

*Gender and Education, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 195–207, 2000*



## *The Conceptual Politics of Chilly Climate Controversies*

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**ABSTRACT** *Across Canadian campuses, 'chilly climate' reports are produced by feminists and other equity-seekers, and are opposed by those who dispute both the diagnosis and the prescription for action contained in them. This article explores the conceptual debate which underlies chilly climate clashes, examining the contested meaning and practice of equality, responsibility, and the proving and remedying of discrimination. An analysis of the discursive debate reveals much about the social organisation of inequality within the academy and the challenges which face equity-seekers.*

### **Introduction**

In recent years, post-secondary education campuses in Canada have leapt into public consciousness as places of scandal. Interestingly, explanations for their scandalous character vary wildly (Randall, 1997). To many, the scandal of the contemporary university is the spectre of 'political correctness' and feminism run amuck; to others, the scandal of higher education is discrimination and inequality which marginalises women and many others. In both views of scandal, 'chilly climate' reports occupy a key place [1]. Across Canadian campuses, 'chilly climate' reports—documents which claim to demonstrate discrimination and propose remedies—are being produced by feminists and other equity-seekers, and are being opposed by those who dispute both the diagnosis and the prescription for action contained in them. An inquiry into the mechanisms of this political contest is both fascinating and richly revealing.

What can be learned from this clash of positions? In this article, I show how the discursive debate can be critically analysed for what it reveals both about the social organisation of inequality within the academy and for the challenges which face equity-seekers. Campus conflicts are founded on practical and political struggles over how to define equality, how to attribute responsibility, and how to prove and remedy discrimination. I argue that these conceptual dimensions of struggle are generally naturalised (and therefore neutralised) within campus debates. This article contributes to a clarification and denaturalisation of the conceptual politics of campus conflicts.

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Canadian campus conflicts revolve around the concept of 'chilly climates'. The phrase 'chilly climate' was coined in 1982 by Americans Bernice Sandler and Roberta Hall to capture the combined effect of a number of practices—each of which is relatively inconsequential or even trivial when taken alone—which cumulatively communicate lack of confidence, lack of recognition and devaluation, and which result in women's marginalisation (Hall & Sandler, 1982). In this framework, the notion of climate is not limited to specific acts or kinds of behaviour; rather, it works to describe the normalising and normalised gender regime which characterises the university as an institution (Prentice, 1996). As feminists use the concept, 'climate' defines a pervasive and systemic institutional order and references a compounding of everyday practices which block women's full participation in the university. To detractors, the concept of chilly climate and the advocacy efforts of equity-seekers is little more than 'political correctness'. In this framework, disparate issues—including pedagogical inclusiveness, anti-sexist and anti-racist curriculum, affirmative action in hiring, concern about sexual harassment and general human rights—become subsumed in the over-arching umbrella of 'political correctness'.

In this article, I undertake an analysis of the discursive politics of campus conflicts over equity initiatives. This contrastive approach permits me to explore campus contests on a number of axes, including how equality should be defined, how responsibility for inequity should be attributed, and how discrimination should be considered proven and remedied. In this article, I primarily focus on the discursive mechanisms by which detractors dispute the claims of equity-seekers. Their rhetorical practices produce and reproduce real social relations, and I begin with this history.

### **Whose History Matters? Feminist Critiques of Higher Education**

There is a historical and material reality which underpins debates about equity, a history which figures much more prominently in the accounts of equity-seekers than in those of their critics. North American equity-seekers regularly appeal to the empirical reality of women's marginalisation within institutions of higher education, a documented past and present which rarely figures in the counter-arguments produced by detractors. From the perspective of feminists and equity-seekers, it is crucial to appreciate that while women have had limited access to some higher education in Canada for over a century, their participation has never been and still is not equal to that of men (Stalker & Prentice, 1998).

