GLASS CEILINGS & TRAP DOORS: ANTI-RACIST EQUITY HIRING, RETENTION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

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(This transcript is from a video recording of the panel. Please note that there were some problems with the recorder; the opening remarks of the first presentation are missing).

Making the Visible Count: Difference and Embodied Knowledge in the Academy

Dr. Audrey Kobayashi, Geography/Women's Studies, Queen's University

What some scholars call the new racism: the racism of 21st century, which is more than anything a culture of whiteness and a discourse of denial.

Some of you may also know that just a few years ago Queen's University, in response to issues that had been raised by especially women of colour at Queen's, [those] who had left the university and asked for an investigation, commissioned Frances Henry who has written a huge amount on this topic to do a study. Actually we did the study and Frances did the analysis and the write up.

POWER POINT: Responses to the Henry Report

- Bad methodology
- Why pick on Queen's?
- We need more international students
- The "culture of whiteness" is a negative concept
- We need more diversity programs

And the major finding, at least the finding that received all the press coverage, was the last paragraph of the report which said that the issue at Queen's is a culture of whiteness. There was an immediate response. And I have to say that a lot of colleagues took up the findings and said "yes it's about time somebody said it and let's develop a program to do something about it." Or there was a huge silence, I would say on the part of the majority, and a great deal of opposition, a great deal of denial that took mainly the form of the five points that I have put up here.

1. First of all coming from very high levels in the university it was "bad" methodology. Why was it bad methodology? Because the sample was too small to have any legitimate findings. Why was the sample too small, well I don't know…[laughter and recognition from audience]

2. The second was why pick on Queen's? Why us? Well actually this is a legitimate point. Queen's actually was the first of a number of such studies in just recent years that have been undertaken. And it is a legitimate point. Why Queen's? I would maintain that Queen's actually is not any more problematic than any other university in the country. So then we could sort of put that one to rest.

3. But then there were other more subtle responses that actually reflect the culture of whiteness. "Well obviously we need more international students, that's the problem." [audience laughter]

4. A huge response saying well yes, but the culture of whiteness is such a negative term so we are not going to use that. People are offended when we say the culture of whiteness and I am going to say it a lot of times today and I hope no one is the room is offended. So therefore we have to have something better and the word is diversity. So obviously we need more diversity programs, and we're going to have a lot more to say about diversity today.

I just want to give you a little more sense of the responses. There was a lot of press and good old Margaret Wente in the *Globe & Mail* responded by saying "well you know we do have a problem, look at this there's…" well that speaks for itself [audience laughter]. But the point is not that Margaret Wente writes racist columns; she does and she does it all the time and she's well known for writing racist columns. The point is that the *Globe & Mail* likes it because by writing racist columns Margaret Wente sparks controversy and controversy sells newspapers. So part of the culture of whiteness is just this very turning of the discourse of racism into a commodity that is reaching in to the homes of Canadians at a very very large scale.

Even more troubling although less public are some of the letters that we received. The individual who's in charge of the committee that received the report is a woman of colour who received threats from a little organization and very… I haven't actually put these comments up here, we haven't made them public. There is an organization called American Renaissance, its president is a guy named Philippe Rushton, some of you may have heard of him…the infamous Professor Rushton; and there was hate material on that website. But this is the stuff that's coming from Queen's alumni. Letters written to the university that shows that Queen's has a certain reputation.

Again I would say that the issues aren't any worse on Queen's campus than they are anywhere else. But there is a certain reputation and obviously there is a fairly significant group of alumni who feel that the report naming a culture of whiteness was a direct attack upon something that they feel is very much within their ownership: "something beautiful, functioning and successful being ruined by the intrusion of non-whiteness." This is pretty horrible stuff.

POWER POINT: Letters from alumni:

- "Ahhh isn't that cute...let's destroy the last cultural bastion of Whiteness in the world for 'diversity.'"

- "God I wish I'd gone to Queen's…PARENTS SEND YOUR CHILDREN TO QUEEN'S where they'll be able to think clearly. Provide room for diversity through other means."

- "As a Queen's man I am disgusted by this turn of events. Sadly, I am far from surprised. We are not even allowed to have one nice thing to ourselves."

- "The list will go on like this forever until Queen's U will resemble the rest of the liberal arts multicultural universities across Canada."

- "I suppose something beautiful, functioning and successful being ruined by the intrusion of non-Whiteness is desirable."

So what the whole experience told us, I think, is that what we had done was to bring the culture of whiteness on to the table make it public, make it a subject for discussion. And once we did that, all of issues that many of us know have been on campus for many many years also came to the fore.

So those issues have been beautifully summarized, actually 13 years ago, in an article by Frances Henry and Carol Tator in which they outline the kinds of things that contribute to what we are calling a culture of whiteness. First of all the overwhelming power of white academicians which keeps the status quo in place in terms of the content and the standards of the university, in terms of research, in terms of who has access to positions. And although we have an increase in human rights offices and in various offices that address

issues of racism there is still in general across the country a lack of institutional procedures to combat institutional racism. Very very few universities, I can count them on one hand, actually have an office that talks directly about racism, it's usually folded in to something else. And the standard denial is a retreat in to excuses based on academic excellence. That's the single explanation that comes up most frequently to explain why the numbers, I don't know if anybody's actually got the numbers, but the numbers are very very very small in comparison ...[inaudible] so drastically underrepresented. We also still have a very Eurocentric curriculum. The two are not necessarily tied, but there does seem to be a strong correspondence.

