

What Knowers Know Well: Women, Work and the Academy

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Abstract

Research on the status and experience of women in academia in the last 30 years has challenged conventional explanations of persistent gender inequality, bringing into sharp focus the cumulative impact of small scale, often unintentional differences in recognition and response: the patterns of 'post-civil rights era' discrimination made famous by the 1999 report on the status of women in the MIT School of Science. I argue that feminist standpoint theory is a useful resource for understanding how this sea change in understanding gender inequity was realized. At the same time, close attention to activist research on workplace environment issues suggests ways in which our understanding of standpoint theory can fruitfully be refined. I focus on the implications of two sets of distinctions: between types of epistemic injustice (and correlative advantage) that may affect marginalized knowers; and between the resources of situated knowledge and those of a critical standpoint on knowledge production.

When the MIT report, 'Women in the School of Science,' appeared in 1999, the terms of public debate about the status of women in science, and in academia generally, were fundamentally reframed. What the authors of this report declared, with electrifying effect, was that discrimination in the 'post-civil rights era' is subtle but no less effective for all that. They reported inequities in resources and support and, crucially, in outcomes for women that persist even in the absence of intentional discrimination. Discrimination in the 1990s, they argued, takes the form of innumerable small differences in uptake and response: 'a pattern of powerful but unrecognized attitudes and assumptions that work systematically against women despite good will' (MIT 1999, 11). Although individual incidents may seem to be trivial, cumulatively they translate into patterns of 'exclusion and invisibility' that can have a substantial impact on the quality of women's work life, their effectiveness in the workplace, and their career trajectories compared to those of similarly well trained and accomplished men (1999, 8).

The authors of the MIT report contrast these contemporary patterns of marginalization with the forms of explicit sex discrimination that had been addressed, in the United States, by executive orders (for federal contractors) and landmark equal opportunity legislation instituted in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹ In the background is a conventional framework for explaining persistent gender inequality in academia that was articulated in particularly clear and influential terms by Jonathan Cole in *Fair Science* (1979), and reiterated nearly thirty years later by Lawrence Summers (then President of Harvard), in his infamous remarks about women's lack of capacity for careers in science (2005). On Cole's account, absent evidence of intentional discrimination, gender imbalances in the representation of women must reflect differences in the choices they make and in their accomplishments. Women must be self-selecting out of the sciences at higher rates than men and, when they do persist, he argued that gender differences in outcome (progress through the ranks, recognition, compensation) can all be explained by lower levels of productivity among women, compared to men, that cannot be accounted for by marital or parental status. Summers filled the explanatory lacunae in this account with the conventional wisdom that these patterns persist because women typically lack the necessary intellectual talent and drive to succeed in science (2005). Although Cole and Summers focus on women in science, these presuppositions surface, in field-specific terms, across academic disciplines and the professions.

¹ For example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act that was passed in 1972 struck down exemptions from the equal-employment-opportunity laws that had been granted to educational institutions under Title VII (Rossiter 1995, 376), while Title IX extended the Equal pay Act of 1963 to higher education and banned sex discrimination in any institution receiving federal funding (Rossiter 1995, 382). With this legislation in place there was tremendous optimism, for the next decade, that gains in the academic training pipeline would translate into steady improvement in the representation of women in the ranks of faculty.

Although Cole's account has been canonical in many contexts, he did face sharp criticism at the time. Margaret Rossiter published a prescient review of *Fair Science* in 1981, objecting that Cole 'seemed unwilling to face his own evidence' (101).² She reads his analysis against the grain, reinterpreting his statistical results—his distributional data—as evidence that women in science might be facing a persistent pattern of underestimation and marginalization such that 'the rate of exchange' (Cole's terms) by which they built research careers and reputations was different than for men; they received less recognition, compensation, and support for the same kinds of training, institutional affiliation, and track record of accomplishments, with ramifying consequences. She cites, in this connection, a growing body of research on evaluation bias that Cole had not considered,³ and urged consideration of a richer set of explanatory possibilities for the patterns of underrepresentation he reported. It should be a priority, she argued, to 'try to understand the attitudes and behavior patterns that *lie behind* the distributional data' (1981, 103, emphasis added).

In the next 15 years an enormous body of grass roots activist research took shape that was animated by the suspicion, articulated by Rossiter, that the sciences, and academia generally, were not fair, not quite the level playing field that Cole maintained. Women reported innumerable ways in which institutional and disciplinary environments put them at a disadvantage, deflecting them from academic careers or marginalizing them within academia, even as they entered and succeeded in graduate programs at unprecedented rates. The MIT report is a recent and especially high profile outcome of a process that had unfolded over and over again in diverse academic and disciplinary settings since the early 1980s. A growing awareness of dissonance between their experience as women in academia and their expectations that academia is a meritocracy—that intellectual talent and contributions would be recognized and rewarded regardless of gender or race or other markers of social difference—focused their attention, often with great reluctance, on characteristic features of what came to be known as the 'chilly climate' for women in academia (Hall and Sandler 1982, 1984, Sandler 1986). Working groups and ad hoc committees undertook finegrained studies of local dynamics of interaction that might account for the persistent disparities in women's rates of appointment, promotion, compensation, and in other measures of academic outcome that were being documented at an institutional, discipline-wide, and national level. The results were typically reported in internal institutional self-studies, the reports of committees on the status of women, and pamphlets circulated by feminist research institutes. Often these reports provoked sharply hostile responses that reiterated, or presupposed, Cole's explanatory framework (e.g., Michell and Backhouse 1995, 138-142): if intention to discriminate could not be demonstrated, there were no grounds for attributing unfairness to the institutions of science or to the academic communities in which women continued to find themselves on the 'outer circle' (Zuckerman et al. 1991), 'outsiders in the sacred grove' (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988).

I argue that feminist standpoint theory is a useful resource for understanding the transformative shift in thinking about 'women, work and the academy'⁴ marked by the MIT report, as well as resistance to the central insights of 'chilly climate' studies that continues even as these are vindicated by the results of mainstream (professional) research in cognitive psychology and sociology. Reformulated in non-essentialist, pragmatic terms, feminist standpoint theory provides a framework for understanding why it was so difficult to identify and delineate patterns of epistemic injustice in academic institutions and how, in some cases, these very patterns of marginalization conferred epistemic advantage on those who were disadvantaged by them, putting them in a position to recognize and to document phenomena that were rendered inscrutable by the normative ideals of academic meritocracy.⁵ At the same time, chilly climate research puts productive pressure on some key assumptions of standpoint theory, drawing attention to various kinds of epistemic advantage that may accrue to those who are marginalized in different ways

² See also Harrison White who objected that, as a 'patriotic citizen of science,' Cole had begged the question of the fairness of science, lacking the data and the controls necessary to establish his favored conclusions (1982, 951).