Equity-seekers point to numerous studies of higher education which show that women lag behind men on all measures of formal status. Whether as students or as faculty members, women are underrepresented and marginalised on campuses of higher learning in North America. One major barrier to women's full participation is the enduring marginalisation of women on the teaching staffs of universities. Contrary to the myth of steady progress, the historical reality is that women's participation rate as faculty members has only slowly improved across the twentieth century. In 1921, women comprised 15% of the full-time teaching staff in Canadian universities (Vickers & Adam, 1977, p. 114). By 1996/97, women's representation had increased to 24.4% of the full-time staff at Canadian universities (Statistics Canada, 1998).

This underrepresentation of female faculty is frequently attributed to limits in the available pool of women with doctorates or equivalent degrees. This argument was undoubtedly valid at one time (although it begs the important question of causes) but it is inadequate for explaining women's contemporary position. The number of doctoral

degrees earned by women in Canada has increased fourfold since 1971 and, by 1992, women earned nearly one-third of the doctorates awarded (Statistics Canada, 1990; Saunders *et al.*, 1992). Much has been done by feminists in the intervening years to transform the nature of education, but progress is far from complete. Today well over half (56.1%) of undergraduate students are women (Saunders, *et al.*, 1992). Yet despite women's majority status as undergraduates, females are still underrepresented in graduate schools and among the professoriate.

Female faculty experience career paths very different from those of their male colleagues. In Canada, women faculty hold the majority of junior appointments; men hold the majority of senior academic and administrative positions. Nationally, only 12% of full professors are female, even though women constitute almost 27% of the mid-career rank of associates, and over 45% of lecturer, sessional and temporary appointments (Statistics Canada, 1993a, 1998) [2]. Fifteen years ago Symons and Page concluded that gender inequity characterised rates of advancement, distribution across faculty ranks and compensation in Canada (Symons & Page, 1984). Recently, Allison Wylie claimed that matters remained largely unchanged, reporting that:

Women were still more likely than men to be unemployed, underemployed or in part-time or non-tenure track positions, they were concentrated in less-prestigious institutions; they showed substantially higher rates of attrition; they advanced through the ranks more slowly, and at the same rank they were paid less than their male counterparts. (Wylie, 1995, p. 33)

Her claims are confirmed by Statistics Canada, which bluntly claims that 'within every rank, the median salary for women [is] lower than for men, with the largest differential occurring at the full professor level' (Statistics Canada, 1993a, p. 15). Despite such evidence, leading Canadian opponents of equity argue that no discrimination, save 'reverse discrimination' against white males, is currently practised on Canadian campuses (Resnick, 12 September 1996).

Inside classrooms, marginalisation of women also occurs. Over 20 years ago, Adrienne Rich observed that 'the content of education itself validates men even as it invalidates women. Its very message is that men have been the shapers and thinkers of the world, and that this is only natural' (Rich, 1979, p. 241). Today, despite significant feminist challenges, women still find themselves and their stories too often absent from the 'canon' of their disciplines, with few role models amongst the faculty. Professors still tend to call on male students more often than female students, tend to make more eye contact with men than with women in the classroom, and to give men a greater share of classroom attention (Stalker & Prentice, 1998). Such classroom bias may explain why so many fewer female than male students go on to graduate school in both Canada and the USA. Confronted by unwelcoming classrooms, women may 'voluntarily' withdraw their time and interest and elect not to complete first degrees or pursue graduate studies.

Conventional beliefs in the neutrality of the canon protect the traditional 'male-stream' curriculum and pedagogy. Canadian historian Joy Parr claims that male sociability shapes most aspects of interaction within higher education. She points out that 'teaching styles are patterned on patriarchal distance [and] research priorities are framed by male concerns, so that findings about women seem specialized and findings about men seem general in interest and applicability' (Parr, 1989, p. 2).

While institutional 'neutrality,' objectivity and liberal organisational practices explain the lion's share of discrimination, the marginalisation of women is not always so benign or directionless. Sexual harassment on campus is prevalent, as it is in the nation's homes,

workplaces and streets (Statistics Canada, 1993b). Studies in both Canada and the USA document the magnitude of the problem. One Harvard survey found that 32% of tenured women faculty, 49% of females without tenure, 41% of women graduate students and 34% of women undergraduates reported at least one experience of harassment by a person of authority while at university. Disturbingly, 15% of these graduate students and 12% of the undergraduates consequently changed their academic plans because of the harassment (Simeone, 1984).

