

Title: Gender Summit 11 North America

Date: November 11, 2017

Between November 6 and November 8, over 600 researchers, STEM professionals, and industry leaders gathered in Montréal, Québec to take part in the Gender Summit 11 North America (#GS11NA). The theme of the summit was “Embracing pluralism and thriving through diversity: Shaping science and innovation.” The stimulating dialogue held across the three days of the summit aptly reflected this theme.

Among frequent topics of conversation were the underrepresentation of women (particularly in science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM, fields, but also in other domains such as academia and corporate leadership), implications of women’s underrepresentation for science and innovation, and organizational recruitment efforts aimed toward achieving gender parity. Several plenary sessions at the summit highlighted “the business case” for gender diversity. In a panel led by Danièle Henkel (President and Founder of Danièle Henkel Inc.) on Monday afternoon, speakers in top industry positions considered ways in which companies might directly benefit from increasing their gender diversity and representation of women. Other sessions put forth a stronger “innovation and scientific progress case” for gender diversity. A fascinating panel organized by NSERC Chair for Women in Science and Engineering Lesley Shannon explored how failing to consider gender diversity might directly impact the results of scientific studies in medicine, public planning, and computer science.

In addition to considering the experiences of women more broadly, there were several encouraging discussions around themes of intersectionality, non-binary gender identities, and indigenous reconciliation efforts. One panel led by Director of the Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy at Simon Fraser University, Olena Hankivsky, encouraged researchers and policymakers to consider other factors that may intersect with gender identity, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, education, age, ability, and sexual orientation. Attendees were also challenged to think beyond traditional male-female dichotomies and embrace true *gender diversity* by considering non-binary identities. Finally, recurring conversations around indigenous rights and reconciliation efforts culminated during an inspiring panel led by Research Chair in Indigenous Environmental Justice Deborah McGregor in which a panel of indigenous researchers explored the gendered impacts of colonization and considered how we might reconcile and return to indigenous understandings of gender identities.

Although the summit’s audience was primarily comprised of non-self-identified males, there were a considerable number of male attendees and panelists. The subject of male allyship was a topic that emerged in nearly every panel. During a parallel session on gender stereotypes hosted by NSERC/Alcan Chair for Women in Science and Engineering Claire Deschênes, *ManTalks* founder Connor Beaton discussed the importance of inviting men into conversations around gender equity and inclusion. His comments were echoed by Former President of Association of Registered Nurses of British Columbia Zachary Matieschyn, who acknowledged the work that must be done to remove the shame and guilt men often feel toward issues of gender inequity. Perhaps the strongest remarks in support of male allyship came from President and CEO of Via

Rail Canada, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano, who demanded that male executives in top positions acknowledge “the new reality” of gender diversity, and highlighted the hard-hitting efforts Via Rail’s corporate leadership has implemented in spearheading the movement toward gender equity.

Despite all three days of the summit being astoundingly packed with a diversity of perspectives and information, informal conversations among attendees of the conference highlighted outstanding questions and concerns. Since many of the summit’s sessions approached gender inequity through an institutional lens, ways in which attendees might counteract gender inequity at the interpersonal or individual level were less emphasized. Several attendees noted wanting to learn more about what *they* might do as individuals to advocate for gender equity in their daily lives, in addition to in their workplace. There also seemed to be a collectively unmet appetite for in-depth narratives and mutual sharing of experiences, namely among the younger generation of attendees. Fortunately, these unaddressed points only speak to a desire to learn more, and highlight promising topics of discussion for future gender summits.

As the summit drew to a close on Wednesday afternoon, Dean of Faculty of Science at Ryerson University Imogen Coe put forth a phrase that had been echoed many times over the course of the summit: “Diversity is fact; inclusion is a choice.” As we move forward into the age of diversity, we as researchers, policymakers, and industry leaders are faced with the critical task of advocating for the inclusion and participation of individuals from all gender identities and backgrounds. The bottom line is: we simply cannot afford to miss out.

Here are 5 ways in which *you* can advocate for gender equity in STEM based on years of research on the science of bias reduction, as well as best practices put forth at Gender Summit 11:

1. Perform a policy “safety check”
 - Finding: Women who work at companies with gender inclusive policies are less worried about being devalued on the basis of their gender. These policies help create a positive social climate between men and women.
 - Strategy: Perform a “safety check” to assess if your institution or place of work has gender inclusive policies and practices in place.
 - Example Action: If your institution or place of work does not have gender inclusive policies in place, contact a representative of your organization and advocate for the adoption of some or all of these policies.

2. Increase the representation of women in top positions
 - Finding: Having female role models in leadership positions can reduce automatic gender stereotypic beliefs. The more frequent the exposure to these successful women, the stronger this effect becomes.
 - Strategy: Seek out and hire women as representatives of one’s organization or institution.

- Example Action: Establish a clear goal or quota for women across all levels of your institution. For instance, Engineers Canada has a clear goal to increase the number of newly licensed female engineers to 30% by 2030.

3. Promote diversity training efforts and accountability

- Finding: When done well, knowledge about the importance of diversity and inclusion is powerful, especially when it is paired with organizational structures designed to hold those in top-level positions (e.g., managers) accountable.
- Strategy: Implement diversity training programs along with check-in structures to make sure that organizations are meeting their diversity goals.
- Example Action: Ask your organization what kind of diversity training is offered, what metrics are used to assess its effectiveness, and what types of organizational responsibility structures for diversity are in place.

4. Become an active ally

- Finding: Both men and women can advocate on behalf of underrepresented groups to facilitate policy change, break discriminatory norms, and improve their personal outcomes.
- Strategy: Support women by serving as *active allies*. Some strategies for becoming an *active ally* include, but are not limited to, encouraging women to pursue career-related opportunities, ensuring that women are represented in important decisions, promoting women into higher-paid / supervisory roles, including women in social activities inside and outside of work, believing women's reports of their experiences with bias, and speaking out against harassment and subtle forms of gender bias.
- Example Actions: Volunteer to become a mentor to another woman in your field.

5. Stay motivated

- Finding: Being motivated to set biases aside predicts more equitable decisions and outcome for groups who would otherwise be disadvantaged by implicit biases
- Strategy: Acknowledge the effects of bias and discrimination and actively work to set them aside.
- Example Action: Reflect on why it's important to you that people are treated fairly and with respect. These egalitarian values underlie why most people are strongly motivated to overcome their biases.