³ As Rossiter points out, a number of controlled studies were available to Cole that documented systematic differences in the ways Curriculum Vitae are evaluated if they are attributed to women as opposed to men. One especially influential example was Lewin and Duchan's 1971 article in *Science*; Tosi and Einbender provide an overview of work along these lines that had appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s (1985).

⁴ The substantive details of this shift are outlined below, and summarized in report on the current state of research on equity issues for women in the academy, *Women, Work, and the Academy* (Wylie, Jakobsen, Fosado 2007).

⁵ In complementary analyses (this volume), Fehr considers the epistemic advantages that may accrue to situational diversity as well as the impediments to its uptake in a research community, and Rooney takes up these issues reflexively, with respect to epistemology.

(socially and epistemically), and sharpening an implicit distinction between the resources of situated knowledge and those of a critical standpoint on knowledge production. I turn first to a characterization of standpoint theory, then expand on the sketch I have given of how gender inequity has been reconceptualized in the last 25 to 30 years. I conclude with an analysis of the epistemic implications of this example of a hard-won shift in collective understanding that was mobilized by insights from the margins.

8.1 Standpoint Theory and Epistemic Injustice

I find it useful to think of standpoint theory as one instance of a broader genre: a form of social epistemology that focuses attention on the social conditions—the composition and dynamics of epistemic communities—by which knowledge production and authorization can be systematically skewed. It is, then, a theory of epistemic injustice in the sense usefully elaborated by Miranda Fricker (2006, 2007), that focuses attention on ways in which epistemic practice can be improved, given a robust appreciation of the epistemic advantages that may accrue to those who are otherwise marginalized.

Epistemic injustice is a form of systematic epistemic misrecognition; it arises, Fricker argues, when norms of credibility ‘imitate structures of social power’ (Fricker 1998, 170, 172), so that our socially inflected ‘working indicators’ of rational authority pick out the powerful and not necessarily the knowledgeable or the truthful. These patterns of misrecognition generate two kinds of epistemic injustice that are relevant for current purposes. The first takes root when members of socially recognized categories or communities—defined, for example, by gender, race, ethnic or religious affiliation, sexual identity, age, class—find that their competence is always in question, no matter what their epistemic credentials or track record. This is what Fricker describes as testimonial injustice (2007, 1, 9-29). In this case it is epistemic agents who are misrecognized (*qua* members of social kinds); they are not accorded the rational authority they deserve given their identification with subdominant or disvalued ‘social kinds,’ even if the epistemic claims they make take a form or have content that is conventionally recognized and valued as knowledge.⁶ Sometimes such injustice is deliberate; it is a matter of intentional imposture as credible, or of a cynical refusal to attribute epistemic authority to those who are socially marginal, whatever evidence or arguments they may bring to bear.⁷ Often such misrecognition is inadvertent; in cases of ‘credibility overspill’ attributions of competence overreach the limits of the expertise marked by working indicators, and the reverse in cases of credibility deficit, without anyone intending or even noticing (Fricker 1998, 169).

A second type of misrecognition, which Fricker refers to as ‘hermeneutical injustice,’ is a function of systematic gaps in the interpretive resources available to epistemic agents that put those who are marginal socially and materially at an epistemic disadvantage, not just testimonially but also conceptually and communicatively. Hermeneutical injustice (2007, 147-161) becomes entrenched when dominant norms of credibility and ‘interpretive habits’ render unintelligible any distinctive forms of experience or understanding that those in marked social categories may develop as a consequence of their social location. As Fricker describes this, ‘relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experience ready to drawn on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves...with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw in the effort to render [their experience] intelligible’ (2007, 148). While conceptually distinct, these two types of epistemic injustice reinforce one another in obvious ways. For example, when there is pressure on norms of credibility to track power, the ability of those on the margins to advocate their knowledge and trustworthiness is diminished, especially in areas where what they know does not conform to dominant cultural norms (Fricker 1998, 169). By extension, when dominant groups are in a position to ‘project their experience as representative of everyone in society...often [as] an unconscious act’ (McConkey 2004, 202), they also project, well beyond the contexts where they originate, working indicators that sanction not just familiar kinds of knowers, but also the forms of knowledge and norms of plausibility associated with them. As McConkey’s observation suggests, working indicators of competence and of plausibility are most effective, and most invidious—

⁶ I have in mind, here, a conception of social kinds as contingently constituted by looping effects of the sort characterized by Hacking (1999, 34, 103-104). See also Moya (2000).

⁷ Derrick Bell’s ‘Rules of Racial Standing’ is a particularly stark and compelling account of how epistemic injustice of this kind operates (1992, 109-126).

most impervious to change—when they take root in the attributional heuristics on which we depend to navigate the social world. In this case, ‘habits of epistemically charged social perception’ (Fricker 2007, 5) become socially charged habits of epistemic judgment that are content-laden, tuned to interpretive resources that reflect the interests and experience of the powerful.

Misrecognition of both kinds—of subdominant knowers and of subdominant forms of knowledge—is properly described as epistemic injustice when, or to the extent that, socially defined categories of people and their distinctive forms of knowledge are systematically excluded from participation in an epistemic practice—from the ‘rhetorical spaces’ in which their claims could be heard and systematically adjudicated.⁸

The central tenets of feminist standpoint theory converge on this account of epistemic injustice at a number of key points.⁹ First, and most important for the analysis that follows, both presuppose a *situated knowledge* thesis, where the situatedness of epistemic agents is construed in structural terms rather than as a matter of individual perspective or idiosyncratic skills and talents. In short: what individuals experience and understand is (contingently) shaped by systems of social differentiation that structure and are, in turn, structured by the material conditions of their lives, the relations of production and reproduction that condition their social interactions, and the cultural and conceptual resources available to them for representing and interpreting these relations.¹⁰

Second, standpoint theorists are typically concerned not only with the epistemic effects of positionality or situatedness (*social location*), but with our differential capacity to develop the kind of standpoint *on* knowledge production that is a ‘project’ (Weeks 1996, 101): a critical consciousness of the conditions under which knowledge is produced and authorized, and of the difference that our situatedness makes to epistemic agency.¹¹ Standpoint theory is itself such a project, animated by a commitment to understand how power relations inflect knowledge—what epistemic limitations or advantages accrue to epistemic agents as a function of their location in and negotiation of structured systems of social relations—especially where there is a mismatch between the epistemic resources of socially marginal or subdominant agents and the credibility ascribed to them on the basis of conventional norms of credibility.