These punishing effects of discrimination for women and other minorities is worsened through a variety of micro-inequities such as: denying the status and authority of women and minorities; devaluing women through sexist comments, anecdotes and 'jokes'; excluding or impairing access to information; signalling women's lesser importance through words, behaviours, posture, tone and gestures which indicate that women are not as powerful, intelligent or competent as men and therefore do not need to be taken seriously; evaluating male and female behaviour and experience differentially, etc. Cumulatively, these behaviours and practices constitute a 'chilly climate'.

### **Dimensions of Political Contestation**

The empirical and historical reality reviewed here is important. Stung by the contradiction between experienced discrimination and institutional claims of fair treatment, and frustrated by the slow pace of change, the North American university has emerged as a site of political struggle over women's place in higher education. In at least four different domains, the claims and proposals of equity-seekers are politically contested by detractors. Advocates and opponents disagree fundamentally, and their differences can be approached through four questions [3].

#### *What is Equality? Definition of the Problem*

Nominally, everyone associated with a climate controversy is in favour of at least some version of equality. But participants do not agree on what 'equality' means [4]. The traditional paradigm of equality in the academy is premised on classical liberalism. In this framework, rights and opportunities may not be assigned by ascribed personal or group characteristics such as sex, race, religion, physical ability, etc. Instead, such opportunities are to be distributed strictly by individual merit and personal accomplishment. Under these formal terms, the governing role of the university is to protect individual freedom of choice through ensuring equality of opportunity—this is 'formal' equality.

Feminists have pointed out that in addition to formal there is also substantive equality. Substantive equality begins from the position of actual inequalities of individuals and with the structurally unequal material conditions which construct and constrain them. Where liberal formalism sees only individuals and not groups, substantive equality sees collective mistreatment on the basis of supposed group-based characteristics (Smart, 1989). Where equality of opportunity satisfies formal equality, only actual equality in results satisfies substantive equality. Using the regulative principal of actual equality, equality-seekers propose affirmative action remedies.

It is important to note that the two discourses on equality are not symmetrical or equally socially valued. A centuries-long history of liberal democracy has produced and relied upon the paradigm of formal equality, especially as it has become embedded in legal and administrative policy and process. Thus, arguments from the formal equality

position are naturalised, seen as neutral and objective, merely 'common-sense'. By contrast, arguments from the substantive equality position are seen as particularistic and non-universal. This perception originates with the formalist assumption that efforts to redress systemic discrimination represent special interests, and do not constitute a general public good.

The widespread assumption that higher education is formally equal means that ascribed characteristics are not supposed to make a difference to any individual's education or career. When women and racialised minorities try to explain their subordination in structural terms, they are perceived by proponents of formal equality as being antagonistic to the whole academic enterprise. Believing that the system is neutral, detractors reinterpret the complaints of equity-seekers as being about the demolition of post-secondary educational institutions.

Quite rightly, equity campaigns are seen as serious threats to the main business of the university and to how things have always been done (Smith, 1989). The attempt to build an inclusive university challenges the academy's everyday practices, 'from textbooks to the organization of classroom talk, to hiring practices' (Richer & Weir, 1995, p. 6). This attempt is resisted by detractors as being about the *destruction* rather than the *reconstruction* of the university. This assumption is both overtly and covertly stated: Patricia Marchak, Dean of Arts at the University of British Columbia, and author of *Racism, Sexism and the University: the political science affair at the University of British Columbia*, for example, contrasts those who 'defend' the university with those who 'attack' it (p. 32), making repeated use of the language of 'crime', 'punishment' and 'defence'. Revealing her commitment to formalism, Marchak writes, 'in using the words "systemic" and "pervasive" we were caught up in the language of the accusers' (p. 79). The *status quo* is again naturalised in such claims.

