

ARTICLE

The Difficulty with Diversity: White and Aboriginal Women Workers' Representations of Diversity Management in Forest Processing Mills

Suzanne Mills

Introduction

IN THE LATE 1990S, AN AMERICAN Multinational Forest Company (MNFC) implemented a set of human resource measures to promote the inclusion of women and Aboriginal¹ men in its operations in Saskatchewan, Canada under the rubric of diversity management. The introduction of diversity management purported to alter unequal gendered and racialized patterns of employment. In the early 2000s, employment in forestry in Canada continued to be segregated by gender and Aboriginal identity, reflecting the historical exclusion of women from non-clerical work and the relegation of Aboriginal men to less-stable and well paid sub-sectors and occupations.² The historic exclusion of First Nation and Métis peoples from better jobs in forestry has contributed to higher poverty levels in the North.³ Similarly, the exclusion of women from

1. The Aboriginal identity population comprised approximately 30 per cent of the total population in and around the communities with forest mills (Prince Albert, Big River and Hudson Bay Saskatchewan) in 2001; Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, *Community Profiles* (Ottawa 2004).

2. Suzanne Mills, "Segregation of women and Aboriginal people within Canada's forest sector by industry and occupation," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 26 (January 2006), 147–171.

3. For example, see Ron Laliberte and Vic Satzewich, "Native migrant labour in the southern Albertan sugar-beet industry: coercion and paternalism in the recruitment of labour," *Canadian Revue of Sociology and Anthropology*, 36 (February 1999), 65–85; Alan G. Teskey and

many forest occupations has led to economic deprivation and social exclusion in forest communities.⁴ While some have applauded the coupling of business and diversity goals, others have critiqued diversity management, claiming that its underlying corporate liberal norms undermine efforts to include marginalized groups.⁵ Since diversity management hinges on economic rationale, it has been lamented as a narrowing of the scope of inclusion, marking a shift from approaches targeted at the removal of barriers to inequality to an approach that sees diversity as ascribed worker attributes to serve the needs of capital.⁶

In this paper I provide a critique of diversity management as an approach to better include marginalized groups in the workplace. I look to the targets of diversity management, white and Aboriginal women, to argue that diversity management's underpinnings in corporate liberal individualism limited its ability to address the needs of different groups of women. I first review critical appraisals of diversity management from the organizational literature that distinguish it from other approaches to inclusion on the basis of its use of a language of difference (and not equality), and its foundation in corporate liberal discourse. I then draw on intersectionality theory to suggest that diversity management will have unequal effects since it will be perceived and experienced differently by workers from different social groups. I then present results of a critical discourse analysis of women working in subsidiaries of the MNFC to highlight the unevenness of women's experiences and perceptions of diversity management. Women's experiences and perceptions of diversity management were structured by their gender and Aboriginal identity, and by their class position (whether they were managerial/professional class or working-class). Ideas of meritocracy and productivity underpinning diversity management interacted with white women's constructions of Aboriginal peoples to re-inscribe racism. I finish by suggesting that strategies that originate from marginalized groups themselves and that emerge out of concerns for social justice rather than profit have a greater ability to achieve genuine inclusion.

Jack H. Smyth, "Saskatchewan's Forest Industry and Its Economic Importance," *Information Report NOR-X140*, Canadian Forest Service and Environment Canada (Edmonton 1975).

4. Maureen Reed, "Marginality and Gender at Work in Forestry Communities of British Columbia, Canada," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19 (July 2003), 373–89.

5. Brian D'Netto and Amrik S. Sohal, "Human Resource Practices and Workforce Diversity: An Empirical Assessment," *International Journal of Manpower*, 20 (January 1999), 530–547; Anshuman Prasad, "Understanding Workplace Empowerment as Inclusion: A Historical Investigation of the Discourse of Difference in the United States," *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 37 (March 2001), 51–69.

6. Maria Humphries and Shayne Grice, "Equal Employment Opportunity and the Management of Diversity," *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 8 (January 1995), 17–32; Sara Ahmed, "The Language of Diversity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (March 2007), 235–56.

Diversity Management and Equality

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT describes a school of human resource strategies that gained popularity in North American business culture through the 1990s and 2000s. Unlike other approaches to include marginalized groups in the workplace, diversity management is based on the logic that diversity is conducive to corporate productivity, and that as a result, there are market incentives for firms to diversify their workforces. The implementation of diversity management often resembles other approaches to inclusion, and therefore includes practices such as: diversity awareness education, targeted hiring and promotion practices, heightened discrimination and harassment awareness and flexible work options to adapt to different worker lifestyles. Despite its similarity to equality-based approaches in many of its practices, however, diversity management conceptualizes diversity differently; policies are not restricted to groups identified through legislation or otherwise and are cast at the level of the individual.

Notwithstanding diversity management's popularity, it has come under criticism by many who argue that it is slowly displacing more effective regulatory approaches to inclusion.⁷ In contrast to earlier equality-based approaches to employment inclusion in Canada and the United States, diversity management focuses on difference and emanates from business research findings linking diversity to productivity. In the US diversity management was introduced by business consultants who aimed to displace state regulatory approaches such as employment equity and affirmative action, with voluntary based diversity management. Alternatively, in Canada, corporate diversity management was promoted by the state as well as the business community because of the former's investment in multiculturalism.⁸ Some authors have suggested that this divergence has resulted in lower popularity for diversity management among Canadian corporations; in two surveys, less than 50 per cent of Canadian corporations saw diversity management as top business priority.⁹ Irrespective of these differences, however, the corporate rhetoric arguing the business case for diversity is similar in both Canada and the US. Critical organizational

7. Yasmeen Abu-Laben and Christina Gabriel, *Selling Diversity: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity and Globalization* (Canada 2002), 152–157; D'Netto and Sohal, "Human Resource Practices," 530–547; Sonia Liff and Judy Wajcman, "'Sameness' and 'Difference' Revisited: Which Way Forward for Equal Opportunity Initiatives," *Journal of Management Studies*, 33 (January 1996), 79–94.