Finally, and most controversially, standpoint theory is characterized by an ‘inversion’ thesis. A central tenet of standpoint theory is that those who are marginalized (socially, politically, economically), and who suffer epistemic injustice as a consequence may, in fact, be epistemically advantaged in key respects. This is a matter of shifting the emphasis from analysis of the epistemically disabling effects of systemic inequality to a consideration of epistemic resources (evidence and experience) that are ignored or discounted as a consequence of testimonial injustice,¹² and to distinctive insights that may arise from non-mainstream experience and the struggle to understand and communicate it. In short, standpoint theory focuses attention on ways in which the experience of those on the margins may put them in a position to know different things, or to know some things better, than those who are comparatively privileged and whose status secures for them more automatic and more comprehensive epistemic credibility.

It is important to note that, on this formulation of the inversion thesis, the types of epistemic advantage posited by standpoint theory are localized and contingent. Standpoint theory need not and, here, does not presuppose an *essentialist* conception of the social kinds in terms of which standpoints are

⁸ The term ‘rhetorical spaces’ comes from Code (1995). See Fricker (2007, 157-158) for a discussion of this requirement of systematicity in relation to hermeneutical injustice.

⁹ This analysis and reformulation of feminist standpoint theory is developed in more detail in Wylie (2003).

¹⁰ Fricker usefully distinguishes between three senses of ‘structured’ that figure in Hartsock’s formulation of the central claims of standpoint theory (1983): an agent’s resources may be structured in a material, an ontological, and an epistemic sense (2007: 147). I mean to indicate here the interdependence of structuring forces in these three senses.

¹¹ For example, Nancy Hartsock makes the point that ‘a standpoint is not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged’ (1983, 285); it is a matter of developing an ‘oppositional consciousness...which takes nothing of the dominant culture as self-evidently true’ (1997, 96-97). In a similar spirit, Fricker observes that a standpoint is ‘the epistemic counterpart of a particular form of “engagement” with the world’: it is ‘not itself a social positioning...[but] something that is made available from the relevant social positioning’ (1999, 194).

¹² See, for example, Sunstein’s discussion of the epistemic costs of conformity to a dominant perspective or world view (2003, 5-9 and throughout).

characterized, nor a claim that these standpoints confer categorical or comprehensive *epistemic privilege*.¹³ Where the risk of essentialism is concerned, on this account it is an entirely contingent matter whether lines of social differentiation obtain that are robust enough to make a systematic difference to what epistemic agents are likely to know, or know well. That is to say, for social kinds to be epistemically salient, they need not approximate an implausible essentialist ideal of internal homogeneity, external boundedness, and stability. All that is required is that the structures of social inequality that create and sustain social kinds should establish similarities in social experience in a given context—for example, through patterns of socialization, education, and work (relations of production and reproduction)—make a systematic difference in the ways epistemic capacities are developed and epistemic resources distributed in that context. Moreover, even when there are grounds for recognizing that social difference is epistemically salient, this does not sustain any comprehensive assumption of credibility, superior insight, or ‘in corrigibility’ (Narayan 1988, 37). Any distinctive angle of vision, experience, or critical perspective associated with social marginality will confer advantage only contingently, and only with respect to specific epistemic problems.¹⁴

Epistemic advantage in this delimited, contingent and pragmatic sense can usefully be assessed on three dimensions.¹⁵

8.11 Evidence. Those who negotiate social, legal, and economic institutions from a position of marginality come to know, indeed they often have to be attuned to dimensions of the social and natural world that can be ignored by those who are comparatively privileged or, indeed, that are systematically obscured (or inverted) by dominant world views that legitimate entrenched hierarchies of privilege. For example, they may know in intimate detail, how labor is exploited, how material conditions of life and social relations are sustained, how power inequities are reproduced and what their consequences are, especially for those who are subdominant.¹⁶ They may also be attentive to aspects of the natural world that reflect their situated interests and needs, interacting with shared biophysical environments in quite distinct ways.¹⁷

8.12 Inferential heuristics and explanatory models. Differential access to evidence is rarely an advantage on its own. Standpoint theorists often point to particular skills at discerning patterns in the available evidence that are associated with subdominant status. These include, most obviously, inferential acuity with respect to the power dynamics and mechanisms of oppression, and their systematicity (across contexts), that those living lives of relative privilege do not need to cultivate. It may also take the form of distinctive ‘metaphors, models, analogies, and narratives’ that enable the detection of a different selection of ‘nature’s regularities’ than are captured by the conceptual resources of dominant culture knowledge systems (Harding 2006, 140). By extension, subdominant knowers may develop an expanded repertoire of explanatory hypotheses for making sense of experience that is unintelligible on, or indeed radically inconsistent with, dominant categories of sense making.

8.13 Critical distance. Finally, and crucially, standpoint theorists have particularly emphasized the kinds of epistemic advantage that arise when marginality enforces critical dissociation from a dominant world view, throwing into relief the parochial nature of conceptual categories and norms of credibility that are otherwise taken as a given and projected as universal.¹⁸

¹³ My use of the term ‘advantage’ is intended to mark a rejection of formulations of standpoint theory that presuppose (or advocate) a thesis of ‘automatic privilege,’ as I have described it elsewhere (Wylie 2003, 28-30).

¹⁴ See Fehr (this volume) for discussion of how epistemic advantage of these kinds may be undermined by isolation or lack of uptake (forms of testimonial injustice), and by patterns of socialization that reinforce methodological conservatism or a disinclination to articulate dissenting perspectives.

¹⁵ This analysis of epistemic advantage is developed in more detail in Wylie (2003, 32-39).

¹⁶ See, for example, Narayan on the reasons to cultivate epistemic humility (1988, 38).

¹⁷ This is a point central to Harding’s arguments for standpoint theory: ‘even in “the same” environment, different cultures have different interests in the world around them’ (2006, 140; 99).

¹⁸ See Rooney (this volume) for an analysis of just this kind of epistemic advantage: the meta-philosophical advantage, as she describes it, that puts feminists in a position to recognize background assumptions, to articulate critical analysis of the limitations they impose, and to develop alternatives to ‘epistemology “proper.”’ Fehr also describes in general terms how ‘alternative perspectives,’ arising from situational diversity, ‘can be fruitful in terms of providing alternative questions to ask, theories to test and methods with which to generate data’ (mss p. 20).