#### *How Should Responsibility Be Understood? Attribution*

Equality-seekers argue that the university—like other social institutions—is characterised by systemic discrimination. This argument rests on an analysis that discrimination may be of two kinds: in addition to direct, personalised and intentional discrimination, there is also indirect, impersonal and unintentional discrimination. Equity-seekers point to institutional practices and policies which, although apparently neutral, have adverse effects on women and other marginalised groups, using the human rights assumption that discrimination can exist without intent and that differential treatment can occur without conscious design. Equity-seekers argue that such systemic discrimination is a feature of broader social organisation and institutions such as the university have a moral and legal responsibility to redress these unjust practices.

Detractors employ the narrower direct discrimination definition. In their view, only direct and personalised behaviour should be named discrimination and they reject the concept of 'systemic' discrimination. John Furedy, once President of Canada's conservative Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, argues that it is a 'primitive collectivist and anti-intellectual assumption' to believe that bias has been demonstrated against a particular group simply because that group is underrepresented (Furedy, 1997, p. 335). In a similar mode, Peter Emberley, author of *Zero Tolerance: hot button politics in Canada's universities*, rejects what he dismisses as the 'narrow sociological' approach to both discrimination and representation, something he identifies as an 'unwarranted demand' (Emberley, 1996, pp. 249–250 and *passim*). That outcomes are unequal, Emberley argues, does not mean that opportunities were unequal. His concern is paralleled by another

prominent Canadian academic, political scientist Reg Whittaker, who says it is a problem to equate 'fairness in process with equality of results' (Whittaker, 1994). Philip Resnick employs this perspective in his claim that concern about underrepresentation builds 'non-merit-driven criteria' into academic decisions (Cernetig, 1996, p. A5).

Ironically, feminists who argue for a liberal individualism—namely that women should be seen as discrete individuals and not treated on the basis of stereotypical group-based assumptions—are treated as though they are trying to newly establish and entrench gender differences, rather than redress a demonstrated history unearned of masculine privilege. Instead, feminists and other equity-seekers are blamed for the very problem they are working to resolve. Detractors' naturalisation of the *status quo* permits them to avoid the important reality of how power has been, and currently is, distributed. Again, the discursive debate is asymmetrical and unequal: the view that individuals are inextricably sexed, raced, classed and otherwise marked by social divisions fundamentally challenges the dominant liberal paradigm of formal equality. Hence, from the formalist position, systemic arguments are simultaneously false and a violation of individual rights.

It is common for findings of systemic discrimination to be reinterpreted by detractors as though they were direct accusations against specific individuals. In particular, most men seem largely unable to appreciate the analytic distinction between effect and intent; they respond to critiques of systemic practices as though they were being personally attacked. Men's objections generally centre around the fact that equity policies and human rights legislation make it clear that individuals in positions of authority will be held accountable for the way their behaviour is perceived. Such accountability is a chilling prospect for those accustomed to viewing professional status as expanding privilege rather than increasing responsibility and obligation (Robertson *et al.*, 1988, p. 808).

In this inversion of responsibility, men emerge as the victims. Detractors transform claims that curriculum or pedagogy is racially insensitive or not inclusive of women into criminal 'allegations' which threaten professors' careers. Metaphors of 'force' and 'coercion' abound. As Jill Vickers points out, in the context of a very high-profile controversy about climate at a major western university, 'white male professors "defending" themselves were portrayed as the "real" victims' (Vickers, 1997, p. 180).

In her analysis of this escalation surrounding a chilly climate dispute at the University of Victoria, Dorothy Smith demonstrates how detractors rhetorically transpose responsibility for harm (Smith, 1999). Smith tracks how a feminist claim about systemic climate was reconstructed in such a way as to exonerate male faculty and demonise the women who raised the concern. Originally itemised as one of nearly two dozen illustrations of chilly climate, the feminist observation that, 'sexual advances at social gatherings were made by male faculty members' was upgraded by outraged male faculty as a charge of 'gross sexual misconduct', and then further escalated to 'sex-crimes'. Male faculty argued they were forced to defend themselves against charges of 'corrupt and repugnant behaviour'. In this process of escalation, feminists were attacked for failing to follow due process. Dorothy Smith points out that it was the reaction of male faculty which produced the very accusations against which they protested. The fact that the feminist climate report was preliminary and internal, and concluded by recommending policy changes alongside education, training and support was forgotten in the much more spectacular demand for unqualified apology, retraction and threats of legal action for libel.