8. Harish Jain and Anil Verma, "Managing workforce diversity for competitiveness: The Canadian experience," *International Journal of Manpower*, 17 (January 1996), 14–29.

9. Jain and Verma, "Managing workforce diversity for competitiveness," 14–29; Alison M. Konrad, Cara Maurer, and Yang Yang, "Managing for diversity and inclusiveness: results of the 2004–05 Ivey Strategic Diversity and Inclusiveness Survey: Responses from Human Resource Managers and CEOs," *Richard Ivey School of Business Working Paper Report*, 7 (2005) <http://www.ivey.uwo.ca/faculty/Konrad_Report_07.pdf> (20 February, 2011).

scholars have argued that diversity management's focus on the celebration of difference (and not on the removal of inequality) and its basis in corporate liberalism has resulted in a more narrow approach to inclusion compared to previous regulatory strategies.¹⁰

The meanings of sameness/equality and difference/diversity are overlapping and need to be understood in the context of their use.¹¹ Early feminist struggles against overt discrimination often sought formal equality, which purports that ending discrimination is simply a matter of applying law and policy in the same way to all people. Hinging on a liberal framework, individuals are conceived as independent from one another, but as entitled to human rights, dignity and equal treatment by way of their common humanity and societal membership. The failure of formal equality to achieve equal outcomes, however, demonstrated the fallacy of the notion of universal personhood which sits at the basis of laws and policies that are in fact predicated on a white, western, male subject.¹² To broaden the scope of inclusion, many feminists have since argued for substantive equality, an understanding of equality that measures equality in terms of outcomes and applies policy remedies that at times require treating groups differently and at other times requires treating them the same. This latter understanding of equality underpinned the 1984 Royal Commission on Equality in Employment which in turn influenced the design of Canadian regulatory mechanisms to address employment discrimination.¹³ The Employment Equity Act (1986) resulting from this commission required applicable employers to collect and report data for target groups¹⁴ and review formal and informal policies and practices with the goal of removing systemic barriers.¹⁵ It is this broad substantive understanding of equality that critical organizational scholars have held up as an ideal in their critiques of diversity management.

10. Humphries and Grice, "Equal Employment," 17–32; Anshuman Prasad, "Understanding Workplace Empowerment as Inclusion: A Historical Investigation of the Discourse of Difference in the United States," *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 37 (March 2001), 51–69.

11. Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in Steven Seidman, ed., *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory* (Cambridge 1994), 282–98.

12. Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Boston 1990), 191–197.

13. Abu-Laben and Gabriel, *Selling Diversity*, 134–141.

14. In Canada designated groups include women, Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, and people with disabilities.

15. Note that despite the broad underpinnings of employment equity legislation, in practice, the understanding of equality is often reduced to the targeted hiring of individuals from designated groups and results in backlash from co-workers. For a discussion of this gap see: Carol Agocs, "Canada's employment equity legislation and policy 1987–2000: the gap between policy and practice," *International Journal of Manpower*, 23 (January 2002), 256–276.

Diversity management gained legitimacy throughout the 1990s in Canada and the US following the rise of diversity politics which were influenced by post-structuralism, post-feminism, queer theory, multiculturalism, and neo-liberal ideology.¹⁶ Originating from different and often conflicting theoretical and political movements, diversity politics denotes a broad discursive space that includes a variety of perspectives that share a need for the recognition and valuation of difference. While some perspectives continue to emphasize how differences are constructed to legitimize unequal and oppressive relationships, other approaches seek to escape hierarchies of oppression through the valuation and celebration of individual or collective difference.¹⁷ Advocates for diversity management see it as preferable to equality-based employment frameworks since equality frameworks obscure power differences that exist within designated groups and through their use of categories and can re-stigmatize individuals who become additionally marked when they are compared to the dominant norm.¹⁸ Diversity management claims to circumvent these problems by revaluing differences for the advantages they bring to the firm, and by recognizing that any individual has a plurality of diverse characteristics beyond their attachments to any social group.¹⁹ Hence, diversity management seeks to promote a broad notion of diversity including differences of perspective and lifestyle in addition to designated groups. When diversity is understood as an assemblage of difference that is non-hierarchical, however, the concept of difference is extirpated from its links to discrimination and inequality, rendering it difficult to address racism, sexism or systemic disadvantage that produce persistent unequal outcomes.²⁰

A distilled understanding of difference is therefore not an intrinsic characteristic of difference as a concept. Rather it is the outcome of diversity management's underlying economic rationale and ideological basis. Specifically, increases in firm productivity have been attributed to the improved performance of diverse management teams relative to homogeneous ones; to the elimination of labour market distortions resulting from discriminatory hiring; and to improved cultural knowledge of spatially (and culturally) diverse markets as firms become more international in scope.²¹ Here, difference

16. Davina Cooper, *Challenging Diversity: Rethinking Equality and the Value of Difference* (New York 2004), 1–9, 14, 15.

17. George Sefa Dei, "The Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender in the Anti-Racism Discourse," in Valerie Zawilski and Cynthia Levine-Rasky, eds., *Inequality in Canada: A Reader in the Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class* (Don Mills 2005) 17–35; Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (New Jersey 1990), 158–183.

18. Deborah Jones, "Screwing Diversity out of the Workers? Reading Diversity," *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 17 (January 2004), 281–91.

