

# Victims of positive discrimination

Valentin Ovsienko

They will never tell you, they suffer silently.

Our colleagues, talented mathematicians, those who are willing and able to make major achievements, are deprived of this opportunity; the only reason is that they are women. Discrimination?! Oh yes, the “positive” one! I claim that women suffer terribly from the thing called “positive discrimination”.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. How many great ideas produce an opposite result, as nuclear power transforms into atomic bomb ...

To be more concrete, let me give one example. I know this example very well, because this is my very own dearest wife. She is an actively working mathematician, she loves research, but she is also a member of an uncountable number of committees at her prestigious Sorbonne Université and elsewhere. She spends all her time at meetings, evaluations, distributions of grants, *primes d'excellence et encadrement*, etc. She is a member of hiring committees in Jussieu and everywhere in the large Hexagon. The major problem is that she cannot always answer “no” when asked to participate; she knows exactly who will be asked to do the job if she refuses, and believe me, all of these poor ladies are already overwhelmed with administrative tasks.

France was spared from this hysteria for a long time, but the “thing” is contagious. The Great Idea crossed the Atlantic, and now there is a quota in France: 1/3 of the members of every committee must be women. As we all know, the real proportion of ladies in

mathematics is something like 1/10, so the consequence is obvious. Of course, the “Idea” was to protect women from discrimination but the result is exactly the opposite: many female colleagues, active researchers, have no time to do research and high quality teaching any more.

One of the results of the situation described above is the underrepresentation of women on the Editorial Boards of scientific journals,<sup>1</sup> prize juries, academies, etc. Just leave them in peace, let them work normally, and the balance will be renormalized!

Ironically, since men keep the 2/3 majority in all the committees that I know, if we make the (paranoid) assumption that the only goal of the male members is to discriminate against female colleagues, we can continue our dark deeds with ease – positive discrimination is not going to stop us!

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<sup>1</sup> A popular subject, frequently discussed in politically engaged pseudo-mathematical literature. The author prefers not to give precise references here; they are numerous and can be found easily.