

We were shocked by the failure of most of the academic community to express concern over the lack of due process or systematic peer review. The administration took the position that we were incompetent and irresponsible researchers, and their statements were published without any respect for the kind of review process that was scrupulously adhered to in the case of Philippe Rushton, whose credibility the administration was careful never to question or to challenge.

On Friday, 24 November 1989, Wylie attempted some damage control with the publication in *The Gazette* of the notes she had written for the Provost prior to the release of the *Report*. Emphasizing that the *Chilly Climate Report* was intended merely as a "pilot study," a "first step," in coming to terms with subtle, environmentally based barriers to equity, she pleaded for cooler heads to prevail (see Appendix A). In a second paper, titled "A Response to Some Criticisms of the Chilly Climate Report," Wylie addressed the three main criticisms levelled against the *Report*: (1) the anonymity of the interview subjects, (2) the selection of interviewees and their representativeness of the population of faculty women, and (3) the "media event" charge. Although it was not published at the time, this paper was widely circulated to those who inquired about our views on these matters (it is included here as Appendix B). Certainly the allegations were cause for serious concern. But we decided as a group not to publish any formal response. We believed the attacks on us were politically motivated and did not arise from genuine concerns about the reliability and validity of the research. A defensive rebuttal would simply have made it easier to keep up the attacks on us.

The President would eventually be forced to concede the anonymity point. After Western employment equity expert Carol Agòcs and Faculty Association President Sarah Shorten made repeated attempts to draw his attention to the errors inherent in his castigation of anonymous surveys, the President subsequently wrote to the authors on 17 December 1990: "I was quite incorrect in any comments which I made about the anonymity of respondents and for that extend to you and your colleagues an unqualified apology."<sup>28</sup> He continued to refuse, however, to apologize on other fronts:

My own experience in social science research and the advice which I have received from others continue to leave me with serious misgivings. There is no need to repeat these concerns in detail here, but they relate to the generalizations which have been drawn, particularly with respect to the sampling procedures and the nature and format of the interview schedule.<sup>29</sup>

Wylie had already addressed the complaints about the representativeness of the survey in her *Gazette* essay of 24 November 1989. There Wylie was unequivocal on the point that "questions about the extent of the problem and its variability" required "much more wide-ranging and systematic

research than we were able to undertake." Congratulating the women who could claim, in good faith, never to have had such experiences or observed such practices, she continued:

I would be delighted to learn that we had, by dint of remarkable sampling error, spoken to all the women faculty at Western who had ever had such experiences, but would still maintain that the number of problems reported to us are too many to be tolerated in an institution that has made the sort of commitment this one has to employment equity.<sup>30</sup>

Somehow this and all the other careful disclaimers, clarifications and statements of objective that we included in the *Report* and its related documents were overlooked throughout this entire affair. Conceding that change would necessitate "an unsettling process of candid self-criticism directed not just at some amorphous 'other' . . . but at ourselves, our own units, our immediate colleagues," Wylie urged the University community to move towards a more egalitarian environment. This was, she argued, something that was "absolutely essential if this institution is to continue to play a vital role in an increasingly diverse society."<sup>31</sup>

At about this time another line of attack was initiated. An unnamed member of the university community was said to have contacted the Research Office to ask if we had received ethics clearance to interview the women to whom we had spoken. On 26 January 1990, Backhouse received a letter from the Chair of Western's Review Board for Social Science and Humanities Research Involving Human Subjects (the committee charged with ensuring that ethics guidelines are observed by all faculty members whose academic research involved human subjects) who had by then investigated the matter. The letter read as follows:

I have been directed by the Review Board for Social Sciences and Humanities Research Involving Human Subjects to inform you and your colleagues that it is the opinion of the Review Board that the study by you and others, (the *Chilly Climate Report*), should have received ethical review. Since it was substantiated that the study did not receive ethical approval, the Board has informed the Vice-President (Research) of its opinion and has recommended that he take any disciplinary action he deems appropriate.<sup>32</sup>