And we have had ample evidence from graduate students that one result is inappropriate supervision. "Oh I can supervise anything, it really doesn't matter what the content is…" Or simply inadequate supervision, which has resulted in a funneling of students of colour, depending upon the discipline, in to a few programs across the country. Certainly a higher burden of counseling and advising of students of colour by underrepresented faculty and I am sure that there are lots of people in the room who can identify with that issue. Inadequate recognition or denigration of the work of faculty of colour and that includes work that reaches out to communities.

Certainly I was required at McGill in 1980 something to go before a tenure hearing and they were considering not granting me tenure because they thought that the work that I did in anti-racism was too much community work and not enough scholarship and fortunately I got through that one or I wouldn't be here.

And also overt racism, direct discrimination, jokes, harassment, or assault those things still go on, but that's the box that people put racism in, rather than the larger box of the culture of whiteness. And hostile environment issues are much more common in the form of everyday racism which is subtle comments, which is body languages, which is all of the processes of othering, including positive stereotyping and other ways of suggesting that racism is on the margins as an academic issue and that the bodies that represent faculty of colour are also marginalized.

The result is that there is overwork and a burden placed upon faculty of colour in universities that is exacerbated by the hostility that they feel. Hostility that is often not recognized or understood by their white colleagues and one of the reasons for that came out very clearly in the Henry report. We

conducted small private safe focus groups where people were willing to speak. They are not willing to go before large audiences or speak frankly often with their white colleagues simply because of the misunderstanding and the subsequent marginalization that occurs.

So we often hear (that's the end of my power point) reference to colourblindness. In fact, claims to colourblindness as a claim that racism doesn't occur because we're colourblind. As though colour is something that is not a meaningful way of distinguishing human beings – "colour makes no difference," "your colour makes no difference to me." And of course such an interpretation would be fine in a world in which colour had no meaning, but it is a marker for discrimination. It is rather indifference to the effects of racialization and the failure to see the need to either study the effects of racialization or to become activists for change that is the issue. It's the denial of the need either for affirmative or positive action practices in order to increase numbers of faculty and students of colour. Well actually we don't need to increase students of colour those are increasing, it's not being matched by hiring of faculty, but that doesn't mean of course that the issues are not there. The result of the apparently progressive attitudes towards race as well as gender disability and all forms of marginalization that give universities a kind of smugness and that smugness is actually getting in the way of addressing issues.

I am almost out of time, so what I want to challenge is the prevailing wisdom about systemic racism and the idea that systemic racism is somehow unintentional. All we have to do is have diversity programs and that those diversity programs are going to somehow take care of the issue, as long as we don't talk about negative things such as racism or anti-racism, which is another negative, or cultures of whiteness. And as long as we remain at the institutional level and by focussing on the institutional level we fail to recognize that racism is always about some body. It is always some body engaging with some other body. And that it's actually a very personal relationship in most cases. So one of our huge challenges is to be able to bring the personal relations that people experience on an everyday level in the university in line with the institutional. In other words we need to change the culture at every level. And it seems to me that the problem is that diversity programs – well what we just need to do is get the numbers up get more, get more, get more - that would follow if we could address the culture of whiteness.

I just want to quickly go through the cultural forms that whiteness takes – I have identified four.

1) One is a process of denigration, a process of denying the work of academics of colour, either indirectly by valuing Eurocentric curricula – "oh we've got to have this because we've always had this and that is a luxury and in these days of cutbacks we can't do it." Or by failing to recognize that issues of racism are not just about something that happens in the human resources department, but actually something that cuts through every aspect of the development of curriculum, as well as the lives of people who are charged with teaching that curriculum.

2) My second is whiteness as a deflection: in the modern progressive university which claims that it can't be racist because of course it's made up of academics who understand things like that and couldn't possibly be racist because they have some special access to knowledge. Therefore if faculty of colour raise issues of racism they become the transgressors; they have used the r word, it's not acceptable to say this is racist because racism of course is in that small box and they have opened things up in order to make them uncomfortable. Well maybe we do need actually quite a lot more discomfort.

Those are the two more negative forms of whiteness.

3) My third is whiteness as guilt. It's much more difficult to deal with whiteness as guilt because that is the process of white faculty taking on the responsibility, it reminds me of Kipling's white man's burden, taking on the responsibility and often appropriating the responsibility to deal with racism with a kind of confidence that is not a substitute for building allegiances and activism. It can also take the form of pity as though skin colour is a kind of a disease or an affliction and people who are not racialized as white therefore need to be - you need to feel sorry for them and do things for them to make their life better.

I am going to end with at that point by placing on the table the forms that a culture of whiteness takes. I hope it provides a basis for opening it up to discussion for everybody on campus. Coming to terms with the culture of whiteness I think is the first step. And in the context of education, what that means is recognizing and valuing the experiences and the knowledge of people who have been working for a very long time to understand racism. It isn't just about acknowledging the bodies, which is tremendously important,

but acknowledging the embodied knowledge that those bodies bring in order to change curricula, in order to change hiring practices, in order to change relations among everyone at the university, including with students. The first step therefore is, as we are all educators here, is to put in place those education programs that are really going to bring about a change in the culture.

Thank you.