19. D'Netto and Sohal, "Human Resource Practices," 530–547.

20. Ahmed, "The Language of Diversity," 235–56.

21. D'Netto and Sohal, "Human Resource Practices," 530–547.

becomes imbued within a particular form of liberal individualist ideology prevalent in capitalist business culture. I follow McKay's understanding of liberalism as the according of "a prior ontological and epistemological status to 'the individual' – the human being who is the 'proprietor' of him or herself and whose freedom should be limited only by voluntary obligations to God, and by the rules necessary to obtain the equal freedom of other individuals."²² Contemporary capitalist business culture combines liberal individualism with a strict belief in market authority over management decisions. Accordingly, human resource practices ascribe to principles of individualism, meritocracy, and market authority. This is achieved by using individualized rankings and punishments to regulate workers, and by rationalizing undesirable workplace changes and excessive profits as normal business practice. Diversity management exemplifies newer liberal business culture in that it is applied at the level of the individual, does not disrupt notions of meritocracy, and seeks to combat older forms of overt workplace discrimination in favour of raw increases in a firms' competitive ability.²³ Unlike formal equality which is also underpinned by liberal ideas, diversity management purports to move away from the same treatment of individuals in such a way so as to simultaneously advance corporate 'needs' to rationalize production to maintain excess profits. Yet the same factors that drive the quest for difference also help to confine it. Although a certain degree of difference has been shown to increase profits, the market also homogenizes difference by requiring that workers conform to strict productivity requirements. In particular, forms of difference that challenge the firm's corporate liberal culture are excluded. It is not the concept of difference that limits diversity management's utility; instead, it is the particular way that inclusion becomes defined in ways that are detrimental both to collective empowerment of workers and to the inclusion of meaningful differences.

Identity and Intersectionality

I ADOPT A SOCIAL constructionist perspective of identity, seeing individual and collective social identities as historically and socially constituted through a negotiation between the self, other individuals within the social group and 'outsiders'. From this perspective, although an individual has some power in determining identity, much of one's identity is not self-constructed since visual markers such as skin colour and sex are used by non-group members to classify others. In the case of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the individual

22. Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *The Canadian Historical Review*, 81 (December 2000), 623.

23. Humphries and Grice, "Equal Employment," 17–32. Some studies have demonstrated that diversity, particularly when applied to top management, increases the competitive ability of firms. For example see: Charles M. Carson, Don C. Mosley, D. C. and Scott C. Boyar, "Performance gains through diverse top management teams," *Team Performance Management*, 10 (January 2004), 121–126.

identities of Aboriginal peoples are "...always being negotiated in relation to collective identity, and in the face of an external, colonizing society."²⁴ Identities are therefore historical and relational in that they develop meaning through interactions among individuals and groups over time. Moreover, individuals may have multiple identities, of which some take heightened importance over others at different times and in different spaces. Feminist theories of intersectionality arose to theorize this complexity. In opposition to earlier theories that either privileged one form of oppression over another or that examined oppression related to gender, race and class as separate systems, theories of intersectionality propose that gender, class and race needed to be understood as interlocking systems of social relations that structure individual and group experiences.²⁵ Consequently, understanding one category of oppression necessitates understanding how it intersects with other categories of oppression. An intersectional approach can provide insights to the way liberal workplace practices interact with local constructions of identity. Theories of intersectionality add to our knowledge of employment inequality by calling attention to the lived experiences of individuals who have been historically neglected from labour research and are constructed as suitable or unsuitable for specific types of workplaces by employers and co-workers respectively.²⁶

A more complex investigation of the multiple roles that individuals play in reproducing and resisting hierarchies can also contribute to our understandings of how corporate practices operate in particular workplaces. By challenging the classification of individuals into categories of oppressor and oppressed intersectionality theorists have argued for a more nuanced understanding of experience. Since individuals are differently located in terms of privilege and oppression relative to different identity categories, some groups (such as white women) may participate in maintaining racist social structures despite their marginalization in another arena. To the degree that some women are able to choose which identity they present, they may articulate one identity category over another at different times. This can help explain why women may present contradictory perspectives, as they chose to either highlight or hide different aspects of identity. This is particularly important when trying to decipher the positions of women in forest communities, whose

24. Bonita Lawrence, "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview," *Hypatia*, 18 (June 2003), 4.

25. Maxine Baca Zinn, Lynn Weber Cannon, Elizabeth Higginbotham and Bonnie Thornton Dill, "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 11(Winter 1986), 290–303.

26. For studies centering the lives of women of colour see: Patricia Hill Collins, "Gender, Black feminism and Black political economy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 568 (March 2000), 41–53; Beverley Mullings, "Women Rule? Globalization and the Feminization of Managerial and Professional Workspaces in the Caribbean," *Gender, Place & Culture*, 12 (March 2005), 1 – 27; Melissa Wright, " Crossing the Factory Frontier: Gender, Place and Power in the Mexican Maquiladora," *Antipode*, 29 (July 1997), 278–302.

experiences and portrayals are often contradictory.²⁷ In her research in Port Alberni, BC, Reed found that women both contested the forest industry's exclusion of women, and supported its existence because of the economic importance forestry had for their families and communities. In conclusion, the perspectives and insights of white and Aboriginal women workers can provide us with new knowledge about the ways that diversity management is implicated with pre-existing structures of colonialism, class, gender and white/Aboriginal inequality.

Methodological Approach

MY APPROACH TO DATA collection and analysis was influenced by phenomenology and grounded theory and later by critical discourse analysis.²⁸ I interviewed women working in forest processing subsidiaries of the MNFC in Saskatchewan during the summer and fall of 2004 to develop a comprehensive picture of woman's perspectives and experiences of work. Women interviewed included nineteen labourers, four clerical workers, one technical worker, four professional workers (technical professionals and team leaders who organized silviculture and harvesting operations) and one low-level manager, and represented 10 per cent of the total female workforce and 25 per cent of the total female Aboriginal workforce in the MNFC's operations in the province (Table 1). These 29 women worked throughout the MNFC's regional operations which included the following: two forestlands operations units, two sawmills, one plywood mill, one oriented strand board mill and one pulp and paper mill. All positions except for management and professional workers and one clerical worker were unionized. The most common positions held by the women labourers included: lumber grader, pulp handler, planer/stacker operator, and paper machine utility. Several women also moved between jobs as spares. Ten women self-identified as having Aboriginal ancestry and fourteen self-identified as having Canadian or European ancestry. Interviews with three human resource (HR) managers; and national and sub-national union staff overseeing forestry were used to contextualize women's experiences and representations.