In this hyperbolic rhetorical atmosphere, equity-seekers who point to systemic discrimination in higher education are vilified, and their institutional critiques are reframed

as personalised attacks. In the discursive reattribution of responsibility which greets feminist critiques of sexism, men commonly claim that they are 'tarred' by climate studies. An example of this is provided by a Professor Emeritus of the University of British Columbia, who argued that institutional measures to redress sexism and racism in his university's Political Science Department (which included a temporary halt on admissions to the graduate programme inflicted 'public disgrace', injustice and 'public humiliation' on scholars in the Department [5] (Durrant, 8 August 1995), something John Furedy elsewhere called a 'public condemnation'. (Furedy, 28 September 1995).

Since most men do not consciously (or do not acknowledge that they consciously) act in sexist or discriminatory ways, they frequently assume that claims of differential treatment or chilly climate must be false; hence, in their view, the women and minorities who disclose experiences of oppression must be lying. As liars, such women do not enjoy rights of academic freedom or expression, because the violated academic freedom is that of the aggrieved man who believes his academy, his honour or both have just been diminished. The media find such male claims of injustice particularly compelling. In June 1994, one Calgary newspaper ran the sensational headline 'Gender Wars Claim Another Victim'. Despite its violent headline (war, victim), the report was about a white male philosophy professor's move to the USA to find a tenure track job.

In rescuing men from what they see as violent and powerful feminist persecution, many detractors equate equity-seeking with horrific, even murderous, intentions. For example, in 1996, Michael Kubara, writing in a Canadian journal of higher education, claimed that 'the feminist model of academic freedom' advocates 'a gender form of ethnic cleansing, reminiscent of Nazis and Jews, Communists and property owners, Christians and pagans.' (Kubara, 1996). Canada's national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, published several letters over affirmative action in university under the title 'A Vicious Assault on Merit' (25 September 1996). Jean Edward Smith calls equity-seekers 'dangerous new puritans' and links them to 'Stalin's henchmen', 'McCarthyite inquisitions' and 'kangaroo tribunals' (21 October 1991, p. A15).

#### *How Can Discrimination be Proven? Making Claims*

If the premises of substantive equality and institutional responsibility are accepted, then systemic underrepresentation indicates that inequality is occurring. The fact, for example, that female faculty made up less than 25% of full-time faculty positions across Canada in 1996/97 demonstrates systemic discrimination to those who adopt the substantive equality position. This approach is contrary to the formal equality position, which rejects analyses of systemic discrimination and insists that the only discrimination is that which is direct and intentional. The formalist position, it is worth emphasising, conflicts with Canadian human rights law, which stipulates that discrimination investigations are not fault-based. Those who oppose 'chilly climate' reports insist that general critiques of systemic sexism are really directed at individuals, not institutions. Hence, Philip Resnick asserts that 'suddenly, in the name of equity, it is open hunting season on one group, that is white males' (Cernetig, 1996, p. A5). Under human rights standards, critics claim that the deck is both politicised and loaded 'in favour of the accuser' (Emberley, 1996, p. 241).

This contest has generated perhaps the most significant controversies. It lies at the crux of the debate over 'chilly climates'. Dean Patricia Marchak makes her position clear when she writes, 'I do not accept the view adopted by [the investigator] and others that persons are guilty of serious sins—sexism and racism—because someone experiences

their behaviours in a negative way' (1996, p. 143). Where women and racialised minorities argue their personal and collective experiences are authoritative, detractors dismissively argue that individuals are merely unhappy. John Furedy asserts that some academics have been seriously 'punished' simply for 'making others uncomfortable' (Furedy, 1997, p. 336) and he devotes a whole article to explaining that equity-seekers are simply striving to create 'cultures of comfort', becoming 'adult daycare centres where comfort is the dominant criterion of what topics are raised, and how the discussion of these topics proceeds' (1997, p. 335). In the aggressive pursuit of 'comfort', Furedy and others argue, academic freedom is abandoned.