It is in connection with these last two factors—explanatory resources and critical distance—that epistemic advantage on the margins is most contingent and most potentially transformative. Born of epistemic injustice, it is in the struggle to take critical distance from a dominant world view, to critically scrutinize entrenched norms of credibility and formulate interpretive alternatives that a **standpoint on epistemic agency** can (sometimes) emerge from the resources of subdominant situated knowledge. When such conditions obtain, standpoint theory is a useful framework for understanding consequential patterns of epistemic exclusion or marginalization, and pivotal shifts in understanding that arise when insights from marginal standpoints throw into relief the partiality of a dominant world view.

8.2 Activist Research on the Academic Workplace Environment

Consider, then, the play of epistemic injustice and correlative advantage in the case of the grass-roots, activist research by which women documented what came to be known, in the 1980s, as the ‘chilly climate’ they were encountering in the male dominated disciplines and professions they were then entering in record numbers.

The catalyst for this activist research was growing concern, by the mid-1980s—two decades after legal guarantees of equal access had been instituted—that the demographics of college and university students had changed dramatically, but improvements in the representation of women in the professoriate, and their effective integration into the academy, seemed to have stalled; the pipeline was showing definite signs of leaking or, more accurately, of filtering and sluggishness. As Simeone described the situation in 1987, qualified women were still ‘more likely than men to be unemployed, underemployed, or in part-time non-tenure track positions’; they were disproportionately concentrated in less prestigious institutions; they showed substantially higher rates of attrition, advanced through the ranks more slowly and, at the same rank, were paid less than their male counterparts.¹⁹

It was at this juncture, in the early 1980s, that women who had successfully navigated the training pipeline, and who expected academia to be a model meritocracy—‘fair’ in all the senses Cole defended for the sciences—found themselves increasingly frustrated by just the kinds of inequitable ‘rates of exchange,’ the lack of uptake and patterns of exclusion, that Rossiter brought into focus in her 1981 response to Cole.²⁰ When the occasion arose to compare their experience with that of other women in their local work environment, or in their disciplines and professions, they discovered, often to their surprise, that problems they had assumed to be idiosyncratic—to their personal situation, the peculiarities of their colleagues, the culture of their institutions or disciplinary subfield—were, in fact, widely shared.²¹ This was a process of ‘coming to consciousness’ that has been described in a number of connections; for example, Fricker draws on accounts of revelatory insights generated by collective reflection on experiences of sexual harassment and post-partum depression to capture the contours and the harms of

¹⁹ By the mid-1980s the percentage of women receiving doctorates across all academic fields was nearly twice that of women in faculty positions (roughly 17% of faculty were women, compared to 33% of PhDs), and yet their distribution across the ranks conformed to the inverted pyramid pattern familiar from twenty years earlier. The percentage of *full professors who were women* remained tiny (roughly 11% in the 1980s in the U.S.; 7% in Canada) but, more telling, the percentage of *women who were full professors* was consistently a third or less than that of men and showed very little change over the previous 15 years. Women were slightly better represented in initial appointments to tenurable positions than in the relevant candidate pools—a function, it would seem, of equity and affirmative action policies—but they continued to swell the lower (most vulnerable) ranks of the professoriate, especially off-ladder ranks: they made up a third of assistant professors but 52-55% lecturers and instructors, and they were much more likely to hold nonladder positions or to be unemployed than men (the revolving door phenomenon). They were being tenured at lower rates than men (two-thirds of men compared to less than half the women), and they continued to be better represented in less prestigious institutions and in smaller (non-graduate teaching) departments and universities, compared to men with comparable graduate training. These details are excerpted from Wylie, Jakobsen, and Fosado (2007), and from Wylie (1995b). Fehr (this volume, mss p. 2) provides a summary of current data on the representation of women and minorities in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) that demonstrates the persistence of these patterns of attrition and the resulting “inverted pyramid” in the distribution of women and minorities by rank and institution.

²⁰ This turning point in thinking about the persistence of gender inequity in academic contexts is reflected in contributions to *Breaking Anonymity* (The Chilly Collective 1995), and described in more detail in Wylie (1995b).

²¹ As indicated at the outset, although the STEM disciplines have been a particular focus of attention, especially in the public debate generated by the MIT report and by Summers’ remarks, these patterns of marginalization are by no means unique to the sciences, and the processes of coming to terms with them that I describe here have taken shape across the social sciences and humanities.

hermeneutical injustice (2007, 149, 153). In an academic context, Aisenberg and Harrington describe the 'shock of recognition' that galvanized members of the Alliance of Independent Scholars in Cambridge (Massachusetts) into action, convincing them of the need to more systematically document the strikingly consistent pattern of 'deflection from expected [tenure track] academic careers' that emerged when they compared their experience in a range of fields at their first meeting in 1980.²² Working groups coalesced in academic institutions and societies across North America, undertaking local studies—often interview based, workplace ethnographies—in which they documented their experiences and, crucially, struggled to develop the conceptual resources necessary to capture emerging commonalities and patterns and to name the diffuse sense of alienation that so many described. The Association of American Colleges (Project on the Status and Education of Women) published a series of widely influential reports through the 1980s in which Hall and Sandler coined the term 'chilly climate.' Their growing awareness that, as Aisenberg and Harrington put it, they were 'hearing about a generalized experience' (1988, ix) is captured by the titles of the AAC reports. The first two, published in the early 1980s, posed a question: *The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?*; and *Out of the Classroom: A Chilly Campus Climate for Women?* (Hall and Sandler 1982, 1984). By 1986 Sandler shifted to the declarative: *The Campus Climate Revisited: Chilly for Women Faculty, Administrators, and Graduate Students* (Sandler 1986).

Twenty years after the first 'chilly climate' working groups had begun to coalesce, the authors of the MIT Report on the Status of Women retraced their steps. Nancy Hopkins describes the process by which they came to their conclusions about the insidious nature of 'post-civil rights' gender discrimination as entirely local and internal (Wilson 1999, A17). When she consulted other senior women in the School of Science about persistent problems she faced in attempting to secure additional laboratory space, they each discovered that they had been dealing with similar problems in isolation; Hopkins had asked for advice about a letter she'd drafted outlining her problems and, in the end, 16 of her colleagues redrafted and signed it as a collective 'letter of protest' to the Dean of the School of Science, Robert Birgeneau. The committee appointed by Birgeneau confirmed their suspicions about an overall pattern of gender difference in the distribution of resources, in professional recognition and compensation, and in institutional decision making and leadership roles. In addition, this report documented an age-graded pattern in these gender disparities. While men and women scientists at MIT start out on an equal footing (gender differences proved to be negligible at the junior ranks), the difference between them widens the more senior the comparison group.