Wylie, who had long sat as a member of this Review Board, was astonished. As she noted in her letter of reply dated 1 February 1990, guidelines and procedures appropriate to this sort of unfunded study had not yet been established by the University. In fact, the Review Board had only begun to formulate such guidelines in the previous year (well after the time the *Chilly Climate* interviews had been undertaken and completed), and they were still under active consideration at the time the Review Board ruled against the

authors of the *Chilly Climate Report*. The retroactive nature of this decision is particularly striking, since the *Chilly Climate Report* was quite clearly represented as an "institutional study," not as "academic research" (funded or otherwise). The question of whether administrative officers, employee associations, unions, and the various clubs on campus should be required to seek formal ethics approval for any studies they might undertake of their members and constituencies was, at the time, hotly debated. The framework for delivering a decision against the authors of the *Report* was not in place at the time the Review Board ruled against them. Moreover, the reference to disciplinary action was problematic. We were informed by the President of the Faculty Association that there were no provisions in the conditions of appointment for faculty members outlining the circumstances under which "disciplinary action" could be taken, the forms this could take, or any procedure for appeal.<sup>33</sup>

By now, debate over the *Report* was rapidly spreading beyond the authors and Western officials. Perceptions and responses within the university community were varied. Fifteen women from the Faculty of Education signed a letter to the *Western News* objecting to the administration's "shrill" and "accusatory tone." "Ironically," they noted, "such a response further enhances the credibility of the report by providing yet another example of the ways in which women's attempts to be heard are denigrated. [W]e found much in the report with which we could identify."<sup>34</sup>

Western women's studies student Karen McCaffery wrote, tongue-in-cheek:

Well! It seems there really is no sexual harassment of female faculty at Western! Our fearless leader, [the] President, . . . has spoken. . . . He says so in *The London Free Press*, right on page B2 in the November 17th edition, so he must be sure, eh? He knows all about sexual harassment. . . . [There is no] sexism at Western, no hostility towards wimmin. Of course not! And there is no racism here either. Everybody knows that. . . . we should all just bust out and rename the place Shangri-la.<sup>35</sup>

Law student Jane Hegney expressed her astonishment that the President had characterized the *Report* as "akin to McCarthyism." Pointing out the comparison that was increasingly being drawn between Rushton and the *Chilly Climate* authors, Hegney noted that the President's version of "academic freedom" apparently had "different meanings when applied to male and female academics." She wrote:

I have a plea for the President of Western: . . . your statements speak volumes about your ignorance of these matters. If you care about this university, or more pragmatically, if you want to retain a shred of credibility, you will educate yourself — quickly. You can start by believing what the people in the university community are trying in good faith to tell you instead of

ridiculing them and calling them names. Do some basic reading on the subject. (Why do I have to say this to a professor?)

Until you start treating these concerns seriously, the person who most debases this university in the public eye is you.<sup>36</sup>

Louise Forsyth, a senior faculty member of the Department of French, courageously identified herself in the *Western News* as one of the 35 previously unnamed interviewees. One of the key members of Western's first President's Advisory Committee on the Status of Women 15 years earlier, she had considerable experience and authority on the basis of which to comment. Noting that many of the 92 recommendations made in the 1975 *Report* had still not been implemented, she called the current administration's denunciation a "disdainful, uncomprehending and defensive condemnation" that was "symptomatic" of a glacial pace of change.<sup>37</sup>

Michael Bennett, one of Western's Sexual Harassment Officers and a Professor of Computer Science, spoke out in support. Claiming that the *Report* was "one of the best" he had seen, Bennett termed it "an excellent start for examining this whole problem of the 'chilly climate,' to eradicate it and then extend the concept to other areas where it might exist."<sup>38</sup> Where people work in an environment of sexism and harassment, claimed Bennett, "they will not come forward publicly. The report has offered an opportunity for those voices to be heard."<sup>39</sup>

Not all of the correspondence published about the *Report* was so supportive. One male Professor of philosophy complained that no men had been interviewed. "What might these wrongdoers have had to say for themselves?" he queried. "What might any male professor at Western have to say for himself — for is he not implicated by having remained at this university of unusually rampant sexist practice?"<sup>40</sup> This challenge raises several crucial questions. Why are the oppressed not believed without proof from their oppressors? And why are the experiences of women not important in and of themselves? Do we require the testimony of the beneficiaries of sexual discrimination to validate women's accounts of sexist practices? For the most part male colleagues do not decide to freeze their female colleagues out; they simply don't think of them as equals and they act accordingly. The effect, more than the intention, is what chills.