Telling Tales on White Li(v)es, Diversity-Talk, & the Ivory Tower

Dr. Malinda S. Smith, Political Science, University of Alberta

My paper is entitled "Telling Tales on White Li(v)es, White Lies, Diversity-Talk, and the Ivory Tower**."** The paper has a number of sections, I am going to focus primarily on the last three, but I will skip, there's a genealogy of the struggle for employment equity in Canada and employment equity in the academy I will only comment briefly on this. So the first thing I want to do though is talk a little bit about the panel and why I think it's important.

In November 2006 Donna and I spoke at conference on women and liberal arts at the University of Alberta. Our respective research data presented at that conference showed that a mere decade after a series of policies and programs were instituted to effect employment equity in Canadian universities there was a dramatic decline in the representation of three of the four designated groups, what I call the "other" groups.

So despite equity talk little progress has been made in the hiring of visible minorities, persons with disabilities and Aboriginal persons. My own research at the University of Alberta showed a disturbing trend. There were fewer members of these "other" equity groups in some faculties in the university in 2005 than in 1993. So my research found that in faculties of arts and education there were fewer visible minorities, fewer Aboriginal persons, fewer disabled persons than in 1993 to the mid 1990s. So it's not just that we are kind of treading water we are actually not moving at all.

We had some conflicting audience responses to our research which I think is not uncommon - denial, disbelief, guilt, surprise rationalization among others - so I think it was important for us to facilitate a broader national conversation not only about equity which it seems has become synonymous with gender equity but specifically about what we are calling anti-racist equity. Now certainly feminism's various philosophical perspectives popularized the concept of glass ceiling and the ways it functions to circumscribe opportunities across sectors, for women across sectors. This metaphor of a glass ceiling was relevant for women but it did not quite capture the ways in which the doors to the academy remain closed for racialized minorities hence the metaphor trap door. For me the idea of a

colour coded trap door signals several things. Doors can be opened or closed and in fact the University of Alberta's first employment equity report was entitled opening doors.

Basically a trap door is a movable panel that tends to be located either in the floor or ceiling. There are also notions of hidden trap doors which occasionally appear in fiction either as entrances to secret passageways or as literal traps in which a hapless pedestrian may fall if he or she happens to fall in one. I am suggesting that racial minorities seem to be lost in hidden trap doors of the university hiring. But insofar as the trap door can be in the floor or ceiling it is movable then the entrances to its passageways are not always transparent. Similar to the glass ceiling the trap door functions to limit the entrance of racialized minorities in to the academy. It functions to affect both a gender and colour coded outcome one in which primarily white women and men are able to enter. The metaphors of the glass ceiling and trap door captures the erasing practices that underwrite on the one hand the pervasiveness of diversity talk and on the other hand masks the fact of disappearing equity in the academy and masks in fact the normativity of whiteness.

In the next section that follows I want to think through the governing philosophies and political rationalities and how they shape the social struggles of the moment. I suggest two logics in this section, one from a social justice struggle based on ameliorating conditions of collective groups in the 1950s to the 1980s to the current neoliberal orthodoxy which promotes the individualized market based logic in the context of the corporatization of the university. My argument assumes that governing philosophies and prevailing political rationalities produce their own procedures for seeing and representing the order of things including social relations that may be marked by inequality and injustice. Political rationalities tend to privilege particular ways of seeing social and political terrains, tend to privilege specific vocabularies, styles and forms of truth telling as well as truth tellers.

Equity talk emerged in a particular historical moment. It was also positively concerned with human rights this concern frames a relationship between the system of the state born in white dominions of the British empire like Canada, Australia and New Zealand as well as the newly colonizing countries throughout the decades of the 50s, 60s and in to the 80s and 90s and 2000, there was a growing reflection on the concept of systemic

discrimination in Canada. This was reinforced in different ways by the human rights and civil rights movements that sought to redress and ameliorate historical disadvantages in society as well as across sectors of the state and the private sectors of our society. But the struggle for employment equity in Canada has been underway for a mere 20 years. The first act came in to effect in 1985 and the second in 1996. And as I understand it a parliamentary committee in October 2006 began to a review of the earlier decade. My view is equity emerged precisely because the earlier efforts of human rights codes, voluntary affirmative action programs in the 60s and 70s including under Trudeau, they failed. They failed to transform the conditions of racialized minorities and women.

I am going to skip a detailed discussion of those programs that emerged in that period. What I want to do actually is shift to employment equity in the academy. And I am happy to talk about these kinds of things.

Employment equity was introduced in to Canadian academies with rancor and claims that it was political correctness, that it would lower the standards, so the kind of talk of the prevailing rationalities. It would lead to reverse discrimination against white men, whether it would lead to discrimination against other groups is irrelevant, [audience chuckles] but among other things it was claims about so called hot button issues. However since the 70s and 80s employment equity was intimately connected to the social struggles for human rights and social justice. From the beginning it was directed at four groups prioritized in the Abella Report of 1985, precisely because they faced systemic discriminations. By systemic discrimination, which I am calling the trap door, persists today. The other equity seeking groups, so visible minorities, Aborginal persons and persons with disabilities who on the one hand are hypervisible in the formative policies that led to employment equity, and at the same time they soon became invisibilized in policy outcomes, they faced the trap door. Paradoxically then, despite all the equity talk that started in the 1980s by the mid 90s all indicators suggested two things. First equity seemed to have become gender equity and second as important as this goal is, is with few exceptions it was achieved at the same time as other equity groups were being disappeared both figuratively and literally from the university. So after four decades of equity talk and two decades of equity policy there has been little to no significant progress in the hiring of the other equity groups. Despite the plethora of university statements, many reports, websites lauding a welcoming environment, a commitment to inclusion, accommodation, multiculturalism and other liberal

principles, the practice has been disappearing diversity. This disappearing diversity is occurring precisely at the same time as numbers as the numbers of racialized members are increasing in society at large and among the student body. So you have a kind of an apartheid system if you will in which, …I will get more in to that in some sense. But universities are giving lip service to equity even as all the signs reveal the ways in which they continue to privilege whiteness. So what I would like to do then is actually turn to my discussion of gendered ceilings and colour coded trap doors and then in to my discussion of whiteness.