What the 'chilly climate' reports and pamphlets of the 1970s and 1980s articulate, and what got public traction with media coverage of the MIT report in 1999, are two key insights that challenge the explanatory framework established by Cole. The first is that gender bias, like other forms of attributional bias, exists in the social fabric of everyday interaction; it takes the form of persistent, small-scale, but systematically gendered differences in recognition and response, evaluation and expectation. Crucially, as Sandler put it in the mid-1980s, this 'host of subtle personal and social barriers' often operates 'below the level of awareness of both men and women' (Sandler 1986, 17), unintended and unrecognized.²³ The grass-roots reports of the 1980s describe, in this connection, the following standard mechanisms by which the workplace is rendered inhospitable for women.²⁴ The most fundamental is an uncritical reliance on stereotypic assumptions about women's capabilities and (appropriate) roles in academia that translate into gender normative work assignments, with ramifying effects for recognition, compensation, and the

²² As Aisenberg and Harrington describe this initial meeting: 'The effect of that [initial] round of stories was electrifying. Women who had arrived with the sense that the drama and loss in their own academic careers was more or less unique, felt a shock of recognition, hearing their experience in the lives of others previously unknown to them. It seemed clear from that one meeting, as women of highly divergent backgrounds and fields told stories with strikingly similar plot turns, that we were hearing about a generalized experience' (1988, ix).

²³ Valian provides a comprehensive overview of the research on cognitive schemas that delineates the role of non-conscious gender schemas in generating gender-biased patterns of evaluation and interaction (1999). Although the grass-roots studies of workplace environment issues I describe here do often cite early studies of evaluation bias, they draw very little on this wider body of work on cognitive schemas that was taking shape at the time.

²⁴ I summarize here an analysis of central themes in the chilly climate literature that were evident by the late 1980s and have proven remarkably stable. I argued then that the types of practice documented by these reports fall into three broad categories—stereotyping, devaluation, exclusion—each of which may be reenacted in intensified form as reprisals against those who draw attention to these practices (Wylie 1995b, 38-40). Fehr (this volume) describes how these mechanisms—specifically exclusion and various forms of evaluation bias—can systematically undermine the potential epistemic advantages of situational diversity.

allocation of resources. Women report being tracked into service and support roles: undergraduate teaching, student advising, heavy administrative assignments that typically emphasize 'housekeeping,' 'hostessing,' nurturing and facilitating roles. They find themselves disproportionately serving as 'associate' or 'assistant' positions rather than leadership roles with decision making power. By extension, these studies routinely describe instances in which women confront a double standard in response to character traits that are valorized for men (e.g., perceptions of 'assertiveness'; Valian 1999, 129), and in the way their credentials are assessed and projected. The cases described in these reports illustrate patterns of evaluation bias that are now well documented by experimental psychologists (Valian 1999, 127-133), and that constitute testimonial injustice on Fricker's account: men are assumed competent until proven otherwise, while women have to demonstrate their competence at every step; women's successes are seen as exceptional, attributed to the support of others or to luck, while their failures are treated as all that could be expected. As Sonnert and Holton describe these dynamics in their study of elite women scientists, women find themselves suspect, under 'heightened critical scrutiny,' with implications for their interactions with colleagues, research style, and publication patterns (1995, 156, see also Fehr this volume, mss p. 20). Finally, a recurrent theme in these studies—as signalled by the 'chilly climate' metaphor—is that women often report a sense of isolation: they lack both formal and informal mentoring; they find they are cut off from key communication networks in their work units and disciplines (the 'sports buddy,' 'locker room' phenomena, as some described it). As a consequence, they report being disproportionately affected by a lack of institutional transparency about performance expectations, resources, and procedures.

The second key insight, articulated with particular clarity by the authors of the MIT report, is a corollary to the first: small-scale differences in expectation, work assignment, recognition, and social integration, of the kind that chilly climate researchers had documented through the late 1970s and 1980s, can result in substantial and persistent gender differences in career trajectories and outcomes, manifest in everything from lifetime earnings profiles to striking age-graded differences in job satisfaction. Rossiter dubs this pattern of cumulative disadvantage the 'Mathilda effect' (1993), inverting Merton's model of cumulative advantage, the famous 'Matthew effect' (1968).²⁵ At the time that chilly climate researchers were documenting the micro-dynamics of workplace environments, a robust body of statistical analysis of the demographics of academia was taking shape that has documented these outcomes on a large scale.²⁶

The response to these studies, when they first appeared in the 1980s, is a particularly telling indicator of what was at stake, epistemically as well as politically. Three recurrent themes in the public reactions of senior administrators, the media coverage, and the resulting public debate about chilly climate studies are particularly relevant here: denial of the facts as presented; denial that they stand as evidence of systematically gendered differences; and denial that, even if substantiated, instances or patterns of gender difference (e.g., in uptake, response, support, or outcomes) demonstrate unfairness in any sense that warrants intervention to change the situation.²⁷

The first standard response was disbelief and indignation: the authors of chilly climate reports, and those whose experience they report, must be malicious or deluded (Wylie 1995a [1989], 159-160). The critics typically observed that they had never witnessed or heard of any incidents like those described in chilly climate reports, therefore they could not have occurred as described. Most striking are cases where, for example, the critics enacted, in their condemnation of these reports, precisely the patterns of gender normative stereotyping and evaluation bias the existence of which they were intent on denying.²⁸

²⁵ The reference here is to Matthew (13:12): 'For whomsoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whomsoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.' Rossiter settled on the 'Mathilda Effect' after considering a number of possibilities; this is in honor of a 19th century sufferagette, Mathilda Gage who, Rossiter argues, developed a critical perspective on the impact of these differences on women's contributions to collective understanding: what I would describe as a standpoint (1993).

²⁶ Sonnert and Holton (1995) describe this pattern in the cohorts of high achieving women scientists they studied, making use of comparisons with a male control group. Xie and Shauman (2003) provide a detailed overview and assessment of large scale demographic studies, and Ginther's analyses of a persistent gender gap in compensation across academic and professional fields is an example of this work (e.g., 2004, 2009).

²⁷ I draw here on published accounts of the response to chilly climate reports that appeared in the 1980s, chiefly as described by the Chilly Collective (1995).