27. Maureen Reed, *Taking Stands: Gender and the Sustainability of Rural Communities* (Vancouver 2003), 79–110.

28. Although these approaches originate from different intellectual traditions, the boundaries between them are porous. My use of methodological approaches was selective and sequential. Grounded theory guided the early stages of data collection and initial coding allowing me to be open in my initial descriptions of women's experiences and in identifying themes of importance that emerged from the data. Phenomenology influenced later stages of analysis when I delved more deeply into participants' descriptions, seeking to expose taken-for-granted assumptions in women's experiences. Critical discourse analysis later provided a structured form of analysis that allowed for the integration of social context with text analysis. For further discussion of the compatibility of these approaches see: Helene Starks and Susan Brown Trinidad, "Choose Your Method: A Comparison of Phenomenology, Discourse Analysis, and Grounded Theory," *Qualitative Health Research*, 17 (December 2007), 1372–80.

Table 1: Occupational Distribution of Female and Aboriginal Employees in the MNFC's Saskatchewan Subsidiaries, 2003*

Occupational groups	Total Employees			Aboriginal Employees			
	Total	Female		Total Aboriginal		Female	
	No	No	%	No	%	No	%
Hourly Operations	968	160	16.5%	158	16.3%	31	3.2%
Hourly Trades	351	1	0.3%	23	6.6%	0	0.0%
Sales/Service	18	6	33.3%	2	11.1%	0	0.0%
Admin/Clerical	68	64	94.1%	7	10.3%	7	10.3%
Supervisor	100	5	5.0%	8	8.0%	1	1.0%
Semi Professional	24	5	20.8%	1	4.2%	0	0.0%
Professional	78	19	24.4%	4	5.1%	1	1.3%
Managers	51	4	7.8%	1	2.0%	1	2.0%
Total	1658	264	15.9%	204	12.3%	41	2.5%
Management employees							
Senior Managers	5	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Middle Managers	46	4	8.7%	1	2.2%	1	2.2%

Per cent figures are of the total workforce in a given occupational group.

* Data used in the construction of this table was provided in H2 White Human Resource Manager, November 2004.

Workers within the MNFC's operations were represented by two unions: The International Woodworkers of America-Canada (IWA) – representing workers for the OSB mill, the plywood mill and the two sawmills; and Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) – representing workers at the pulp and paper mill. Although local all-male union executives declined interviews because of the study's gender focus, active members of the CEP Women's Committee were interviewed. Because of the ethical requirements for the study it is not possible to disclose the name of the company being studied or the names of government, union and human resource officials interviewed.²⁹

29. Interviews were 1–2 hours long and were semi-structured. All but two interviews were conducted in-person, throughout northern Saskatchewan. I have cited the interviews by interview number, whether the interviewee was white or Aboriginal, and noted their broad

The predominant racial divide in the northern prairies is between people of European descent and Aboriginal peoples. In Saskatchewan, the dominance of third and fourth generation settlers of European ancestry and the high population of Aboriginal peoples relative to other populations of colour have resulted in the marking of Aboriginal peoples as the dominant “Other.”³⁰ I therefore used the term white to collectively describe the non-Aboriginal women interviewed, none of whom were people of colour and all of whom self-identified as being of Canadian or European ancestry. The term white emphasizes how whiteness superseded ethnic differences among the non-Aboriginal women. The category Aboriginal included any woman who identified herself as having Cree, Métis and/or Dené ancestry whether or not she was a ‘Status Indian’ as defined by Canada’s Indian Act. The Aboriginal women interviewed were living off-reserve in forest communities and their livelihoods were not dependent on subsistence activities.

Intersectional approaches to research require that researchers balance the degree to which they accept categories of difference to highlight inequality with the degree to which they deconstruct existing categories of difference for their essentialism.³¹ Despite the problems associated with drawing lines among groups, I used social categories that represented lived identities as they were accepted and negotiated by the participants to contextualize the talk and representations of women. After initial thematic coding, different themes emerged related to women’s class positions (that accorded with whether they were salaried or unionized) and whether they were white or Aboriginal. I examined interviews within each of these groups using critical discourse analysis (CDA). In CDA, talk is understood to both reflect and construct social experience, so it can at once be used to highlight experiences of oppression while interrogating its construction.³² I followed Fairclough’s³³ method of CDA by examining the structure of the text itself: how the text produces or reproduces different discourses, and how the text functions as a social practice within an ideological framework. My analysis focused on meanings related

job category as well as the date of the interview. Note that key informant interviews were numbered separately from worker interviews and include the job categories: Human Resource Manager, government representative, and union representative. Worker interviews include the job categories: professional, manager, labourer, and clerical worker. “I” is used in cases where the interviewer is cited.

30. Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis, “Troubling National Discourses in Anti-Racist Curricular Planning,” *Canadian Journal of Education*, 28 (Summer 2005), 295–317.

31. Leslie McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” *Signs*, 30 (Spring 2005), 1771–800.

32. Rebecca Rogers, Elizabeth Malancharuvil-Berkes, Melissa Mosley, Diane Hui, and Joseph Glynis O’Garro, “Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature,” *Review of Educational Research*, 75 (Fall 2005), 365–416.

33. Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge 1992); Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (New York 2003).

to representations of identity and to ideological representations of diversity management. Portions of talk analysed were selected to provide examples of how women's different positions influenced their representations of company diversity practices.