My research at the University of Alberta highlighted a trend of disappearing racialized minority men and women. What it found was that primarily in the arts, humanities and education, white women were being hired. Primarily in engineering, sciences and to some extent business faculties you had more racialized minority men being hired. What you had then is a trend that when racialized minorities are hired almost always it is, and these are like miniscule, we are talking like insignificant numbers to begin with, it is men in a handful of faculties. When women are hired, in the majority of cases they are almost always white able bodied women. This trend of universities hiring white women on the one hand and racialized minority men on the other hand recalls to mind the 1982 work of African American feminists Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith which drew attention to the dominant racialized and gendered hiring practices in American universities. Hull, Scott and Bell noted that these policies function in a way that ensure that all the men are black and all the women are white. The glass ceiling and trap doors function to exclude racialized minority women in particular. The authors suggested that those of us who do not fit in to these gendered and racialized norms, assumptions that are normative, academics must be brave, hence the title of their book, *But Some of Us are Brave*.

Himani Bannerji, Kari Dehli and Linda Carty published their important collection *Unsettling Relations*. The term unsettling relations sought to theorize the process of disrupting the social relations of power and knowledge in universities is questioned, academic feminist position and identification with those relations. Rather this democratizing power relations, the practices of many white feminists who were increasing in the academy function to reinscribe whiteness as normative. Some white liberal feminists in particular argued a kind of universalism which suggested to speak about racialization, indigeneity, or other forms of intersectionality would then loot the women's movement and struggles. There was an

implicit defense and prioritization of white womanhood. Bannerji argued that the very fact of visible minority faculty – and there's a problem with visible minority but I'll get to that - their presence, positionality, voice and practices in the academy could function to unsettle relations along race, gender, sexuality and class lines. Throughout the 1990s women of colour continued to draw on this notion of unsettling relations in order to expose the exclusionary policies and practices. The aim was to transform the academy by achieving the long promised goal of equity in employment and also by ensuring that the academy actually begin to look more like humanity, to paraphrase George Elliot Clarke's comments in the last issue of *Academic Matters.*

For Bannerji an important principle guiding this work was of accountability. At the same time feminist conceptions of accountability were largely forgetting political rationalities in which social justice struggles within the academy were intimately linked to civil society movements. The institutions of governance amid/[inaudible] the social justice within the academy women of colour also were conscious of the link between power and knowledge, between the discursive and material relations in order to work to excavate, subjugate and subaltern knowledges, as well as produce new knowledges and epistemologies. The desire was to transform not only what we know, which often hinged on privileging the European canon, or how we know it, which was primarily shaped by positivism, but also who is understood as the knower, so bodies do matter. Employment equity policies were an important element in ensuring representation, voice and new knowledges and ways of knowing within the academy. Along with representation and voice, the gaze also became an important element in anti-racist equity struggles. Sherene Razack, for example, theorized the necessity and benefit of looking white women in the eyes and has subsequently extended this to the importance of subjugated peoples to look white people in the eye. Similarly Bannerji suggested racialized minorities need to return the gaze, as an important oppositional strategy both in the academy and in society at large. Returning the gaze, looking white people in the eye and asking impolitic even impolite questions were important for the historical memory of the experiences of many racialized minorities. It was an assertive strategy that enabled them, these minorities, to consciously distance themselves from their past histories of subjugation, of colonialism, indigenous dispossession, slavery, apartheid and other forms of domination and exploitation. Precisely because of the relations of power and exploitation they could be the reason why racialized minorities might not want to meet the gaze of white people. Including this

desire to avoid the pain and frustration of conscious historical memory, meeting and returning the gaze square on however is important for affirming one's equal humanity. At this particular historical conjuncture it is imperative that the gaze is turned on its hegemonic practices of both white men and white women who arguably are among the new gate keepers of the academy and thus help to authorize colour coded glass ceilings and trap doors. An important oppositional question to ask of white women, particularly white feminists in the academy who I presume are committed to equity, is have you noticed can you account for the fact of whiteness and why after all these years the trend continues to mirror the 1980s when new hirings were dominated by men of colour and white women? Have you noticed? More specifically in regard to [inaudible] perhaps the question I want to ask next is what's up with whiteness? Why are white scholars, white men, employing the bodies of white women, hiring as if we were cloning or socially producing white people like themselves? This trend leads me then to my next section in which I want to take up Bannerji and Razack and return the gaze and offer some critical, perhaps impolitic questions about whiteness. I am mindful of the time.