²⁸ In a discussion of the extremely hostile and high profile response of the President of the University of Western Ontario to a 1989 report, I observed that, in the end, this 'highly charged reaction to the *Chilly Climate Report*' did

The contours of both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice are clearly evident in these exchanges. It was more plausible to those who were not subject to or who benefit from such bias that the ad hoc working groups, who undertook the hours of interviews and the labor of assembling and distributing these reports, must have falsified the incidents they described, or must have deliberately sought the notoriety of a 'media event' (as one set of critics described it), than that the patterns of marginalization they reported could really be commonplace in the meritocratic culture of the academy. In the case of one such report (Backhouse, Harris, Michell, Wylie 1995 [1989]), aggrieved university administrators objected that the interviewees were 'hiding behind anonymity'; in not self-identifying, those whose accounts were reported must be assumed to have 'made it all up' (Wylie 1995a [1989], 159). Despite entrenched conventions of research ethics in the social sciences that require interviewers to protect the identities of research subjects, the content of the report was so evidently unsettling, so threatening in its illegibility, that anonymity was taken to be evidence of deceit and malicious intent.²⁹ Here the hermeneutical lacunae that rendered chilly climate phenomena inscrutable served to reinforce already entrenched suspicions about the testimonial credibility (the truthfulness and the competence) of the women who reported them. The irony is that it is precisely these patterns of credibility deficit—amplified and rendered explicit in public debate—that chilly climate authors strove to capture in their accounts of the persistent, demoralizing experience of finding their intellectual and professional contributions ignored, discounted, or attributed to others.

Even when the facts of chilly-making incidents and practices were accepted as reported, a second response was to deny their status of as evidence of any systematic difference in the treatment of women as compared to their male peers: each instance must be explicable other terms, as idiosyncratic to the event, the individual, the situation, a localized conflict or misunderstanding, or to a generally hostile environment, such that no gendered pattern emerges in the details. Certainly it is challenging to demonstrate that there are robustly gendered patterns in small-scale, often unintended and unrecognized differences in response, recognition, inclusion. Chilly climate researchers typically started with individual women's stories, following well-established feminist practices of oral history and auto-ethnography that serve to create spaces, in collective discussion, interviews, testimonial writing, in which women can begin to articulate, in their own terms, experience that does not fit normative expectations. But however powerful the 'shock of recognition' when striking and persistent similarities suggested that these stories embody systematic differences in attribution of credibility, recognition and response, the qualitative nature of these accounts rendered them suspect, especially for those who have no counterpart in their own experience to that which is reported. Here again both hermeneutical and testimonial injustice configured the debate. Chilly climate researchers confronted a 'gap in collective interpretive resources' (Fricker 2007, 1) that put them at a disadvantage in at least two distinct but powerfully interconnected senses. The challenge they faced was to work against the grain of a set of presuppositions that both animate and obscure the very phenomena they were struggling to capture: presuppositions about the nature of cognitive authority and discrimination that privilege the role of deliberate intention both in individual action and as embodied in explicit policies. The methods of inquiry they relied on to do this—comparative ethnography, textual and qualitative analysis—were precisely what was needed to identify previously unrecognized 'microinequities' and patterns of 'subtle discrimination', and the hermeneutical lacunae that rendered them inscrutable. And yet, in delivering insights that disrupted dominant expectations, these methods were further discredited. On these assumptions, even if the resonances evident in the reported experience of academic women proved to be widespread (a 'generalized experience' in the statistical sense), any claim of systematicity would remain implausible so long as there was no evidence of deliberate intent to discriminate on the part of individuals, or of explicit institutional barriers to the training, appointment, funding of women academics or to their research and publishing opportunities. The heuristic gap that rendered gendered patterns illegible in this domain was the lack of an explanatory mechanism conventionally recognized to be capable of generating systematic differences in women's experiences and academic career paths.

more to 'illustrate, graphically and publically, the problems we had hoped to document than any amount of 'anonymous' reporting could have done' (1995, 51).

²⁹ The senior administrators in question quickly backed away from this line of critique, but it continued to be a recurrent theme in letters to the editor and public debate (Michell and Backhouse 1995, 138-141; Wylie [1989] 1995, 160).

A final objection to chilly climate studies draws out the normative implications of this last point. Even when systematic gender differences were successfully documented, either in a particular context or as a pervasive feature of academic life, the critics of chilly climate studies routinely denied that they reflect any unfairness either on the part of individuals or institutions; if no harm was intended, and no intent to discriminate had been demonstrated, allegations of injustice were unfounded. Cole's argument in *Fair Science* depends on these presuppositions, and they routinely resurface in contemporary debate; they are evident, for example, in the arguments made by those who defended Summers' remarks (e.g., Pinker 2005). Two elements of this paradigm are relevant here. The first is that discrimination, as a form of injustice, is not just a matter of unintended consequences, or unfortunate inequities in the distribution of resources or rewards, however systematic they may be. It is, by definition, a consequence of intentional action that is morally culpable; only if harm is intended, or directly enough caused to be attributed to an individual, is it morally or politically salient. The second assumption is a resolutely internalist conception of agency that sharply delimits an individual agent's moral accountability. Reasons for action that are introspectively accessible to an epistemic or moral agent—their conscious beliefs and intentions, and judgements that arise from deliberation on them—are the only relevant grounds for explaining their actions and the only legitimate basis for attributing responsibility for the outcomes of action. Each of these presuppositions has generated vast philosophical literatures and are certainly untenable as they stand, but in their vernacular form they are never far from the surface in public debate about the claims central to chilly climate reports, and are sometimes ardently defended by the critics of these reports.³⁰ So long as they frame discussion of women's workplace experience, they powerfully counteract the possibility that the persistent, often 'subtle' differences in treatment reported in chilly climate reports could be recognized as systematic, or as discriminatory.

Indeed, the problem with which chilly climate researchers and activists grappled was not just a lack of conceptual tools adequate to the task of capturing interpretively opaque experience—a function of gaps in the available hermeneutical resources, as Fricker describes it (2007, 148)—but the constraints imposed by dominant conventions of sense-making that foreclosed the possibility of recognizing the phenomena in question. On the presuppositions about agency that chilly climate researchers strove to make explicit, it was deeply implausible that systematically gendered patterns of evaluation bias and interaction might arise from internalized cognitive schemas that operate 'below the threshold of consciousness' or that such 'micro-inequities' in interaction have the capacity to generate large scale differences in opportunity and outcome for women (Rowe [1973] 1990). Moreover, it was quite literally inconceivable that we might (collectively and individually) be accountable for the effects of these dynamics, given complementary normative assumptions about the nature of discrimination. In the case of climate studies that focus on academia, these hermeneutical barriers are compounded to the extent that the defining feature of these communities and institutions, and the cornerstone of their epistemic credibility, is a commitment to regulative ideals of intellectual meritocracy.³¹ In short, the central claims of chilly climate studies about the cumulative effects of diffuse 'microinequities' were categorically implausible given the (resolutely externalist) self-understanding and epistemic authority of their own academic communities. The cost to those who attempted to name and to report forms of experience that called these assumptions into question was further erosion of their credibility as epistemic agents.

