

Science & Society

## Equity, diversity, and inclusion in academia: lessons from the Canadian Society of Immunology

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Recently, the Canadian Society of Immunology opened its 2021 scientific conference with equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) workshops, before any other sessions, highlighting the significance of this topic and aiming to seed concepts/behaviors in the minds of the community. In this article, we urge research communities to adopt this type of approach for navigating difficult conversations and setting a balanced tone in scientific gatherings worldwide.

### Efforts to improve EDI in academia

Despite three decades of EDI initiatives regarding gender and ethnicity, acade-

- (ii) There is a clear decline in female representation as one climbs the ranks of the academic ladder [4] (Figure 1 summarizes some of the reasons why women consider leaving academia).
- (iii) The Full Professor rank is comprised of only 20% women [5], possibly reflecting discrimination within the workplace, but perhaps also the demands imposed by personal/family lives at this advanced stage in women's careers.

(a) Lack of parity for women and men in STEM careers reflects a selective lack of infrastructure and support that is necessary to retain women in STEM; this is a striking fact when one considers that the retention of women in non-STEM professional careers is now approaching parity with men [6].

(b) Without any intervention, women are not predicted to reach representational parity with their male colleagues until the year 2050 [7].

(c) Achieving EDI requires a community effort to combat racism, sexism, and inequitable cultures within academia. It is crucial to encourage women and their allies to take action, aiming to make science and medicine more inclusive (Figure 2).

team to discuss the practice scenarios. Subsequent breakout sessions contained the following discussion scenarios. These are the key concepts and denitions that were introduced:

Racism is:

- (i) rooted in the belief that some people are superior because they belong to a particular race or ethnic group;
- (ii) systemic and leads to inequality;
- (iii) the combination of racist policies (written and unwritten rules) and racist ideas produce and normalize racial inequalities [8].

#### Scenario 1

You are with a group of peers in the health sciences when the conversation turns to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine rollout. You collectively lament that some neighborhoods with high incidences of infection have lower rates of COVID-19 vaccination. A colleague says earnestly of a neighborhood of high BIPOC residents and low vaccination rates, 'It's a real shame that there's so much vaccine hesitancy in that neighborhood. If they

could get over their fear of the vaccine, trust the science, and comply with public health orders, they'd be in much better

#### Racism scenarios as a learning exercise

An interactive EDI learning session was led by a team of expert equity facilitators; lead facilitator, Chanelle Tye, taught key concepts on racism prior to dividing the

attendees into small 'breakout' rooms. For this exercise, 'Community Guidelines

were established: (i) openness: be open to new or differing ideas and embrace discomfort to reveal subtle and not-so-subtle forms but specific stories stay behind; (ii) confidentiality: learnings can leave, but specific stories stay behind; (iii) balance: One states confidently, 'Look, I don't make of racism and practiced implementing to share the space and the floor, speak the rules, its just a fact that Black people well-tested interruptive strategies. At the end of an interactive Q&A session, the breakout groups reunited as a single

#### Scenario 2

You are standing in the line for coffee when you overhear grad students behind you talking about social determinants of health. One states confidently, 'Look, I don't make of racism and practiced implementing to share the space and the floor, speak the rules, its just a fact that Black people are more prone to having diabetes, low lung capacity, and sickle cell anemia, and have a higher pain tolerance than

average...indigenous people, too. There's  
nothing good or bad about it, we are all  
just built differently.

### Scenario 3

You are a racialized person and the only  
international student your white professor

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