So what's up with whiteness? White lives white lies. bell hooks suggested that rather than or in addition to white scholars giving their take on blackness, those same scholars would do well to theorize what's going on with whiteness. hooks challenged white scholars to move beyond simply acknowledging whiteness to think through its implications, its standpoint, motivation and directions of white people, its subjectivities, ontologies, and epistemologies and the possibilities of transformative politics in the academy and of our society. There are a number of double entendres in the title of my paper. The first, telling tales, speaks both to the practice of story telling and the need to tell on universities that too often engage only lip service around issues of equity and hence they fail to achieve the promise of equity in employment. Similarly white lives suggests we need to return the gaze upon white people to ask, as I did earlier - what accounts for the tendency to hire only people that looks like oneself? White lies deliberately placed in the conventional understanding that little white lies are not so bad. Hence concern with the little untruths we tell, particularly as it relates to issues of excellence, colourblindness neutrality, objectivity and other tall tales. Since the early 1990s interrogations of whiteness have become a significant element of critical race theorizing in white settler societies like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. The resulting critical whiteness studies draws attention to the deeply contested meanings of

whiteness, to the ways in which whiteness is socially and discursively constructed, how white people are racialized in ways in which they may be visible, even those marked by its normativity, and by those who are the beneficiary of its institutional, material and symbolic privileges, and to the ways in which whiteness may limit notions of agency, accountability and other oppositional strategies.

Critical whiteness studies aims to racialize whiteness or whiten race to render its power and privileges visible and to make it an explicit part of expressions of racism and anti-racist practices in universities. In Canada critical race theorists variously have been engaged in an interrogation of the fact of whiteness and its durability over time and space and public policies and the ways in which the "tough geography" of Canada's landscape as Derek Walcott terms it, continues to be troubled by questions of race and space and the absented presence of the "others." Interrogations of the normativity of whiteness draws attention to the ways of thinking and theorizing about racialization as processes that impacts the coloured ones or the others. In contrast white is constructed ahistorically as a non-colour and as deracinated. The racialized others become "visible" minorities and "people of colour," but this is always already in relation to notions of hegemonic whiteness. The silent and relational aspect of whiteness has implications for the language of the official Canadian discourses of visible minorities and multiculturalism which come to function as operative categories, injunctions or codes of command which bid us to be silent or remove ourselves from areas or places where we may be seen. To be labeled visible is to be told to become invisible or to get lost. People of colour are simultaneously invisible and overexposed. Today critical engagements of whiteness in Canada reveal the ways in which it shapes the boundaries of community and of belonging and how the encounter between Whites and indigenous people and peoples of colour are marked by ambivalence, desire and the performance of dominance as well as the material, psychic and symbolic implications of whiteness.

So despite my ambivalence and wariness about advocating a critical whiteness studies, and the risk of recentering rather than destabilizing whiteness, I believe it's important to take the study of whiteness seriously in Canada as a white settler society as well as in the ivory tower. In order to do this white feminists have to critically examine institutional whiteness in the academy, and by reflecting on whiteness as a political discourse that is neither ontological nor unitary, we need to understand that whiteness is a

contested concept, and that there is an ongoing need to interrogate the regulatory signifiers that have shaped whiteness and white womanhood and privileges within the academy.

Whiteness operates through normalizing and dividing practices, including practices that mark some of us as visible, racialized minorities, as other minorities and others of us. So there is this hierarchy even among visible minorities in the context of whiteness as undesirable and as not belonging. I am suggesting that whiteness is the organizing principle of academia, one that signifies and controls insiders and outsiders. So we need to focus more specifically on how institutional whiteness is constituted and how it functions.

What I want to do then is actually to wrap up and offer some concluding remarks. We currently live in the moment shaped by a new governing philosophy, one which aims to restrict the capacity to collect data and to make structural claims. Under the current government for example we have witnessed the death of the Law Commission of Canada, and the Court Challenges Program, debilitating cuts to the Status of Women, its independent research fund and most recently to multiculturalism programs. Moreover the Status of Women has had to remove equality from its mandate. Undermining these programs which sought to give voice and representation to women and racialized minorities makes it harder to make claims about structural disadvantage and hence it makes it difficult the ability to make equity claims as well. So we are witnessing an attempt to silence and jettison equality talk altogether. At the same time universities and college faculties are homogenizing despite all the diversity talk. This homogenization is increasingly differentiating faculty from the students and from the communities in which they live. Yet it has been met with a thundering silence. There are not a lot of people standing up and contesting the erasure of racialized minorities, which speaks to the fundament lack of commitment to equity and social justice despite the diversity talk. I am mindful that there is a lot of fear of lost benefits and privileges for speaking out about these kinds of topics. But to conclude, neoliberal developments suggest that the current moment is hostile to an equity agenda and to raising equity claims. In such an environment it is risky to make claims of being disadvantaged by glass ceilings and colour coded trap doors, including drawing on empirical data. It also begs the question is anyone listening? In the current era of neoliberal globalization equity demands new strategies which must begin by examining the stories people tell including the tall tells

and white lies. We need to create spaces that will ensure that other stories, storytellers and stories are heard. Arguably if we allow the continuation of dividing practices that juxtaposes gender equity against the others, if we allow equity talk to be silenced, then we all lose.

Getting Radical: Racism, Complacency and Self-Deception in Academic Culture

Professor Joanne St. Lewis, University of Ottawa Law School

Obviously everything that has been said resonates very strongly for me. I was trying to figure out what is it that I could offer and what do I have to say in this context that could be both complementary and perhaps moving us forward and what I mean by that is….maybe you need to know a little bit about me.