8.3 Epistemic Injustice and the Resources of Situated Knowledge

How did chilly climate researchers render intelligible to themselves the diffuse but persistent problems they continued to face even when anti-discrimination laws had long been in place and overt discrimination was (largely) a thing of the past? And what changed between the early 1980s and 1999 such that the central tenets of their analysis could get significant public traction with publication of the MIT report and, subsequently, through arguments for the extension of Title IX provisions to graduate training in the sciences (Munro 2006, Zare 2006)?

Where the first question is concerned, my thesis is that chilly climate researchers drew chiefly on the resources of their own situated, experience-based knowledge to develop what they could only

³⁰ See, again, the review one such debate in *Breaking Anonymity* (Chilly Collective 1995) and the defenses of Summers that appeared a decade later.

³¹ Rooney (this volume) offers a striking example, in the marginalization of feminist epistemology, of how critical challenges are deflected by appeal to entrenched epistemic ideals of objectivity and neutrality.

describe metaphorically as an inhospitable ‘climate.’ In particular, apart from scattered references to early evaluation bias research and appeals to statistics on the representation of women in academia that demonstrated the need to look beyond ‘civil rights era’ barriers to access, their work was largely uninformed by a growing body of disciplinary research in the cognitive and social sciences that would ultimately vindicate their central insights. I return to this point shortly. The situated knowledge on which grass roots chilly climate researchers did depend incorporates each of the elements I identified at the outset as loci of epistemic advantage, but with some telling twists.

8.31 Evidence. Social psychologists have articulated a principle of informational asymmetry that fleshes out the empirical detail of an insight that has long been central to feminist standpoint theory: it is that ‘in any relationship defined by differential power (like gender), the dominant group (e.g., men) can afford to be oblivious to certain kinds of social cues, while the subordinate group (women) cannot’; consequently, ‘dominants and subordinates have very different levels and kinds of information about each other’ (Stewart and McDermott 2004, 529; citing Fiske 1993). In some cases this asymmetry ensures that subordinates and outsiders have access to evidence that the privileged do not in a quite literal sense. This is an insight routinely exploited by mystery writers, from Agatha Christie to Barbara Nealy, whose fictional investigators are discounted for precisely the attributes that put them in a position to learn crucial facts about means and motivation that elude normatively credible witnesses.³² The case of chilly climate research is more complicated in several respects. Women academics are, in principle, insiders to the ‘sacred grove’ (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988), not sojourners or invisible outsiders; what mobilized (some) to take up chilly climate projects was typically dissonance between their expectations—rooted in a deeply held commitment to the meritocratic ideals of their chosen fields and, often, considerable privilege in other respects—and evidence from their direct experience of academic institutions. Chilly climate authors catalog moments of rupture in which a particular juxtaposition of responses or judgments throws into relief a double standard (e.g., the same credentials are read in very different ways), or a growing unease about gender inequity in the outcomes of deliberation (e.g., on appointments or admissions, publication or promotion) that alerts them to a persistent disconnect between the purportedly gender neutral norms of academic accomplishment and the highly gendered characteristics of the qualities that conventional working indicators tend to track.³³ They register shock and anger at what they slowly and often grudgingly came to recognize as pervasive, gendered patterns of credibility overspill and credibility deficit—testimonial injustice; evaluation bias—that had been invisible to them, and that remained largely inscrutable to those who better fit these dominant norms and benefit from them.

8.32 Inferential heuristics and explanatory models. Given the hermeneutic deficits facing the insiders who struggle to articulate this dissonant experience, chilly climate projects were explicitly and agonizingly exploratory. The process of coming to consciousness described by Aisenberg and Harrington, and by Hopkins, was an irreducibly collective and comparative undertaking. It was a matter of creating from the ground up the conceptual tools and interpretive heuristics necessary to reconceptualize systematic disadvantage in terms of the ‘climate’ of a workplace, rather than its architecture, and to identify mechanisms that might generate large-scale discriminatory outcomes ‘despite good will,’ through inflicting ‘a thousand cuts’ or by suffocation under ‘a ton of feathers’ (Caplan 1993).

8.33 Critical distance. As this suggests, the situated experience that made chilly climate researchers aware of gendered ‘micro-inequities’ afforded them a critical advantage in discerning the ways in which the institutions and practices of academia fall short of its ideals. The ruptures created by finding that gender makes a difference to who counts as a credible knower—whose ‘merit’ becomes a medium of exchange in a meritocracy—enforced a critical dissociation from norms and conventions of academic practice which, in turn, made it possible to recognize the disconnect between what working indicators of epistemic credibility actually track and what they are claimed to track. It was

³² Elsewhere I develop an analysis of evidential advantage in terms of Nealy’s character Blanche White, a crime solving African American housekeeper (Wylie 2003).

³³ These are the mechanisms by which systematic forms of ignorance and underlying (taken for granted) assumptions become visible to those on the margins, or to insider-outsiders (Rooney this volume, mss p. 14).

asymmetries in extant 'working indicators' of epistemic credibility that chilly climate researchers both documented and exploited.

In recent years a number of high profile reports have appeared that systematically rebut the lingering presuppositions of Cole's paradigm, as revived by Summers,³⁴ bringing to bear the results of research that probes the mechanisms responsible for evaluation bias and documents the cumulative effects of small scale gender biases in uptake and response. These reports demonstrate that fields as diverse as experimental psychology, sociolinguistics, and economics have substantiated many of the conclusions drawn, tentatively and quite independently, from the dissonant experience documented by grass roots 'chilly climate' researchers. It is now well established that factors operating below the threshold of conscious awareness—cognitive schemas of various kinds—condition the adjudication of academic merit in the review of credentials, in assessing grant proposals, and in weighing the authority of publications. These effects are documented by studies of cognitive schemas, stereotype mobilization, and ascriptive bias in social and cognitive psychology (Steele 1997, Valian 1999); by the work by sociolinguists on small-scale interaction patterns that reproduce social hierarchy (Ridgeway 1992); and by sociological studies of institutional structures that can foster or counteract these dynamics (Reskin 2003).³⁵ In addition, since the early 1990s, models of the dynamics by which women and minorities are deflected from and marginalized within academia (especially in the STEM disciplines³⁶) recognize the interactive and cumulative effects of small scale disadvantage, giving the Mathilda effect a central place in their analyses (Cole and Singer 1991; Sonnert and Holton 1995). Finally, large scale quantitative analysis of national databases delineate, with growing precision, a persistent 'gender gap' in such measurable indices of recognition as salary, and document the age-graded patterns of cumulative disadvantage predicted by these models in the analysis of large-scale national data bases (Xie and Shauman 2003).³⁷

