

# THE 2022 MAY COHEN LECTURE



## **LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT WOMEN'S HEALTH - A MILITARY VETERAN'S REFLECTIONS**

Dr. (Major Retd) Karen Breeck CD MHSc MD

# OUTLINE

- Why are you here?
- Why I am here
- Women in the military
- Lessons Learned (3)
- Final Thoughts
- Questions?



# WHY ARE YOU HERE?



# WHY I AM HERE



**Dr. May Cohen MD**

# MILITARY DOCTORS

- Primary Care
  - Patient advocate
  - Knows clinical medicine
- Occupational Medicine
  - Company advocate
  - Knows the workplace
- Operational Medicine
  - Mission success focused
  - Risk mitigate (ALARA)



# ANY TIME, ANY PLACE



Welcome to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces



# MY BIO

1986 Federation of Medical Women of Canada

- 2005 President
- 2020 May Cohen Award Winner

1990 MD (Memorial)

UN Peacekeeper

Humanitarian support missions

Aerospace medicine focused support

- Military, Civil, Commercial, Space

MHSc (U of T Occupational Women Studies)

- Researched: Operational Medical Needs of Female Military Pilots

2009 Health advocate for military/Veteran women

- Conflict of Interest Statement

# WOMEN IN THE MILITARY



## Today

- 100% of military jobs are open
- women are found at all military ranks (except CDS)
- 15% of the military self-identifies as a woman
- Government aspires to have 25% military women by 2026
- 50% of women are in 7 of 108 trades



# WOMEN IN THE MILITARY



1885	Nursing Sisters
WWI	2,800 Army nurses
WWII	50,000 in Army, Navy and Air Force
1965	Fixed ceiling allocation of 1.5% women
1970	Royal Commission on Status of Women
1977	Canadian Human Rights Act
1979	Trials - non-combat operational roles
1987	Trials – combat operational roles
1989	CHR Tribunal orders all trials to cease



Major-General Wendy Clay was the first female RCAF pilot, the first female flight surgeon, the first female major-general and the first female surgeon general.