A female subscriber to *The London Free Press* from Port Stanley, Ontario, wrote that she feared that demands for employment equity programs would result in reverse discrimination. "Has it occurred to Constance Backhouse that many women at the University of Western Ontario aren't afraid to speak out without the veil of anonymity?" she exclaimed. "They may just be having a hard time trying to verbalize the way they feel without coming across as prejudiced and discriminatory themselves. It's boisterous,

unthinking, sexist statements by so-called feminists that make me sometimes embarrassed to be a woman."<sup>41</sup>

A professor emeritus from the University of Calgary was perhaps the most vehement. His letter to *Western News*, published on 23 November 1989, was direct and to the point. Labelling the authors "the gang of four," he used gleefully vitriolic prose:

The accusations made by four female persons of rampant sexism in Western are the most sexist orientated statements I have encountered in any University in 40 years of academic life. Without presenting any evidence they accuse male faculty of sexual misdemeanours ranging from the absurdly trivial to the very serious.

Do they expect to be accepted uncritically? The methodology is ludicrous and a disgrace to any academic institution. Their behaviour in releasing this to the press is a serious breach of academic good manners. It is all the more reprehensible that they include at least one Faculty of Law member who should surely be expected to understand the meaning of evidence, the unacceptability of hearsay evidence and no doubt the use of leading questions. It is quite clear from their attitude and their behaviour that they are in the wrong jobs and are most assuredly unsuitable as role models for students. . . . The four can clearly be classified into what I call "uneducated literates," a very dangerous group in our society.

Perhaps in self protection, male faculty members should refuse to have any communication with the four. Who knows if in saying "hello" they might be written up as potential seducers.<sup>42</sup>

The offensiveness of the letter is somewhat offset by the rich scope it offers those wanting to understand the anti-feminist perspective more thoroughly. Like the Western administrators, this professor emeritus seems completely unable to distinguish between studies that begin to give voice to women's problems within the University and procedures appropriate for the formal litigation of sexual harassment complaints — the exclusion of hearsay evidence, the use of leading questions during cross-examination, and the like. Furthermore, his use of the phrase "potential seducers" reveals his understanding of chilly climate issues as rooted in male sexuality. This is clearly not how the women victimized by gender harassment perceive it. That male apologists seem wedded to metaphors of coercion, aggression, and sexuality provides much pause for thought.

This critic's rant about our disgraceful breach of scholarly manners and decorum implies that it was we who had chilled the climate. The obvious conclusion, according to this professor, is that we were "in the wrong jobs" and logically "unsuitable" for the academy. After all, how better to improve the climate than to remove the rain clouds? The serious danger we posed emanates from our status as "uneducated literates." We should either educate ourselves to conform to the rules and perspectives he enunciates, or re-

frain from writing. The concept of free speech unfettered by male conventions goes right out the window.

Our *Report* also provoked censure from some female colleagues, some of which we found very disheartening. While we knew that the various women who taught and studied at Western would not all accept our depiction of gender inequality, we had not fully anticipated the extent of the disagreement. A female faculty member of the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology was one of the first to write to *Western News*. While she allowed that "undoubtedly sexism exists at Western," she was anxious to disassociate herself from the *Report*:

I am concerned that the report issued on the "chilly climate" has left the impression that sexism and unequal treatment have been the universal experience of female faculty at this institution. This is not the case. Just as those who were interviewed felt that anonymity was essential to protect them from possible negative repercussions arising from their statements, those of us who were not interviewed and have not been subjected to the types of harassment described in the report now feel obliged to distance ourselves from its conclusions.<sup>43</sup>

This letter singled out, by peculiar juxtaposition, the contrasting positions of women who felt themselves to have experienced discrimination and women who did not. The former needed to cling to the blanket protection of anonymity, the latter claimed public voice. The obvious rationale for the divergent responses — that the forces of institutional retribution awaited the first group while more beneficent behaviour welcomed the second — seemed lost on Western's President. He cited his personal receipt of "numerous telephone calls from women faculty members upset at the report and its allegations" as authority for impugning the reliability of the original study.<sup>44</sup> In doing so, curiously, he failed to apply to his own analysis any of the methodological and sampling critiques with which he so vigorously assailed our *Report*.