For example, defenders of the *status quo* insist that several high-profile controversies over climate have been nothing more than disputes over 'any form of speech or behaviour that the member of a particular group may happen to find insensitive or offensive' and thus 'criminalize not just acts but opinions' (Resnick, 11 September 1995; Furedy, 1997). Claims arise, according to Philip Resnick, from members' of designated groups' unjustified *a priori* claim to feel themselves aggrieved (Resnick, 11 September 1995). Detractors thus dispute that underrepresentation or chilly climates constitute proof of discrimination. Michael Risk, a geologist at McMaster University writes, putatively supportive of women:

I feel, sadly, that any woman hired in these politically correct times will forever have to fight the perception that she got the job because of her sex and not because of her attributes. This is not good for society and these women in particular. Equality of opportunity is the answer, not equality of representation. (9 August 1995) [6].

Another way detractors dispute whether discrimination has been proven is to dismiss the methodology employed by equity-seekers. In particular, chilly climate reports are vilified through critiques of their research basis and are berated on methodological grounds. With amazing regularity, the commonly accepted scholarly practice of respecting anonymity and protecting the confidentiality of sources is singled out as the reason why a climate or equity report must be rejected. Whereas confidentiality of sources is a stated ethical requirement for most social science research, it appears sinister when practised by equity seekers. The fear is that women and minorities might say anything behind the 'veil of anonymity'. Another mode of criticising research methods is to challenge the sample. The criticism is that researchers only spoke to the malcontents, the implication being that the views of the happy majority were not represented. Alternately, detractors claim that they personally have never met an unhappy woman nor a minority member with a complaint, and that their *ad hoc* sample is a better reflection of general sentiment. The net effect of all three forms of methodological questioning is to deny any problem exists.

An associated, and perhaps not unintended effect, is to undermine the producers of the equity reports. The perceived methodological weaknesses are 'typically attributed to discreditable motives (the desire to make white men or the institution look bad) and/or to the natural defects of their authors (over-enthusiasm, paranoia, hypersensitivity, vengefulness or simple subjective bias)' (MacIntyre, 1996). This appears to be what Peter Emberley does when he dismisses concerns about racism and sexism raised by University of British Columbia students as the venting of 'pathologies, insecurities and disappointments as intellectual perspectives' (Emberley, 1996, p. 252).

Criticisms of the research base of an equity report furthers the reattribution of responsibility for the harm. Equity-seekers identify institutionalised practices of discrimination and subordination. Yet, in a resignification of responsibility, the messenger is



blamed for the message. The overwhelming response to equity analyses is to shift responsibility from the institution and onto the person or group which named the problem, e.g. the 'feminist police', political correctness, etc. Thus, to detractors, the scandal of the university is not that there is inequality; instead, feminism and equity-seeking make up the scandal (Randall, 1997). This resignification explains how Canada's national news magazine, *Maclean's*, can claim that a 'new wave of repression' is sweeping the country's campuses (Fenell, 1991), and why the national newspaper can editorialise that what is really happening is the 'battering of academic freedom and due process on the anvil of political correctness' (*Globe and Mail*, 10 August 1995).

#### *How Can Discrimination be Remedied? Solutions*

Critics of equity reports often charge that chilly climate reports do not follow the due process of natural justice and do not prove their allegations beyond a reasonable doubt. These concepts, however, are associated with criminal law, not human rights. Detractors claim that equity policies have enormous and sweeping powers, including the power to force professors to change what and how they teach in their classrooms, to force adherence to 'speech codes', to punish men for normal forms of conversation and social intercourse and more. To detractors, these unwarranted and dangerous powers are made many times worse because 'objective' standards of proof are not required.

Critics claim that current 'political correctness' has transferred power 'into the hands of new university gatekeepers'—academic bureaucrats (Resnick, 11 September 1995; Furedy, 1997). Philip Resnick and other defenders of the *status quo* vigorously protest that under equity policies, administrators now have the power to 'punish', 'destroy careers', etc. This issue loops back to an earlier point: many individuals (men in this instance) are unable or unwilling to distinguish between charges of systemic discrimination and intentional discrimination. Hence, they respond to reports which raise generalised concerns as though they had been personally accused/tried/and found guilty of a specific act of harassment, then punished severely—all without a chance to defend themselves, in 'star chamber' type proceedings.