*She charted a smoother flight path for others to follow.*

MAJOR-GENERAL  
WENDY CLAY



# LESSONS LEARNED #1

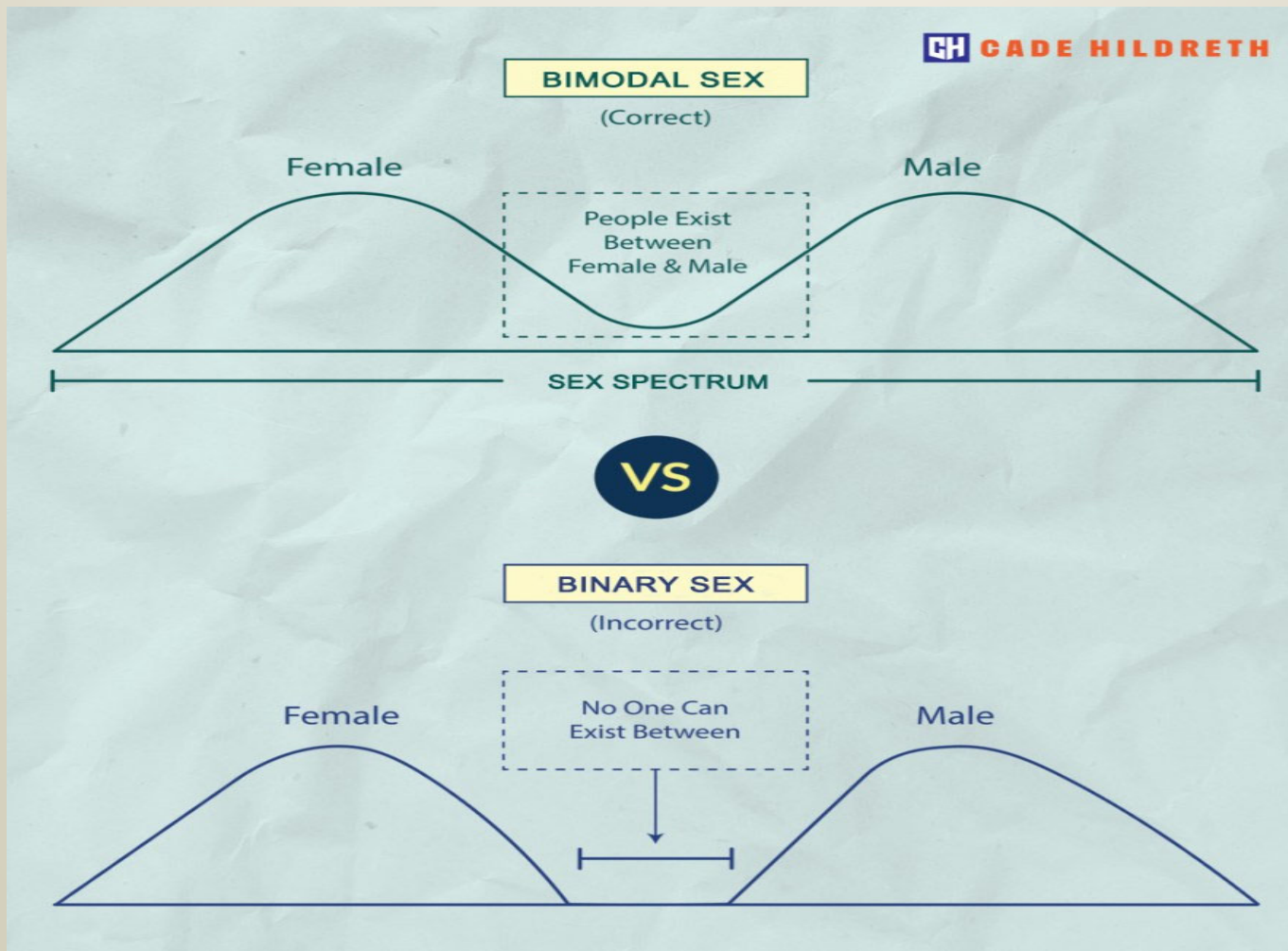


## MILITARY WOMEN'S HEALTH IS POLITICAL

- Military is a reflection of Canadian societal values
  - Biases and stereotypes still abound
- Military health care was set up by men for men
  - Inclusion of women requires a CHANGE to happen
- Make no assumptions
  - Define everything

# DEFINE EVERYTHING

## What is a “woman”?



# DEFINE EVERYTHING






## What is “health”?

- Domains of wellbeing
- Self care
- Primary care
- Occupational care
- Operational care
- Who decides?
  - Subjective vs Objective