I went to McGill in 1989 which was I got my BA when I was 19 at the time. I was nineteen when I got my BA so we're talking about a bit of time. I got my law degree in 1993. I have been called to the bar for quite a while. I've got great genes. I thank my mother every day for her great genes [laughter]. But one of the things that I am observing is that, on one hand I agree we have a shrinking window in terms of the public policy conversation around equality and social justice generally. But one of the consequences is I think that we are thinking very small. We have allowed the world in which we envision what is supposed to be, to be circumscribed and we contribute to that circumscription. So we look outwards and say here are all these barriers here are all the doors here is where I am not in and somehow that becomes the world. Now all I can do is tell you a bit about how I think. I am not remotely suggesting it is the solution. I am not remotely suggesting that even the choices I have made or my responses to those choices are even typical. I have been told over and over again they're actually not typical, okay. So that's what you're about to hear from me.

I absolutely believe that we need more diversity however, whatever term you want to use, but not because of the photo op that makes us all comfortable, because without that you don't actually have intellectual depth. You don't have opportunities for creativity. You don't have resonance you don't have a truly functioning democracy, if you systematically continue to exclude people who are supposed to be reaping the benefits of knowledge construction.

Your knowledge is always going to be partial and very limited. So to me the starting point isn't really about my feelings and whether it'd be nice to have…It is that we are less strong as a society. Your knowledge base, your

disciplines, everything it's almost like continuing to want to live in a flatter theorized world, and that's one of the consequences, because we are sitting and speaking about it here as academics and I think that that is one of the pieces that we don't always bring back to the pool. Why is it that we want to do this? And when we do it, what is it going to be that embodies our success? How are we going to capture and understand that we have been successful?

And I am going to go in and out of talking about a couple of ideas and I am just going to throw them out because I am hoping that there will be questions and an opportunity for conversation and I know my time is limited, so I hope it's not too fragmented I just want to throw out a couple of ideas. One for example is this issue of credentials. Who is qualified and who is competent to enter in to these institutions and how we evaluate people. Now clearly there has been an escalation of credentials, certainly in my field. I am in law and I am in a professional school so that is affecting some of what I am saying. But many of the people who taught me only had undergraduate degrees and they had the law degree and often some of them were called to the bar. But that was it. Now it is really not unusual at all to find that you're going to have people not only with a minimum of a master's degree in law but they're going to have doctorates in law, so there's been an escalation. Now of course escalation is fine, I'd say, …well but does it mean that people are smarter? Does it mean that they have more to offer? I am not necessarily persuaded that I was poorly taught by people with the LLBs but it becomes an interesting filter. Why am I raising that? Because if you accept that there is systemic racism and systemic inequality then as you escalate you are winnowing out people because it becomes costly. Just the simple act of getting the credential starts changing who is available to you. So even if the pool of who is available to you looks diverse, there are people if you're just thinking about raw skill and talent who are simply not there because they can't afford it. They're just not there. You're not choosing them They're self selecting, they're going some place else. So that's a piece that we're not gleaming. Now if it is that costly then it's triggering something else, so I am talking more about the internal piece. If I have to pay that much, if I have to sacrifice that much, how risky and how far will I go in my master's degree, in my doctorate, doctoral studies? Where will I go how far will my supervisor, even if that isn't a pleasant situation, how far will I go? When I present to that faculty how far will I go? The upshot of it as far as I'm concerned is an accumulation and a layering on of self censorship over

and over again, which is partially because it's being realistic to the situation people are in and you might say oh it's being, I like that word, strategic.

But the upshot of it is a form of intellectual impoverishment that we all pay the price for is what I'd like to suggest. Now that's a really interesting thing. I don't have a master's degree. In fact I am one in the last 15 or more hires I am the only one without an LLM - that means that I had an extremely pleasant time obtaining tenure. There's a reason why my thing says assistant professor even though I have been at my faculty for quite some time. Now when I got hired by the dean at the time he actually didn't know me. He took me aside as he gave me that letter that suggested that I needed to get the LLM and he said you know I've formed an impression of you and I don't know, you aren't going to do this thing are you? And I said but if I tell you I'm not going to do this thing then I can't sign the letter, can I? I said well I don't know I might be drawn towards it, I might do it. He said that's good enough for me sign the letter [laughter].

Now when I went through my interviews it was fascinating to me. I was the only black person hired at the time and yet my colleagues including my progressive feminist colleagues describe me as an equity hire [murmurs from audience]. Now I find that fascinating. Why? Because there had been a hire with a number of white women candidates and they could not simply say that I had outperformed those candidates and say that to their friends. It was easier for them to say we did an equity hire and we hired a black child. But they didn't frame it that way, but I do know they said that because of the number of times it came up in other contexts within that next year. When people said "we didn't know that U of O had an equity policy on hiring…" and I said "well neither did I" [laughter]. Now that was shades of my first actual weeks of law school, because I went to UBC. And there were 234 students and I was the only black student in the class and people kept asking me if I was there on an affirmative action program. And I actually quite proudly said, "yes but it's not working very well; they only found me, I am the only one" [laughter]. But it speaks to something very interesting. Because usually at that point is when you start to doubt yourself; you start to say well do I really need to get this degree. So I said okay I signed this letter and I'm a lawyer, kinda understand I just think about contracts and [inaudible]. So off I trot and I apply to McGill University. And I don't want you to think I'm a difficult person because I am not. I am a very gentle lamb flower and off I went and I'll tell you what happened. And I decide I'm taking these interesting courses, some I don't know. Two reactions - I'll just

give you two reactions to say what part of the problem is that we have. In one class I chose to write a paper it was a philosophy class and I decided to do,… because I wanted to look at Aristotle and I was doing a critical analysis of Aristotle from my critical race perspective to which the professor said to me he had never seen or heard of anybody I was referring to [she laughing] in the paper, and he didn't know what to do with it. Well that didn't stop me, I proceeded to write the paper anyway.