The most systematic denunciation was led by Western's Associate Dean of Medical Research, who wrote a statement of rebuke on behalf of some 30 women with whom she had been in contact. As she wrote to the *Free Press* on 9 December 1989, she was both "bothered" and "dismay[ed]" by the tone of "hostility and extremism" in the *Chilly Climate Report*. The following passages have been excerpted from her lengthy letter:

That view of the atmosphere on the campus is not shared by the first 30 women I happened to see in two days, and asked if their experiences were those described in the report. Some of the women surprised me by the depth of their anger and irritation, because they felt that the report belittled and denigrated them and portrayed them as victims.

We do not come to work in fear; do not find the atmosphere chilling; do not find ourselves put down, harassed, ignored or insulted by our male colleagues.

The report's tone of bristling hostility doesn't help the cause of women. [T]he great majority of the many men I personally interact with daily are reasonable, pleasant to deal with, and often most helpful. I consider many of them to be valued colleagues and good friends.

I take exception to the assumption that the authors of this report speak for all women on the campus. The report and the publicity surrounding it have served to distort the situation at Western, which does not deserve to have its good name tarnished.<sup>45</sup>

While we were greatly upset by this effort to discredit the *Report*, misrepresenting again the scope and generality of the claims we were making, the four authors made the collective decision not to respond publicly to any of our detractors. The author and the other women she claimed had never experienced discrimination may indeed have been able to flourish unscathed within the predominantly male academy. Alternatively, they may have survived by systematically ignoring such sexist treatment as came their way, denying the existence of gender-related barriers in their work.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than respond publicly, we sought to meet privately with the Associate Dean of Medical Research and the women she spoke for, as well as with several other influential women who had taken umbrage at our report. One of the meetings we scheduled with a senior female administrator at the University seemed, at first blush, to have lessened hostilities somewhat and accorded greater opportunity for future communication. In later months we would be disappointed to observe that in public our positions remained sharply separated.

One of the most unsettling responses from a female academic came from a professor from the Department of Microbiology and Immunology. A prominent advocate for women's equality within Western's Faculty of Science, she too was upset about our report. She argued, in the *Western News* of 7 December 1989, that our focus on matters such as "gender-neutral language" and the "deep-seated, subtle attitudinal difficulty which may afflict the occasional faculty member of either sex," was seriously misplaced. Attention to these issues would detract from what she viewed as far more pressing concerns: the low number of female faculty members, especially in the sciences; the decreasing representation of women in postdoctoral positions and amongst applicants for faculty positions in science; the clash between tenure opportunities and women's reproductive biology; and the exploitation of part-time faculty members, particularly those with child-rearing responsibilities.<sup>47</sup>

Not for one minute would any of us have thought to belittle the importance of the issues this Professor cited. In other documents, under other

circumstances, we had all argued for measures to address these important problems. A great many of the experiences outlined in the *Chilly Climate Report* had to do with such matters. In contrast to the Professor's dismissal of more subtle issues, biologist Sheila Widnall, in her 1988 Presidential Lecture to the American Academy for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), had pinpointed the workplace climate as the precise reason why women disappear from the training "pipeline" feeding the sciences. Yet our critic had been so offended by our environmental approach that she felt compelled to disassociate herself from our initiative. Stunned by this reproach from a woman we had thought of as sharing similar goals, we realized that divergent opinions about how to improve the status of women would continue to make positions of broad solidarity tenuous.

While critiques of this sort were deeply unnerving, we were gratified to learn that many others were eager to hear more about the *Report*. We were invited to give presentations about the *Report*, and its reception, to various groups: to interested members of the Faculty of Nursing and King's College, and to the University chaplains. Off campus, we spoke before a number of learned societies and professional associations and at various conferences and symposia in Canada, Australia, Norway, the UK, and the United States. In none of these settings did we encounter the kind of hostility meted out to us by the administration, or by various of our colleagues.