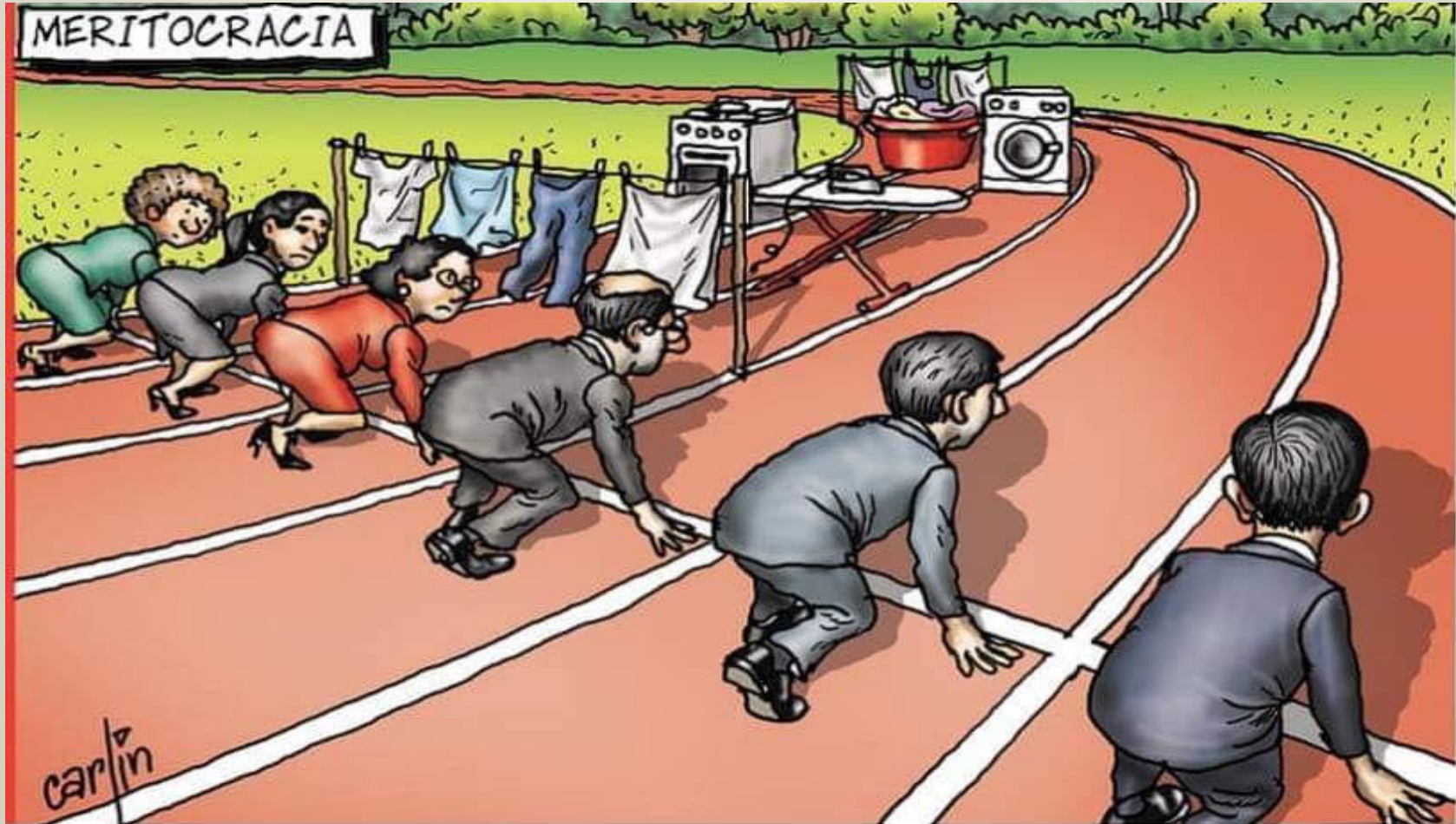
# DEFINE EVERYTHING

What is the problem you want solved?

 <p><b>REALITY</b></p>	 <p><b>EQUALITY</b></p>	 <p><b>EQUITY</b></p>	 <p><b>JUSTICE</b></p>	 <p><b>INCLUSION</b></p>
<p>One gets <b>more than</b> is needed, while the other gets <b>less than</b> is needed. Thus, a huge disparity is created.</p>	<p>The assumption is that <b>everyone benefits</b> from the same supports. This is considered to be equal treatment.</p>	<p><b>Everyone gets the support they need</b>, which produces equity.</p>	<p>All 3 can see the game without supports or accommodations because <b>the cause(s) of the inequity was addressed</b>. The systemic barrier has been removed.</p>	<p>Everyone is <b>INCLUDED</b> in the game. <b>No one</b> is left on the outside; we <b>didn't</b> only remove the barriers keeping people out, we made sure they were valued &amp; involved.</p>

@ClinPsychDavid

# DEFINE THE PROBLEM



# DEFINE THE PROBLEM



How will you know when problem solved ?

- SMART Goals
  - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound
  - Resourced (money and people)
- Types of planning
  - Strategic
  - Organizational
  - Tactical



# LESSONS LEARNED #2

## SEX MATTERS

- Anthropometric
  - Vehicles / weapon systems
  - Personal safety equipment
- Pelvic Floor
  - Pee tubes
  - Stress Incontinence / Prolapse
- Reproductive System
  - Menses
  - Pregnancy



# LESSONS LEARNED #3



## WHEN WE KNOW BETTER, WE CAN DO BETTER

- Training courses
  - GBA+ / CIHR / TCP2 / Train.org
- Research
  - Musculoskeletal injury and repetitive strain
  - Workplace harassment and violence
  - Chronic pain
  - Mental Health
  - Transition from military to civilian life and work
  - **Reproductive health hazards**

## LESSONS LEARNED #3



### Reproductive hazards in non-traditional workplaces

- A fetus has a lower threshold of tolerance for most workplace hazards than an adult (or child)
- Employer due diligence to identify and mitigate hazards
  - Who oversees / provides quality assurance / trains ?
  - How to ensure “informed consent” for workers?
  - What responsibility level for health of offspring (non-worker)?
  - Who does the research ?

# THIS IS A MALE ISSUE AS WELL...



- Sperm is affected by workplace exposures too
- Window period = 3 months prior to conception

# LESSONS LEARNED SUMMARY

1. Military women's health is political
2. Biological sex is important for health
3. Need more female sex-specific military research



# FINAL THOUGHTS



**Military women have indeed “come a long way”**

- But have further to go ...

