve, hungry for knowledge and punished by exile from paradise and pain in childbirth for her alleged temptation of Adam and their disobedience. And problems and punishment persist in a wide range of ways for girls and women pursuing education, from Afghanistan to Canada. Several murders in recent years of young immigrant women in Canada fit the pattern of so-called “honour killings.” One young woman, Shaila Bari was a business student at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton; she was unhappy in her arranged marriage but reportedly “blossoming” at university. Shaila Bari was murdered by her husband, from whom she had recently separated. In another tragedy, three teenage Afghani-born girls, the Shafi sisters—Zainab, Sahar, and Geeti—and their mother—Rona Amir Mohammed—were drowned in Kingston, Ontario, apparently as punishment for slipping out of their father’s (or husband’s) control. Victims of domestic violence, these young women had begun to develop minds of their own, getting educated, learning to drive, not wearing headscarves, becoming “rebellious.” While these examples are extreme, there is evidence of persistent if often less blatant sexist, racist, ablist, and homophobic forms of harassment and hostility in Canadian society and on campus (Caplan, Canadian Panel on Violence against Women).

Patriarchal religions abound with rationalizations of sexist discrimination. For example, Genesis not only tells the story of man’s appropriation of woman’s power to give birth (Eve being fashioned from Adam’s rib), it also justifies man’s authority over weak-willed woman as a god-given right. The monastic roots of the medieval university, like the religious roots of many of the earliest North American ones, reinforced these patriarchal notions. The writings of some of academe’s canonical authors still form the staple of the curricula of many disciplines—classics, philosophy, religious studies, literature, and history—with or without benefit of informed feminist analysis. Sigmund Freud described women’s “lack” in various ways, including his theory of women’s penis envy. (Gloria Steinem satirically proposed the opposite in an essay in which she imagined Freud as female and expounded on men’s womb envy.) If knowledge is power, then restricting women’s access to knowledge, and belittling or thwarting their attempts to gain education, very effectively control women’s access to power.

### **Levelling the Playing Field**

Science, engineering, and technology have been conceptualized, by Evelyn Fox Keller and others, as “the epitome of...a male culture” because of their orientation to “mastery over nature (the latter often seen in feminine terms)” (Beauchamp and McDaniel, 308). But women in many kinds of work, including professional musicians, experience discrimination. Blind auditions, like unsigned academic paper submissions, have been shown to help overcome negative stereotypes. As a study by Marilyn Marks of five major symphony orchestras documents, when symphony orchestras started to ask musicians to audition behind a screen, so they were not visible and their gender not apparent, the proportion of women hired went up dramatically by 50%, while that for men declined slightly. The equity-versus-excellence construction is refuted by such empirical studies in a burgeoning contemporary scholarship on gender schemas and implicit biases. Counter-arguments point to partial notions of excellence (Sheinen, Side and Robbins, Valian, Dowdeswell), prejudicial expectations (Ridgeway), gender schemas (Valian), and implicit biases (Shalala *et al.*; Hill, Corbett, and St. Rose).

As Virginia Woolf noted a hundred years ago: “Possibly when the professor insisted a little too emphatically upon the inferiority of women, he was concerned not with their inferiority, but with his own superiority. That was what he was protecting rather hot-headedly and with too much emphasis” (34–35). At least since the time of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) with its analysis that there could be no sexual equality without educational equality, opponents of women’s equality have had reason to try to maintain tight control over education and to shape the curriculum so that “it is an education that concentrates on and affirms male experience” (Spender, 6). It is perhaps not surprising after all that the CERC announcement comes in the same period in contemporary Canada, under the Conservative administration of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, as the dismantling of women’s equality machinery in government, withdrawal of funding from women’s advocacy groups, and attacks on women’s studies in the right-wing media. The myth that is being perpetrated is that “we are all equal now” (Brody). Or soon will be. Some men are even complaining, using anecdotal evidence, that discrimination now works in reverse, to restrict men’s hiring in the academy (Irvine). However, the latest data on new hires in Canadian universities and colleges show that the majority of academic appointments still go to men: full-time faculty appointed in 2006–07 numbered 2,616; women were 40.6%, men, 59.4% (*CAUT Almanac 2009-10*, Table 2.4, p. 18).

Acclaimed scientist Rose Sheinen years ago issued a ringing call for “academic leadership” on the issue of excellence and equity. She asked the following question:

And, finally, how excellent can a university and its entire senior academic administration be if they do not implement the various laws of the land and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the land which guarantee that we shall:

- provide equality of education to all of our young, and even older men and women;
- provide them equally with economic equality;
- provide them with equality of mobility in every workplace, including our very own academe. (103)

For Sheinen, “Academic excellence is a function of all of humankind” (104). And for Dowdeswell et al.: “Given the demographic challenges of our projected aging workforce, the need to ensure the full contribution of everyone is not only an equity imperative, but also a pragmatic reality” (17). For the time being, however, as Canadian dub poet Lillian Allen summarizes: “no one in power ain’t givin’ up nothing’.”

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