

We need to become tentative in our thinking
by Lloyd Robertson

She had been a student activist in "the women's movement". I was on the University of Regina Students' Union executive and had been supportive of her cause. We were driving to a conference in Saskatoon. The conversation turned to what we would be doing after we graduated with our degrees in education.

"Now I will have something concrete to be an activist about", she said.

"And what is that?", I asked.

"Well, you know, as a woman I will be making less money than you", she replied.

"Where do you get that from?", I asked.

She turned to me in shocked disbelief. Then, with a slight shrug of her shoulders she turned back to her driving and said, "You're a man so perhaps you hadn't heard that women are paid only two thirds of what men get in this society".

I explained that the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has a contract with the provincial government governing wages and that gender discrimination is not allowed under that contract. She and I would be paid the same starting wage. She became incredulous. She had the "Truth" with a capital "T" and no argument I could present would change her mind.

Human beings are meaning makers. We have a psychological need to answer the question "why?" Feminism has provided answers to many such questions. The reason why women, on average, make less income than men is because men, as a class, discriminate against women doing the same job. The reason why we have physical abuse is because men are violent to maintain this position of privilege. The reason why women, more than men, are diagnosed with depression is because most doctors are men.

We form our beliefs based on what we have been told and on the evidence we observe. There are two ways of having a belief. First, the belief be tentative. We can believe something until we see evidence to the contrary. Second, the belief can be absolute. We believe it to be so true that we disregard evidence to the contrary.

Certain cultural beliefs or "memes" attract other beliefs. For example, the belief that men oppress women is attractive and supportive of the belief that men, as a class, are violent toward women. Once a large number of such interlocking beliefs are in place we emotionally feel that have the "Truth". Any facts that contradict any one belief within the "Truth" are repelled by the whole belief system. There then becomes, in our minds, two classes of people: believers and non-believers. When this happens we have a religion.

In an earlier column I reported on feminist researchers who withheld evidence that women are just as likely to be violent, in domestic situations, as men. I believe that these researchers were

not evil conspirators, lying to the public. Given their faith in feminism they simply could not believe the evidence of their own research. So they reported on male violence only.

With more than 50 North American studies saying the same thing, some feminists are now beginning to admit the fact of female violence. But they are saying that women's violence is the fault of the men in their lives. Given the religion of feminism it must be so. Hard evidence is not needed. Just like my young friend did not need to read the STF contract to know that she would be paid less as a women; the belief that men are responsible for violence feels true, at least to feminists.

We have two choices. We can believe in a "Truth", religiously, or we can be seekers of truth. Seekers of truth also believe, but our beliefs are tentative. Admitting that our beliefs could be wrong opens us to recognizing and accepting new evidence. We then become lifelong learners, growing in knowledge and understanding.