**When we know better, we can do better**

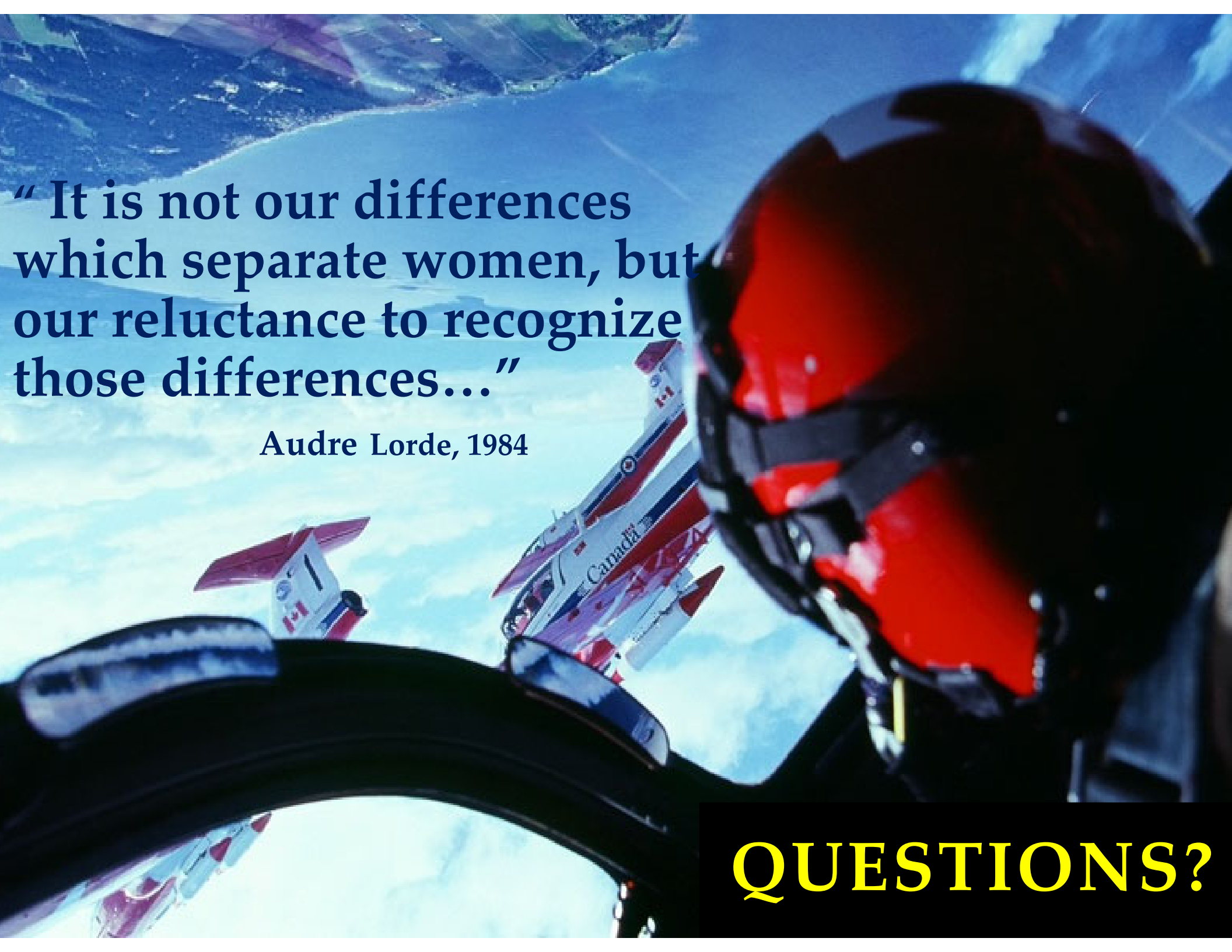
- Need more sex and gender-based research and training

**Military change requires your political advocacy**

- Get involved ! If not you – who?

## FURTHER READING

- Caplan, Paula. “Thinking Critically about Research on Sex and Gender.”
- Hendricks, Kate. “Invisible Veterans.”
- Hudson, Valerie. “The First Political Order – How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide.”
- Perez, Caroline. “Invisible Women – Data Bias in a World Designed for men.”
- Ritchie, Elspeth. “Women at War.”
- Whelan, John. “Narcissus Called My Name.”

An aerial photograph showing a formation of Canadian military jets flying over a landscape. The jets are white with red and blue accents, and the word "Canada" is visible on the side of one of the aircraft. The view is from a high angle, looking down at the jets as they fly in a curved path. The background shows a mix of green and brown terrain, possibly a forested area or a rural landscape. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

**“ It is not our differences  
which separate women, but  
our reluctance to recognize  
those differences...”**

**Audre Lorde, 1984**

**QUESTIONS?**