No doubt a great many factors contributed to the sea change in the reception of chilly climate reports, from the early 1980s when they first began to appear to 1999 when the MIT report drew national attention. But certainly one key factor is a shift in the interpretive resources available in public discourse about 'post-civil rights' discrimination as a consequence both of the grass-roots chilly climate research and of these proliferating research programs in the social sciences and psychology.³⁸ By the turn of 2000 it was no longer radically incomprehensible that our judgments and behaviors might be substantially shaped by non-conscious cognitive schemas, or that large scale, morally and epistemically consequential inequities might arise from unintended and unrecognized differences in treatment of men and women.

³⁴ For example, the National Academy of Sciences report, *Beyond Bias and Barriers* (2007), and the AAUP report, *Faculty Gender Indicators* (West 2006). Although the NAS report frames its mandate in general terms without reference to Summers, it responds point for point to Summers's claims demonstrating that the best empirical research available renders untenable the stereotypes and conventional assumptions he invokes.

³⁵ For example, Cecilia Ridgeway calls for attention to the micro-structure of interaction as the level at which gender stratification is generated: like the double standards at an interactional level that Fosci describes as mechanisms by which structural inequities are maintained. And Barbara Reskin (in a 2002 Presidential Address to the American Association) inveighs against the continued focus on 'motives' and argues for focusing on 'organizational- and societal-level mechanisms'—patterns of practice; systems of accountability; degree of transparency and formalization in an organization; design of work—that allow cognitive schemas to work / that perpetuate the double standards and patterns of ascriptive bias that underpin them.

³⁶ Science, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM).

³⁷ These show, for example, that gender gaps in productivity are not as marked as Cole claimed and have been diminishing; control for an enormous range of factors cited as possible reasons for women's different employment and compensation profiles (various forms of self-selection, demographic or market factors) shows a persistent gap that seems only attributable to residual gender discrimination, especially at higher ranks and more elite schools; the pipeline proves to be more porous than assumed and to be leaking at different places for different disciplines.

³⁸ In a response to Summers, Valian observes that 'although an abundance of research of this sort exists, it has not become part of our common understanding and thus has not yet redressed the imbalances between men and women in professional life' (2005). While I agree in general terms—certainly, there is much to be done to integrate insights about cognitive schemas into our understanding and our practices—the outcry generated by Summers' remarks suggests that the resources available for understanding the status of women in male dominated fields had shifted significantly since the time when Cole could take for granted that his reading audience would accept terms of his analysis (with the exception of a few critics like Rossiter).

8.4 Conclusion

In this analysis of the insights central to chilly climate reports on ‘post-civil rights era sex discrimination,’ I have argued that chilly climate researchers posited a set of generative mechanisms—elements of an alternative explanatory paradigm for understanding both their own localized experience and the patterns they discerned in this experience when they had occasion to compare it with other women in their fields and institutions. Although few directly engage Cole, the explanatory models they offer directly counter the conventional presuppositions made explicit by Cole and, 25 years later, by Summers; they show how gender normative behavior can give rise to systematic, large scale and ramifying differences in outcomes for academic women in the absence intentional discrimination or formal barriers to their participation.

At the same time, however, the more radical epistemic implications of this alternative chilly climate paradigm are routinely blunted by its staunchest advocates. As one outspoken advocate for gender equity in the physical sciences likes to put it, the institutions of her science are sexist to the core, but ‘quarks have no gender’; inequities in the application of epistemic norms—a reliance on working indicators of rational authority that relegate women to the margins—have no bearing whatsoever on the conceptual, empirical integrity of the science. The problem to be resolved is strictly a matter of testimonial injustice; for meritocratic ideals to be realized what must be rectified are systematic patterns credibility deficit and overspill, the misrecognition of epistemic agents. It is assumed that ideals of excellence—the substantive norms of credibility that define what counts as a well formed question and a credible answer—are impervious to the influence of factors that are recognized to distort their application when intellectual merit is adjudicated in the context of hiring, tenuring, promoting, awarding grants to, and publishing particular individuals. In fact, it is hard to see how systematic testimonial injustice could fail to entrench patterns of hermeneutical injustice, even in fields that deal with manifestly non-gendered subject matters. If, for example, patterns of workplace segregation obtain such that women typically work in a narrow range of subfields or on particular types of problems, and if the results of women’s work gets less support and recognition than that of their male peers, given standard gender biases in citation and funding, then the evidence and insights women generate will have less impact on their field as a whole than the work done by men in areas where they dominate. Testimonial injustice thus translates into biases in the research agenda and in the epistemic resources available to the research community that, to varying degrees and in diverse ways, shape the trajectory of a discipline as a whole. It is the possibility that institutional inequity may have an impact on the content of their fields that many equity activists flatly refuse to consider. To take up these questions would require more than the resources of situated experience which brought testimonial injustice into sharp focus; it would require a well articulated critical standpoint on knowledge production.

It is perhaps unsurprising that equity activists would draw strong conclusions about testimonial injustice, delineating innumerable ways in which gender schemas determine (unfairly) who counts as a credible knower and who gets credit for contributions to the collective store of authoritative disciplinary knowledge, but deny that these injustices have any impact on the epistemic integrity and hermeneutical resources of the disciplines within which they work. The challenge of rendering the experience of epistemic injustice communicable is particularly acute in academic, especially scientific contexts because it calls into question the community norms of credibility to which chilly climate researchers are held accountable and to which they themselves subscribe. In many contexts, these community norms include a proscription against any appeal to experience, and yet it was women’s dissonant experience (as scholarly or scientific insiders but gender outsiders) that threw into relief the contours of the cognitive schemas and localized interaction patterns that generate persistent patterns of testimonial injustice. The cost of relying on the epistemic advantages of situated knowledge, for many, was a resolve to circumscribe its import, sharply dissociating the claims they make about institutional inequity from any more probing critical analysis of the epistemic conventions of their fields.

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