Diversity Management in Saskatchewan

SASKATCHEWAN PRESENTED a distinct political economic and social space for the introduction of diversity management. All of the forest activity in the region, including the locations of mills and harvest activities, took place on the traditional territories of Cree, Dené and Métis nations who were increasingly articulating their rights to a say and role in the development of resources in the province. Despite the increasing recognition of Aboriginal groups' legitimacy in provincial politics, however, social and economic divisions between Aboriginal people and white people in Saskatchewan remained strong. Current and historical patterns of employment rendered Aboriginal men underrepresented in larger forest processing mills and management activities, and overrepresented in forest fire fighting, tree planting and logging activities, and other forms of seasonal work that garner lower wages and less job security.³⁴ These patterns are consistent with the documentation of Aboriginal people's participation in seasonal and lower paid forms of resource work through the 20th century.³⁵

Gendered patterns of employment in the Saskatchewan and the MNFC resembled those of other forest communities in Canada. Women in Saskatchewan had only gained a small foothold in forest processing by the late 20th century. In 2003, they comprised less than 13 per cent of non-clerical positions in the MNFC (Table 1). Women were underrepresented in forestry work and overrepresented in service sector occupations in their communities. The first woman was hired in each of the mills in Saskatchewan in the 1980s; however, it was only in the 1990s that mills began to hire significant numbers of women.³⁶ By 2003, the MNFC's regional workforce was comprised of 15.9 per cent women, and 12.3 per cent of Aboriginal people. The distribution of women among occupations within forest processing followed gendered patterns of work allocation demonstrated elsewhere.³⁷ Women were

34. Teskey and Smyth, *Saskatchewan's Forest Industry and Its Economic Importance* 10; Mills, "Segregation of women and Aboriginal people," 147–171.

35. Andrew Parnaby, "'The best men that ever worked the lumber': Aboriginal Longshoremans on Burrard Inlet, BC, 1863–1939," *The Canadian Historical Review*, 87 (March 2006), 1–15; Steven High, "Native Wage Labour and Independent Production During the 'Era of Irrelevance,'" *Labour/Le Travail*, 37 (Spring 1996), 243–64.

36. Pers. comm. Administrative staff IWA 1–184, and CEP 1120, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, November 2004.

37. Roger Hayter and Trevor Barnes, "Labour Market Segmentation, Flexibility, and Recession:

underrepresented in management, labourer, and technical and trades occupations, and concentrated in clerical work relative to white men (Table 1). One exception to this pattern, communicated by two women plywood workers, was that women were more likely to work in the plywood mill than in the other mills in their community of Hudson's Bay. Since many plywood mills across Canada opened during World War II, these mills became gendered as places where women could work. Klausen's research on women in Port Alberni, BC, demonstrated how women in that community were more insistent that they retain access to plywood mill work after the war because of their dominance in the mill during World War II.³⁸

The MNFC's introduction of diversity management in Saskatchewan occurred in the context of an expanding forest industry. The profitability of forests in British Columbia declined in the 1980s and 90s on account of declining old growth forests and higher tariffs on softwood lumber exported to the US.³⁹ Concurrently, prairie forestry became relatively more profitable because of a shorter growing season, a greater quantity of virgin forests and technological developments that allowed the fast growing *Populus spp.* prevalent in the northern prairies to be used in the production of pulp and oriented strand board.⁴⁰ As forest employment declined in other regions, it increased in the prairies. The increasing profitability of prairie forestry spurred investment in forestry through the 1980s and 1990s. It was during this time that the MNFC expanded its forest management license areas in the prairies and increased its operations through acquisition. From 1948–1980s, many of the forest processing mills in Saskatchewan were provincially owned or owned by smaller companies.⁴¹ This changed in 1986, when the MNFC bought the Prince Albert Pulp Company and Big River sawmill from the Saskatchewan government and obtained a long term timber license. In 1999, the MNFC purchased Macmillan Bloedel, acquiring a sawmill in Carrot River, a plywood mill in Hudson's Bay, and an Oriented Strand Board plant in Hudson's Bay.⁴² At this time, under

A British Columbian Case Study," *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 10 (Spring 1992), 333–53.

38. Susanne Klausen, "The plywood girls: women and gender ideology at the Port Alberni Plywood Plant, 1942–1991," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 199–235.

39. Maureen Reed and Suzanne Mills, "Chapter 17: Renewable resource use," in Bernard Thraves, M.L. Lewry, Janis E. Dale and Hansgeorge Schlichtmann, eds., *Saskatchewan: Geographic Perspectives* (Canadian Plains Research Centre 2007), 385–405.

40. Oriented strand board is an engineered wood product formed by layering wood flakes and binding them with resin and wax. See Roger Hayter and Trevor Barnes, "The Restructuring of British Columbia's Coastal Forest Sector," *BC Studies*, 113 (Spring 1997), 7–37.

41. Micheal P. Howlett, "The forest industry on the prairies: opportunities and constraints to future development," *Prairie Forum*, 14 (Fall 1989), 233–257.

42. Wayne Roznowsky "Weyehaeuser" in *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* (Canadian Plains Research Centre 2006) <http://esask.uregina.ca>

pressure from the provincial government to meet their Annual Allowable Cut, the MNFC opened a small sawmill in Prince Albert and built a new Oriented Strand Board plant in Hudson's Bay.⁴³ By the turn of the 21st century, the MNFC had two long term harvesting leases that covered approximately two thirds of the marketable timber in the province and six forest product mills situated across four communities.

Workers from different mills who had worked through the change in ownership attributed increasing job insecurity and productivity pressures to the MNFC buyouts.⁴⁴ The MNFC began to rationalize workforces and introduce functional flexibility in clerical, technical and managerial job categories.⁴⁵ In the three years prior to the study, the MNFC had downsized the workforce within one of its larger mills, increased the frequency of seasonal and unscheduled layoffs in another mill, introduced new work systems that altered shift schedules and speeded up the production process in yet another mill. The MNFC had also increasingly centralized clerical functions, and altered shift and break schedules of workers across all mills. These changes were undesirable for most workers, and were accompanied by continual threats of plant closure.