University tribunals' use of civil standards of proof are attacked for not using the criminal standard of 'beyond a reasonable doubt'. It is extremely curious, as Kathleen Gallivan and Paddy Stamp point out, that it is only in equity cases that the appropriateness of this mode is queried—'beyond reasonable doubt' is not the norm in labour arbitration, family law courts, coroners' inquests, etc. Why, they ask, 'is the balance of probabilities good enough to determine who gets custody of children or whether someone was wrongfully fired, but not good enough to decide whether sexual harassment occurred?' (Gallivan & Stamp, 1997, p. A-17).

Human rights and other equity policies are administered exactly like dozens of other internal policies on Canadian campuses. Such complaint and enforcement procedures are established by processes which invariably include public consultation; and they are ultimately enacted by committees which encompass constituency representation. Just as with many other matters of internal discipline, sexual harassment and other internal policies are matters for civil remedy. The long-established balance of probabilities test and internal discipline are attacked by defenders of the *status quo* who claim such policies produce 'new forms of paternalism and cultural imperialism' under the guise of pluralism and equity (Emberley, 1996, p. 233).

Despite hyperbolic claims that white men are being punished by equity policies, most recommendations generated by equity reports revolve around the axis of public edu-

cation and proactive institutional action to ensure inclusion. They often take the form of recommending the establishment of, or greater support for, equity offices and similar initiatives. John Furedy, of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, however, says that excellence cannot thrive in an environment where equity offices exist, because 'there is pressure on individuals, there is a basic unfairness that is injurious to individuals in non-designated groups that are unfairly dealt with. It is also injurious to designated groups who may get the uneasy feeling they are there not on merit' (Connell, 1996, p. 3).

There is an important effect of this dispute over remedy. Equity-seekers advance a social complaint and correspondingly propose social solutions. Their detractors, to the contrary, protest such social critique. Detractors' objections transpose equity-seekers' generalised observations about systemic gender privilege into personalised accusations about individual wrong-doing. This transposition is made possible by the greater social power associated with the discourse and practice of formal equality, direct discrimination, and fault-based approaches.

Canada's national newspaper recently carried a series of letters and responses to an article by University of British Columbia Professor Philip Resnick, who argued that 'no discrimination means no reverse discrimination', charging that a University of British Columbia job posting which reads that the UBC 'encourages all qualified applicants, especially members of designated employment equity groups' was 'reverse discrimination' (Resnick, 1996). Resnick is outraged that his university has publicly stated that it is 'concerned' about the underrepresentation of women, aboriginal people, visible minorities and persons with disabilities. Rhetorically, this theme shifts concern and sympathy from those marginalised by systemic practices to those who benefit from systemic discrimination.

Many letters to the *Globe and Mail* in response to Resnick's article were equally critical of equity initiatives. One self-identified former male member of Moncton University's Equity Committee wrote that 'equity commissars have determined hiring primarily on the basis of sex, colour and type of physical or mental "challenge"'. "Since he personally knows several young academics who have been obliged to seek work elsewhere", he laments Canada's newest export product: 'equity refugees' (Beninger, 1996). John Furedy compared the defence of the UBC affirmative action job notice to the Nazi selection of Jews to be sent to concentration camps—a comparison he called 'offensive but apt' (Furedy, 1996).

### **Conclusion: Conceptual Power on Campus—Whose Knowledge Counts?**

The only time epistemology overtly figures in the debate is over the issue of postmodernism. In this aspect of chilly climate contest, supporters of formal equality, strict individualism and direct discrimination claim that postmodernism undergirds those who propose substantive equality and group-based remedies to redress systemic discrimination. Dean Patricia Marchak illustrates this phenomenon. In rejecting the findings of a report into racism and sexism at her university, she writes that:

... the text [the investigator] produced has a popular postmodernist stance to it. It never argued its case, it produced no evidence, and she stated that evidence was not required because the allegations were enough to demonstrate the case for her. It made no claims to truth—indeed, [the investigator] explicitly informed readers that it mattered not whether the claims were true; it was

enough that the complainants believed them to be true. It rested, finally, on a political position: that the department under study consisted mainly of 'white' men and that 'white men were corrupt'. (1996, p. 146)