On a more personal note, the four of us found it, in varying degrees, very difficult to continue to work on campus after the *Report* came out. Professional and social relations with many of our colleagues, numbers of whom manifested various degrees of hostility and paranoia, were strained beyond repair. Our apprehensions and anxieties were intensified by the horrific events of 6 December 1989, when Marc Lepine gunned down 14 female engineering students on University of Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique, shouting "You are all a bunch of feminists!" Feminists across the nation, numbed by the Montreal massacre, were shocked to the core by the misogynist backlash which followed, as media pundits and community leaders banded together to insist with increasing hyperbole that this was the isolated act of a lone madman, bearing no particular meaning for women, which feminists were "using" to promote their own "narrow, political interests."<sup>48</sup> They adamantly refused to recognize the extreme and catastrophic consequences of the hatred and distrust of women within Canadian society, in much the same way that Western administrators had refused to listen to more subtle variations on this theme.

Along with other feminist university women across Canada, in the wake of the massacre we felt our position at Western to be particularly precarious. We felt that as the authors of the *Chilly Climate Report* we had been left dreadfully exposed by orchestrated attacks on our motives, our method-



ology, and our recommendations for change. Disappointed and unnerved by the reaction of the senior administrators of the University, we reflected upon the telling irony that their response had served to replicate many of the mechanisms that produce a chilly climate in academic contexts: stereotyping, devaluation, exclusion, revictimization. If there had ever been any question about the currency of sexist and misogynist attitudes and behaviour on campus, it had been decisively and conclusively laid to rest — most powerfully by the example, in action, of those who most vehemently denied the seriousness of these issues.

Significantly, this point was not lost on a good many of our male colleagues: people who had sat on the fence and been inclined to dismiss the *Report* as generalized belly-aching, or as idiosyncratic to specific units or individuals. Some found their thinking turned around first by the administrative response to the *Chilly Climate Report* and then by the enormity of the Montreal massacre. Suddenly it was graphically clear just how deep and pervasive the problem was. In a couple of cases our male colleagues made a point of telling us that, where they had previously seen sexist behaviour as simply bad taste which was best ignored, the events of the fall of 1989 made it clear to them that they had a moral obligation to take active steps to oppose such behaviour.

The four of us had originally hoped to conduct annual, continuing studies on the status of women at Western, branching out to examine such additional matters as the plight of part-time faculty and the situation of non-academic staff. But coping with the fall-out from the *Chilly Climate Report* proved significantly more draining and time consuming than any of us had anticipated. In fact, we have not met as a group for quite some time now, and we have no active plans for further follow-up studies.

One particular project did move forward, however, under the aegis of Western's Caucus on Women's Issues. When the *Report* drew such a hostile response, Alison Wylie (as President of the Women's Caucus) and the Executive of the Women's Caucus were reinforced in their commitment to a project that was already in the works: a video on chilly climate issues. Our experience with hostile reactions to the *Report* made it clearer than ever just how important an issue climate was, especially as employment equity programs were getting under way in the province. In April 1990, supported by Western's Caucus on Women's Issues, Western's Employment Equity Office, and the President's Standing Committee on Employment Equity, Wylie successfully made application for funding to underwrite a video on chilly climate issues. The sum of \$55,200 from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the Ontario Women's Directorate was granted to fund the creation of a 28-minute video and an accompanying facilitators' manual. Ironically, the success of the grant was greeted enthusiastically by the Presi-

dent of the University, who stated that the issue was "tremendously important."<sup>49</sup>

Produced by London's Kem Murch Productions, the video was described in *The London Free Press* as "deeply mov[ing]" after its premiere showing at an anti-discrimination conference in London on 29 April 1991. Based on interviews with female and male students, faculty, staff, and administrators from London's Fanshawe Community College, Toronto's York University, and the University of Western Ontario,<sup>50</sup> the video reached beyond the original *Chilly Climate Report* to include a welcome and important focus on race and disability. With emotion, humour, and rich irony, it described the subtle features that operate to thwart the full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and individuals of diverse races within post-secondary educational institutions. The market for the video and manual has rapidly expanded beyond provincial borders to include purchasers from across Canada and the United States and beyond. In a gesture which held great meaning for all of us, the authors of the manual generously dedicated it to the *Chilly Climate* authors, "for their vision and courage." The more appropriate dedication, however, would have been to all of the women at Western who have striven, for many decades and through many generations, for greater acceptance of women's perspectives within the academy.