The other class was more interesting. I was in the master's program taking a course, and I had a colleague, so this is now a colleague who has to teach me, say to me well I really would prefer if you weren't in the class, because you have such a level of expertise and uniqueness I think you are making the other students uncomfortable. Now you know what had happened? I wasn't making the other students uncomfortable. I was making the professor uncomfortable. And in fact what happened is I just agreed and I didn't go. I thought I'm not going to fight over this my life is too short. What happened is the students winged out of control. Because why? Because there were very few students of colour so from their perspective it wasn't that I was a professor it was that I was an outspoken woman of colour in their class who was raising issues that made it safer for them to raise issues in the classroom because I was challenging certain things and now I wasn't in the classroom, so what happened to me, right? At the end of the day I didn't finish my LLM because I couldn't adapt to what was happening in these classes.

Now I knew I was going to face this wonderful thing – that there was a tenure requirement that seemed to require the LLM. Now you know the end of the story which is I have tenure. And part of the reason I am saying it this in this context is people seem to think that all of these things in collective agreements are intractable. Is the battle a huge and awful and messy and nasty one? Yes it was not pleasant, okay. But I did get my tenure without having that credential. At the end of the day I believed there was something different between academics, and being an academic and being an intellectual in my view can be quite separate things. I have no doubt that I am an intellectual. I didn't necessarily have the academic qualifications and I was willing to fight for the fact that I viewed myself as being entitled to be in that specific environment. I am a stubborn child. I felt that I was supposed to teach at that school, in that office, that I had, with those students. So it wasn't even a matter of could I go someplace else. No, it was we're all going to grow as people together, because I'm going to have this battle. My colleagues were very supportive, so I ended up eventually with a unanimous

tenure committee. And they were colleagues coming from different perspectives. My dean separated myself from the unanimous tenure committee and recommended that I not be granted tenure. This precipitated the central committee to say I should not be granted tenure. So I actually have this wonderful letter saying that I am not competent and you see I'm a bit of an egomaniac, I actually read it from time to time and laugh and amuse myself in my office. And I thought how very interesting that I am not seen as competent, because by this time, some of you do know me, by this time I had just finished getting two national awards. And I had at that point been seen as one of the leading people in my field. And I was thinking, how fascinating, this is fascinating I can't meet basic "see spot, spot is a dog" threshold here.

Now at any point could I have gone and gotten the LLM, I can honestly tell you yes, it wouldn't have been an impossibility to do. I simply felt it was crazy. It was crazy making for me. I wasn't interested in trying to figure out how to write an essay and spend those life moments writing something that somebody else could understand when I wasn't interested in that and I was thinking something different. It wasn't flattering for me to hear I don't understand what you're talking about. Well that's why I am at the university for heaven's sakes, because I am trying to create new knowledge, I am really not interested in regurgitating pap to you, so that you get something so that you can understand how to grade it. Not interested.

Now I am not saying that's a solution, but I'm saying at every point even with barriers there are choices. You have to decide how you're going to live your life and what the integrity is to the quality of the life that you're going to go forward with. It's not giving over your power simply because somebody says there is a barrier. Not everybody's going to want to slug it out, I truly get that. I also get that not everybody can support their colleagues in other institutions. I was,… it was before my tenure when I was supporting some of my colleagues who were fighting at other universities. I wrote personally to the president of the universities to call them out on their racism. I was told by some people that was not strategically wise and it could cost me my own tenure. And I said my life is very short I don't know where I'm going to be two years from now. I only know that this is a fight now and I have something to say and I am willing to stand up and be counted for that person on this issue, now. And I will deal with two years from now whatever that battle is when it comes because that becomes my battle. In my own battle I didn't rally bazillion people and write a lot of

letters, I saw it as something that was more internal to the university, but it's important to know why. The reason I did that was because I actually believed at the end of the day I was going to win. And I knew I would have to reconstruct a relationship with all of those people in my faculty. And the extent to which I had pushed them well beyond their capacity to bear being told they were fundamentally racist would mean it would have been an untenable unlivable situation for me.

Now at the time I couldn't predict what happened more recently. So that was my experience. I have quite a bit of academic freedom there. I teach what I want to teach I have great students. But we had a hiring cycle. Every year I'd say something about how unrepresentative we were. But I think it might be important to know this. Dealing with the same dean of the decision that was made and I actually analyzed what he did in a very specific way. I did not think he had any personal animosity towards me and I treated him as such. I have been told by my father that if you look at somebody and you show them a reflection of their better selves they will live up to the image that you project of them. I also believe bone deep shaming works [laughter]. And so my view was, by never calling out, by taking this incredible high road my moment would come. I didn't know what it would be, but it came with the hiring.