The changing ownership of the mills also brought a greater attention to diversity that was favourable to most women workers including increased vigilance in upholding of anti-discrimination and harassment policies, heightened attention to workplace health and safety, and increased numbers of women and Aboriginal men. Emanating from its headquarters in the United States, the focus on diversity within the MNFC began in the 1990s.⁴⁶ The integration of diversity into business goals became more formalized in the early 2000s when its CEO and top human resource manager joined a group of top executives in Seattle to talk about how to achieve diverse workforces.⁴⁷ This decision was influenced by a desire to guard against costly human rights lawsuits (two of the MNFC's customers had recently lost lawsuits lodged by their employees for human rights violations), and by the knowledge of changing demographics in the United States and the implications that this would have for replacing an aging workforce. In addition, as a federal contractor in the United States, the MNFC needed to abide by Equal Employment Opportunity legislation in

43. H5 White Government Representative, March 2005.

44. Interview subjects for the study spanned four mills, each with different product specializations and histories. Since interviews were selected to represent the breadth of women's experiences of forest work, a more thorough examination of labour process changes within each mill is beyond the scope of this study.

45. H1 White Human Resource Manager, November 2004.

46. Frank Jossi, "Cultivating Diversity," *Human Resource Executive Magazine*, 14 (December 2004), <<http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/story.jsp?storyId=4222909&query=diversity>> (3 March 2011).

47. Jossi, "Cultivating Diversity."

its US operations, so diversity management helped the company meet existing legislative requirements.⁴⁸ Diversity was listed as a top business priority and company-wide diversity practices included tying managers' bonuses to diversity targets, implementing diversity training programs for all management, and promoting 'clean' workplaces that were free from harassment.⁴⁹ The central diversity policy of the MNFC was not only about increasing the numbers of targeted minority groups, but also about changing the way the company operated to ensure that workplaces were amenable to diversity. As such, the company promoted a broad definition of diversity that included not only legally protected and recognized groups but also age, lifestyle and differences in experiences and ideas.

At the regional level, the MNFC aimed to create workforces that were representative of local demographics.⁵⁰ In Saskatchewan this meant increasing the representation of Aboriginal men and women.⁵¹ Although the MNFC was not required to abide by Canada's employment equity legislation, it did need to report workplace numbers to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.⁵² A more significant impetus for Aboriginal inclusion, although only implied by HR managers, was Canada's evolving relationship with Aboriginal peoples. The 1990s and early 2000s marked a time of increasing recognition of Aboriginal peoples' rights to resources and of the duty of governments and corporations to consult with Aboriginal groups prior to development. Increasingly broad interpretations of Aboriginal and treaty rights by the Supreme Court of Canada were influencing provincial governments' approaches to managing natural resources and the Saskatchewan government was no exception. The Saskatchewan government encouraged the MNFC to increase the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in forestry at the time when the MNFC's long-term forest management license was up for renewal.⁵³ Increasing Aboriginal employment in its operations through diversity management would therefore help mitigate pressure to include Aboriginal peoples in the forest industry.

Although the firms' targeting of women and Aboriginal men in hiring demonstrated a categorical approach to inclusion, HR managers' talk about strategies of inclusion reflected the individual approach of diversity management theory that rejected the use of social categories and stressed a continuation of meritocracy and worker productivity. One HR manager stated

48. H1 White Human Resource Manager, November 2004.

49. Jossi, "Cultivating Diversity."

50. H2 White Human Resource Manager, November 2004.

51. Although people with disabilities were also underrepresented in the MNFC, regional HR managers stated that the corporation did not attempt to represent the disabled population since it was too costly.

52. H1 White Human Resource Manager, November 2004.

53. H5 Government Representative, March 2005.

"I think you have to be careful ... you really need to talk about human beings rather than designated groups."⁵⁴ Merit was a key factor in hiring and promotion decisions; women and Aboriginal candidates were preferentially hired or promoted only if they were equally qualified to other candidates. The ability to offer flexible work options was also highlighted as an important component of diversity management strategies. Correspondingly, the same HR manager cited the workforce's "resistance to change" as the greatest barrier facing the future success of the mills.⁵⁵

A lack of union interest in concerns that were distinct to women was reaffirmed through interviews with women workers. A representative from the CEP women's committee described a union "mentality" that made it difficult for women to be heard. The unions were therefore in a position of being reactive when the company implemented specific strategies to increase diversity such as targeted hiring, altering the work experience requirements, moving the location of recruiting and applicant testing to reserves to encourage First Nation applicants, and ensuring representation from marginalized groups in summer student positions. The company also held diversity and Aboriginal awareness sessions, promoted a heightened awareness of discrimination and harassment and targeted women and Aboriginal men for promotion. While targeted hiring and heightened awareness of discrimination and harassment were uniformly applied across all of the mills, some strategies, such as diversity and Aboriginal awareness training, were only available to salaried or clerical workers. Flexible work arrangements were provided for salaried employees allowing them to work from home, and to shift their work hours. Women in managerial and professional occupations were also encouraged to apply for promotions.

Workplace Practices and Difference

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES of diversity management in the MNFC's Saskatchewan operations were uneven. Women's experiences and perceptions were related to the positions that they held within the firm and by whether they were white or Aboriginal. Three themes emerged related to women's experiences of diversity management. First, the different perspectives of white managerial/professional and working-class women demonstrated the class specificity of how diversity management was experienced. Second, women's perspectives highlighted some of the limitations of the corporate liberal framework of diversity management to meaningfully include women in the workplace. And last, diversity management was helping to re-inscribe white racism towards Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal working-class women communicated negative

54. H2 White Human Resource Manager, November 2004.

55. H2 White Human Resource Manager, November 2004.

experiences of diversity management and often spoke in response to being seen as token employees by co-workers and management.

The Contradictions of Flexibility: Liberal Bargains

THE PERSPECTIVES OF several women working in professional/managerial roles highlighted how diversity management's individual focus can help disguise gender bias. In focusing on the hiring and promotion of individual women, diversity management failed to look at how women as a group were disadvantaged. The MNFC aimed to hire and promote women, yet also required exceptionally long work hours of its upper management, hours that did not allow several of the women interviewed sufficient time for reproductive work in the home. Yet many women in professional and managerial positions supported diversity management, moving between strongly endorsing the company's approach to including women and descriptions of their overwork.

