

## OPINION

# University professors call for more women in the sciences

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'We need more women in positions of power and their inclusion needs to be beyond tokenism. This is important because girls and women cannot be what they cannot see.'



Tabaret Hall on the University of Ottawa campus. 13 professors from the school are pushing for women to have greater access to science programs. *RobCA/Wikimedia Commons photograph*

Today, as we celebrate International Women's Day, we wanted to reflect on what it meant to be a woman in 2018.

We feel privileged to hold a professorship in a Canadian university, and today, we are reminded that this privilege cannot be taken for granted. We are privileged because historically, women could never aspire to such a position, so many have struggled to create these opportunities for us and were confronted with academic sexism and paid the price of being marginalized because of gender identity. A woman in 2018 is in constant juxtaposition. She has more opportunity and a greater voice than ever, yet acknowledges the remaining challenges in the workplace, the barriers that prevent her progression, that stifle her ambition, and fill her with doubt.

A woman in 2018 is bombarded by images of beauty, cataloguing the lines, spots, scars and folds that form her landscape while wanting to be recognized for her leadership, her creativity, her intelligence and her drive.

In the era of the #MeToo movement, and at a time where women march to combat the misogyny and counterculture that simmers below the surface of our society, in a world where women want it all; career, family life, personal life, the struggle to succeed while achieving balance is still a reality we have to face every day. We are disheartened that women still have to worry about their personal health, mental and economic safety on a daily basis. Women and girls should be able to live a life free of financial, psychological, emotional, physical, sexual, verbal, spiritual and environmental abuse.

It is also unacceptable that racialized women still continue to face barriers and struggles and the burden lies heavy on the few racialized women who have transgressed these barriers. We learn from racialized and Indigenous women lawyers who face the interlocking barriers of racism and

sexism in the legal profession and queer lawyers setting off on a career where they will have to navigate homophobia, transphobia and other forms of queer exclusion.

Hope lies in the young feminists from diverse communities and we stand in solidarity with feminist struggles for equality in the workplace, accountability for sexual violence and meaningful representation at all levels of governance.

While major advances have been made in recent decades, the fact remains that women are underrepresented in the Canadian and international scientific community.

Women are essential to modern science. We should be in awe of the scientific breakthroughs of the last half-century, and recognize they arise from the impressive growth of the scientific community, fueled by including women and other formerly underrepresented groups.

The participation of women in male-dominated study programs continues to rise but unfortunately, many women leave after 5-8 years, often because of the culture of the organizations or because younger men get the promotions women feel entitled to have themselves. There is some progress on many levels, but gender balance in programs such as engineering is not on the radar at this time.

We must continue our efforts to promote science to girls and women and, more importantly, to increase their access to science programs and to encourage them in their endeavors.

We need more women in positions of power and their inclusion needs to be beyond tokenism. This is important because girls and women cannot be what they cannot see.

These experiences have fostered resilience in us, and we look forward to paying it forward to our successors. March 8<sup>th</sup> is a reminder that all of us have a role to play in advancing equality and the role of women in society.

Now more than ever, we must stand strong to empower and support each other. Together, we can make a difference.

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