Patricia Marchak attributes political contests about race and sex at the university as the fault of a postmodernism which seeks the 'jettisoning of all notions of objectivity and disinterested pursuit of knowledge' (p. 19). She writes, 'at the popular level, some who call themselves postmodernists accept no standards of scholarship ... For some, any interpretation is just as good as any other' (p. 19). Similarly, Peter Emberley asks, 'what does the cultural left utter but the postmodernist opinion that all human life is structured by nothing but relations of dominance and subordination and that, as a result, no civil engagement is of any value?' (1996, p. 216). 'When the cultural left says that everything is power, what else can it mean but that they want more power? ... This is turf war, not reasoned debate' (p. 225). Diversity, claims Emberley, is nothing more than 'a code word' for the cultural left's ideology of power (p. 234).

Here, we have the political contest at its most stark: detractors of chilly climate reports see equity-seekers as political nihilists, authoritarian tyrants, promoting a vastly worse future. Equity-seekers argue that their goal is a transformed and enriched academy, where the merit principle would truly operate once loosened from the bonds of systemic discrimination and inherited privilege. Defenders of the *status quo* seek to bolster the university as the primary bulwark against the 'colossal breakdown of moral order in civil society' (Emberley, 1996, p. 237)—and equity-seekers attempt to bring about an inclusive university from the very same ethical concern about moral order.

The political contest over equity initiatives will not be resolved by technocratic or empirical tinkering with methodology, definitions or policies—even though these often form the overt grounds over which reports are contested. Instead, equity-seekers need to appreciate that the apparently innocuous process of generating knowledge about 'chilly climates' is intensely political, philosophical and value-laden. The definition of equality, the proving of harm, the attribution of responsibility and the process of remedy are each vigorously disputed—together they produce enormous obstacles for those who campaign for a transformed and inclusive university.

The political contest and struggle over the meaning of equity initiatives is not symmetrical. To the contrary, the perspective and practice of equity-seekers is subordinated in favour of the perspective and practice of those who oppose them. Detractors assume the stance of the public good; their views are naturalised as being in the universal interest. Equity-seekers are denied this status and authority. Their subordination is accomplished both rhetorically and practically, through appeals to formal equality and claims that remedies for unjust treatment must be directed only to individuals, not towards groups or collectivities. The contest over chilly climate and other equity reports shows how the two discursive positions are unequal and differentially located within the academy. Opponents of chilly climate reports, in fact, displace equity-seekers as credible and competent claimants. An analysis of the political contest over chilly climate reveals how inequality is conceptually naturalised and neutralised within the academy in ways which pose profound obstacles to equity-seekers.

## NOTES

- [1] An earlier version of this article was delivered at the 'Women and Texts: languages, technologies and communities' conference at the University of Leeds, July 1997, and I am grateful to conference participants for feedback. I also appreciate the comments of anonymous *Gender and Education* reviewers. Support

- for project was provided by the University of Manitoba through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Research Grant. This article was submitted August 1998 and accepted June 1999.
- [2] 1996/7 data on part-time faculty were not available from Statistics Canada at the time of writing.
  - [3] Criminologists Sykes & Matza (1957) have discussed how techniques of neutralisation allow deviant behaviour to be rationalised. I share their concerns with how responsibility, injury and victim (among others) can be attributed.
  - [4] For clarifying this point, I am indebted to Sheila MacIntyre, whose pioneering work has done much to expose the inequality which characterises Canadian campuses. This section on equality draws heavily on MacIntyre's 1996 talk, 'Building an equity culture: from the abstract to the concrete.'
  - [5] Durrant, it is worth pointing out, simultaneously displays a spectacular lack of concern for those female colleagues who had raised issues of equity, and who contributed to the chilly climate report. Only some colleagues, it would appear, merit solidarity.
  - [6] Astonishingly, Michael Risk does not seem troubled about *who* it is who will perceive women to hold jobs for reasons other than their attributes.

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