In some cases, it is advantageous for women to support liberal approaches despite the ways that they disadvantage the larger category of women.⁵⁶ Women sometimes gain material benefit from showing that they support and believe in particular state or corporate strategies. Middle-class women, in particular, often benefit from approaches that are disadvantageous to themselves or to other women, if they offer returns for education and skills that they possess. All of the women interviewed in managerial/professional positions played at least a small role in the management functions of the corporation regardless of whether they classified themselves as forest professionals or managers. As managers, many of the women were expected to adopt diversity management as part of the MNFC's corporate identity, so promoting diversity management was beneficial to their careers. These women also described markedly different work histories from labourers or clerical workers: they tended to approach work as a self-development project rather than as a means to a paycheque; had often attended university specifically related to their current position; and had experience working for different forestry companies in different geographical locations. Because of their higher educational attainment and greater geographic mobility, these women were able to take advantage of diversity management's merit-based hiring and promotion opportunities in ways that working-class women could not. Several women stated that they felt that the MNFC's heightened vigilance against gender-based discrimination was far above what they would find at another forest company. As testimony to the company's lack of discrimination, one woman described how she was impressed that she had been hired since she had been visibly pregnant during her interview. Other women working as professionals or managers also recounted positive

56. Amalia Sa'ar, "Postcolonial Feminism, the Politics For Identification and the Liberal Bargain," *Gender and Society*, 19 (October 2005), 680–700.

experiences such as these to legitimize diversity management, even in the cases where this position was contradicted by personal experience.

Two diversity practices in particular highlighted the contradictions diversity management often posed for managerial/professional class women: the option of flexibility, in terms of location and hours of work, and the targeting of opportunities for promotion to women and Aboriginal people. In her description of what she liked about her job, one woman referenced both the company's practice of offering flexible work practices and diversity management's individualistic ideals.

I like the principles and the values of the company that I work for. I always said to myself, if working for [this company] ... if it ever came to the point where my values, [were compromised] ... I don't think I could do it just for the money... And there is a lot of flexibility in my job ...I have a young family, there is more recognition given to the women and men in our corporation that have young families and if someone is sick and they're staying at home because their wife has to work ... they're still in contact ... people have laptops, people can phone in if they're missing a meeting.⁵⁷

This woman bracketed her remark about flexible work practices with the assertion that the company had positive values. She referenced her personal values using a number of conditional clauses, "if working for," "if it ever came to," to add emphasis. This technique of moralization supported her authority to judge the values of the company. She then classified the practice of offering flexible hours as an example of company "values." The woman conferred further authority on her claim by highlighting her identity as a mother of a young family. The way she presented her ability to work from home, however, to the effect that special accommodations would not be made only for women but also for men in a similar situation, highlighted the individualism entrenched in diversity discourse; the special circumstances of each individual would be taken into account, and not the blanket needs of a minority group. Moreover, her description of how flexibility operated within the firm emphasized a continuation of work, "the use of laptops and phones," in such a way as to not hamper firm productivity. Accommodation of difference was not linked to a reduction in productivity, consistent with diversity discourse. Accordingly, all women interviewed as managers or professionals positioned themselves as highly productive and dedicated to the company. To describe why she continued to work many hours of overtime one woman stated "you want to do your job well, and you don't want to be viewed, as if you're not pulling your own weight."⁵⁸ Likewise, another woman described how she didn't question the need to work overtime "the company says we're supposed to be here from 8 til' 4:30 but we know what needs to be done and what needs to happen during that week ... and we just do it."⁵⁹

57. P27 White Professional, July 2004.

58. P19 White Professional, July 2004.

59. P32 White Professional, September 2004.

This theme of labour productivity was present in other women's discussions about their advancement within the organization. When asked about whether she was seeking an internal promotion, one interviewee remarked: "Not in the near future and that's a personal decision because of where my kids are."⁶⁰ Later, when asked if she faced different challenges or opportunities from men in her job, she stated:

Yes I have, I do, but I think they are in a positive way ... they are looking strongly to have women and Aboriginals in top leadership roles, and they're encouraging that and that's what, that's where I find some pressure, that I'm a woman in a management role and ... they want to see me move on into bigger roles and I've got to challenge that back and say that's not what I want right now.⁶¹

In the context of the interview, the woman's statement "that's not what I want right now" paraphrased her earlier statement, "Not in the near future ... because of where my kids are." The last excerpt, then, suggested that encouraging the promotion of women was inconsistent with maximizing the productivity of workers. Not applying for promotion was described as "a personal decision," and as an act of resistance against the company through the statement: "I've got to challenge that back." These semantic devices framed the woman's not moving to higher roles in the organization as an *individual* choice, and not as a barrier facing women as a group. Her interpretation relied on the assumption that promotions entail longer hours of work not manageable while raising children. And, despite the speaker's emphasis on the individual level, her reference to children when answering a question about the differences facing women suggested an assumed understanding that as a *woman* with young children, she would not find it manageable.

Despite the flexible work options presented to women and men with young families, however, the ability of the corporation to demand extremely long work hours for upper management positions was contingent on the availability of women (but more often men), who did not have responsibilities for reproductive labour, to fulfill these roles. Since unpaid work in the home continues to be gendered, this resulted in a systemic bias against the promotion of women to higher levels in the corporation. Yet, many managerial/professional class women presented challenges they faced as a choice, and the company as pro-flexibility and pro-women. This discourse of individual choice allowed some women to manage the dissonance between their lived experiences of work-family imbalance and their desire to be good employees by endorsing a corporate culture that aimed to maximize individual effort while professing to help women.