**Appendix A**  
**Some Comments on the *Chilly Climate Report***

*Alison Wylie*

*This commentary was published in The Gazette, 17 November 1989, p. 9.*

— Eds.

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**Preface**

In the week before the *Chilly Climate Report* was circulated I set down a few thoughts about my hopes and expectations for its reception. They were circulated to members of the administration and those responsible for the development of employment equity programs on campus, in the hope that they would provide a fuller sense of the spirit in which the *Report* was drafted. Unfortunately, they have not mitigated what has been described as a "nasty exchange" in the external press in which the credibility of the *Report* has been called into question on the grounds that we undertook to protect the identities of the 35 women we interviewed and because it is considered unrepresentative of the conditions under which women faculty work at Western.

In fact, it is clearly stated in the introduction to the *Report* that those we interviewed requested anonymity not just out of fear of reprisals but because no constructive purpose would be served by pointing fingers at individual units or colleagues. Our objective was not to seek redress for individual cases, but to characterize, with reference to Western, a problem that has been widely documented on campuses across North America against which effective action can only be taken if it is named and understood. Clearly, questions about the extent of the problem and its variability require much more wide-ranging and systematic research than we were able to undertake; we consider this report a first step in the process of coming to terms with the subtle, environmentally based barriers to equity which have been found to persist even when formally discriminatory policies are struck down. The key conclusions of our report are that the chilliness of the climate at Western varies a great deal across the departments and faculties from which we drew our samples of interviewees, but that there are a number of common themes (i.e., similar actions or mechanisms which make the climate chilly, such as stereotyping, isolation or exclusion, and systematic devaluation of women) which cross-cut this variability and replicate the conditions that have been documented, in the past decade, on campuses across the United States.

What follows is the text of the "comments" that were circulated two weeks ago; they amplify these points in a way that I hope may put discus-

sions of the *Report* and the problems it describes on a more constructive track.

### **Comments Circulated 7 November 1989**

I see this report as, above all, a contribution to efforts to realize equity for women at Western that are being made on a number of fronts. In particular, the President's Standing Committee for Employment Equity has made a clear commitment to address exactly the sorts of chilly climate issues that we set out to document in our report. With this committee in its first year of operation and engaged in a process of familiarizing itself with the concerns of the four target groups covered by its mandate, the timing for release of such a report couldn't be better. This is in part, a matter of luck rather than design. The President's Committee didn't exist when we began our study, nor did the University's policy or the President's statement of commitment to employment equity. At the time, the most we could have hoped for was that our results would underline the need for such a committee and policy. Now, however, they can enter directly into a process of designing and implementing a program for realizing equity at Western that has already been set into motion. My hope is that this report will reinforce the Committee's resolve to make climate issues one chief target of a pro-active program for change, because it is only with change at this level — in effect, in the culture of the institution — that changes in formal policy and procedures will have any sustained effect.

What this study has to offer, more specifically, is the demonstration that women at Western encounter essentially the same kinds of difficulties that have been widely recognized to persist in other contexts, even when strong action is taken to eliminate overt discrimination. It replicates the sorts of results established by a number of studies of climate issues that have been undertaken on campuses across the United States. While this is, in one sense, a depressing result (we might have hoped, rather unrealistically, that things were different at Western), it is extremely valuable in situating our local problems in a larger context. And it provides, in a preliminary and exploratory way, some indication of the context-specific form that these problems take at Western. My hope is that, in making these results available to everyone concerned with employment equity at Western, we will have accelerated the process of program design and implementation. With a qualitative pilot study in hand, complementing the quantitative "audit" of target groups now in the final stages of development, there is the basis for beginning the process of education and for designing more encompassing surveys that will ascertain the extent of the problems described to us by those we interviewed.