

## E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS

◆ Accumulated disadvantage ◆ still present  
in New ZealandKERRY EVERETT

One of the issues raised by Virginia Valian in her book, *Why so slow? The advancement of women*, is that accumulated disadvantage may explain why women do not become more represented in the upper echelons of science. It is an interesting idea, that women tend to be -- whether the men care to admit or not - gender classified and patronised regarding what we are capable of doing. Repeat occurrences of this patronage result in accumulated disadvantage and subsequent misrepresentation in positions of power.

Valian uses the example of a woman junior lecturer, who is not given the raucous first years because, as a feeble woman, her 'kind' superiors consider this to be something she would only cope with with difficulty. Instead, she gets the 'easier' but far more frequent 2nd and 3rd year classes. Her male colleague is given the first years. Her preparation and lecture time is higher than his, which immediately disadvantages her by resulting in less time she can spend developing her own research career. I ◆ve had personal experience of such patronage and protection from the 'hard' parts of my job, which has resulted in a disadvantage which I am currently adopting strategies to overcome.

Once you are aware of the problem and its source, it is beatable. And with retirement of the 'fatherly' and patronising previous generation of male managers I expect such disadvantages to disappear. However, my male colleagues who have not had to overcome this disadvantage are of course further ahead than I am, and so my career is now comparatively retarded, and my generation will also be disproportionately represented in the upper science echelons, unless I sacrifice family and work twice as hard as the men do to catch up.

I come from a country that was the first in the world to give women the vote, has a female Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, a significant number of our parliamentarians are women, as are CEOs of some of our larger public and private companies. In our society men no longer open doors for us, or pay for us when we go out together, and generally treat us as equals and have intelligent conversations with us on traditionally male topics such as rugby. What must it be like in more archaic societies such as the one my manager came from?

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