We had a hiring which was a totally racialized hire at our faculty. And I don't know if anybody else has ever done that. We hired five racialized faculty in a row in a pool in which there were no white people. And I did that. When we were asked about that, you can imagine my colleagues and both for a number of very sound reasons, as well as some of my racialized colleagues believed that the stigmata of being hired in that cycle would actually affect all of these individuals. And how would they know that they were good enough? I said you don't seem to understand my perspective. I happen to believe that a racialized pool would be a stronger and more superior pool and I can construct it and show you that. I am either right or I'm wrong. I am not asking you to hire a specific number. I am saying we have approximately seven positions and I am saying hire as many as you would like of the pool I will construct for you and support you in developing. That is what I am going to do. But you will give them a shot. Because I personally don't understand why you didn't think it was affirmative action when you hired white man after white man in all white male pools. And when you have been hiring white woman after white woman in all white pools and so I am not getting why those people are not

terribly stigmatized since they have not had the benefit of competing against extremely strong racialized people to reach to the pinnacles that they have, so I am not getting it.

Now my colleagues, uhm I know that if they'd realized what I'd said it might have been very stressful since they ended up getting hired. But we all get along. At the end of the day they hired five and why did they hire five? Because they were so overwhelmed by how amazingly good they were, [from audience because why?] because they were so amazingly overwhelmed by how good they were [oh] how dynamic they were. They they, just they, so in thinking,…oh well we'll get one or two, it was like "no no, we don't want to lose this one and we don't want to lose this one, and we're gonna make the offer on this one."

What that did and that goes to what we're talking about here in terms of overall strategies and why did I do that, why did I risk that overall mark of Cain kind of piece for the hiring? Because I know that if we don't have critical mass and if we are not diverse enough in the pool itself the pressure is extremely great. These people coupled by the people that are already there actually broke down the barrier; the subsequent hiring cycles didn't need that. The subsequent hiring cycles actually hired other racialized people, they didn't sit there and say we hired in that cycle we don't need to do need to do it again. It broke down something in their heads about what people could do and contribute.

But we're different from each other. We're in very different fields, and so that pressure that we sometimes grate against each other because we sometimes feel betrayed because "oh my god how could they say that now I have to deal with whiteness and that person is a collaborator. It is almost like you're in a war. You're in a trench war. You don't feel quite of that. And you have more scope to have a range of responses. I am not remotely saying these things because I think that they are ideal solutions. I am just saying it's possible to dream in a more enlarged way. I just had, and it sounds so egocentric, I had a sense of where I wanted to work and where I wanted to live, and the way I wanted to live. And I really did appreciate my colleagues, but I told them, you're not enough for me. It's not workin.' It's just not enough, it's not good intentions. It's about a capacity to have intellectual communication, that at every point I don't have to explain every single aspect. It's to be able to move forward.

I mean one of my colleagues, and I am sort of putting him on the spot - I know it's being videotaped - that we hired, I think that one of the things that really struck me - he works in the area of law and development. But I think what was most striking was when he made a presentation which was in the other faculty, we're in the commonwealth section, which was largely attended by the civil law faculty which was in French, looking at the relevance of the methodology of Zen to law. It's totally new, it's totally unusual. It can't happen.

You can't get new things if people are not in spaces where they know that they can think in the most abstract way and bring in a conversation about the Darma and know that nobody is gonna say well exactly how does relate to the statute and who are you talking about and which decision are you looking at? But you, I don't know what that will mean at the end of the day. I do know that all of us in the room, listening to that presentation knew that we were listening to something wonderful. And what was wonderful which I think should be a part of what we are trying to do as academics was that it was new. And so as much as I do think and I agree with everything that we've talked about here, and if these things hadn't been said I wouldn't have had the luxury of being able to speak about why we do it. We do it not just for us to be present, but for the possibility of the new, of the engaged, of the fantastic that we haven't yet seen. And we can only do that in this collective endeavour of intellectual work. On the one hand it is work alone but it requires an audience it requires the sharing it requires communication and all of that underlies why we're doing this. So the extent to which we have an extremely impoverished and narrow understanding of what equity should be, is the extent to which we fail ourselves and we fail our institutions.

So I know I am out of time so I will end it there.

QUESTIONS:
[Female] You probably know this, but I am wondering do you agree that quite often when people in a position of higher power say I don't often understand what you're saying they are just trying to being polite and what they really mean is I disagree [laughter].

Joanne: I absolutely agree think that and I was taking that part about silencing very seriously. Because one of the things I think we need to give ourselves more permission to be is to be more rude and direct. At least that is my view. I feel that when people do something like that they are given me permission to respond in any way necessary to deal with it, because I don't

like putzing around. And so I think that sometimes we have to call people on it. I had a discussion just the other day with a colleague who was saying well I am negotiating with this person. I said no, you are not in a negotiation. They're not listening to you, they're being disingenuous. Why are you having that conversation? Simply go back and tell them that your life is too short, until they are ready to come there and say something meaningful to you don't go back. And then she looked at me and she said what [laughter]. But that's part of it, right? Part of the game is somebody says something and they get you to collaborate in your own disempowerment by it. So I totally agree with you. But I think the next step in knowing it is that you must, and I am not saying everybody has to, but I have a tendency to name it. I have been known to get up and walk out of things and be very very clear. I have just simply said we all seem to be at this point, it's see spot, spot is a dog for me. This is what I think is on the table, if you want to continue this way call me when you get here. I'm going to my office. I just get up and I go. I mean the hiring was like that. I did the piece that I had to do and they said where are you going? I said I've done it. They said you're on the committee for the chair I said no I'm not I have accomplished this, I'm going back I have other things to do and I never went back to another hiring meeting. I wasn't interested in having other kinds of conversations [she is laughing], so you know I agree with you, I agree with you.

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