60. P21 White Manager, July 2004.

61. P21 White Manager, July 2004.

White Working-Class Women Negotiating Equality and Solidarity

THE WHITE WORKING-CLASS WOMEN interviewed did not reiterate diversity management's individualistic rhetoric. Instead several working-class women selectively supported practices to include women that did not impede union strength using a language of equality. Class politics has historically relied on the notion of worker equality and sameness to underpin collective action since workers have much greater power *vis à vis* the employer when they stand together.⁶² By choosing to represent the practices to include women that they supported as measures that increased worker equality, several working-class white women were able to recast elements of diversity management through a collective frame. Women used language of collective worker empowerment to both challenge and support the dissenting positions of their unions towards some diversity practices. The strategic positions taken by women and their unwillingness to sacrifice the solidarity of their male co-workers allowed them to maintain their support for elements of diversity management that would benefit women while also rejecting the individualism of diversity management.

The ways that several white working-class women portrayed diversity practices reflected their underlying belief in collective representation. Since the collective agreement and the union prohibited the implementation of corporate strategies targeting promotion or allowing part-time work, and since the structural requirements of mill work prohibited the introduction of some forms of work flexibility (such as working from home and changing hours), many of the working-class women did not experience the full range of diversity management initiatives. As a result, several white working-class women experienced diversity management predominantly through hiring practices, the enforcement of discrimination and harassment policy, and their occasional participation in a diversity course. Notably, the union also protected these women from the pressure to work long hours faced by salaried middle-class women. When describing their experiences with the union, many women used words such as equal, fair and the same. Many white working-class women stated that they felt that the union provided them with protection from unfair treatment by management and with equal opportunities for promotion through seniority. One woman emphasized how the union guarded against discrimination towards any worker, regardless of sex, stating: "So your foreman ... don't happen to like you and if you didn't have a union, how long do you think you would last? Whether it would be a girl or a guy."⁶³

Another common theme among working-class white women was the leveraging of the vocabulary of equality to describe corporate diversity practices to include women. Here, equality and sameness were used in the spirit

62. Darcy Martin, *Thinking Union: Activism and Education in Canada's Labour Movement* (Toronto 1995), 31–32.

63. P7 White Labourer, July 2004.

of substantial equality as the removal of unequal discriminatory practices towards women. One woman described the company's targeted hiring of women, stating, "as far as I'm concerned the company has been very fair to us and they have hired a lot of women." Another woman used the terminology of fairness when describing the company's strong stance on harassment relative to other mills stating: "As far as harassment ... they are really trained to be fair ... It's not perfect but so much better than in so many other places."⁶⁴ White working-class women therefore used a vocabulary of equality both to promote the inclusion of women, *and* to defend their class interests as working-class workers.

A desire to guard against encroachments on worker power by management placed some of the working-class women in ambiguous positions relative to diversity management practices when these challenged their union's concept of equality. These women carefully negotiated their positions when diversity practices aimed to separate the concerns of workers as a whole from initiatives targeting marginalized groups. Two women's accounts of incidents where the union opposed practices that would have been beneficial for women show a negotiation between a desire to improve the workplace for women and a desire to support the union. One woman described an attempt by the company to introduce targeted apprenticeship positions to diversity groups, showing her disappointment in the union:

the company had offered seven positions plus two if the two other ones came from the diverse groups ... However it was voted down on the membership floor to have these extra two positions specifically because of seniority...[it was] a very sad thing.⁶⁵

I followed by asking her if this decision was because the union objected to the possibility of apprenticeships going to people with less seniority. The interviewee agreed, adding that:

[the targeted positions], those would have been awarded on seniority of those identified groups but because those groups have been in the workplace for so fewer years than the general white male population, they in total have less seniority ... it would have meant (pause) that was the bottom line to me was two more jobs.

In her description of the scenario, the woman communicated her disappointment not only for the outcome of the vote, but also for the reasoning behind the decision. Though she described the union's "no" vote as resulting from a refusal to allocate apprenticeships to workers of lower seniority, her position was that the union had not understood her line of reasoning: that the creation of two positions was an advance for workers in the context of a workforce that was being downsized. The firm had previously announced 200 layoffs. Her regret at the vote's outcome was thus not presented as a defeat

64. P12 White Clerical Worker, August 2004.

65. P6 White Labourer, July 2004.

for the rights of women and Aboriginal people, but rather as a defeat for workers. By stating, “the bottom line to me was two more jobs,” she emphasized the importance of the apprenticeships in terms of job creation rather than as a practice that would target specific groups. The woman presented this worker-based argument when she approached the union despite her own understanding of how women and Aboriginal workers were systematically disadvantaged from moving into apprenticeship positions in her interview.

In a separate account, a working-class woman described her conflicted position towards requests made by women with small children to work part-time. Although the firm was supportive of the requests, the union local stood firmly opposed.

I know of some girls, especially the ones coming back from mat [maternity] leaves, you know, they would love to work part-time. Personally I tell them you know, this union has fought long and hard to have us all hired full time and that's not something that's not something they're going to like ... not for us few women. That's hard. It's for the benefit of the whole, for the majority but it does make it hard for the ones that are just having babies now.⁶⁶

This woman responded to a question about the firm's support for women by recounting barriers some women faced as a result of the union's firm stance on full-time work. This reflected the degree to which the union mediated unionized women's experiences. Yet the woman was careful to retain her support for the union. She was inconsistent in how she positioned herself; shifting back and forth between locating herself with all workers “to have us all hired full time” and with women workers “not for us few women.” She defended the union stating that it was “for the benefit of the whole.” While sympathetic to the issues of women with substantial family obligations, she spoke through a discourse that valued collectivity and suggested that the interests of the individual should be forsaken for those of the group.

In the above cases, women continued to support their unions' positions, even when these were problematically based on male norms. Women's continued support for their unions highlighted the significance that several working-class women placed on maintaining union power. Neither greater flexibility with childcare nor the faster promotion of women into apprenticeships was considered to be more important than the need to have a strong union. This perspective is unsurprising given that the unions offered some protection for their jobs, which paid far above most other forms of employment available to the women in their communities.

The selective support that several working-class women showed for diversity management practices challenged diversity management's individualistic approach that promoted the inclusion of individual women while implementing undesirable changes for all workers. These women's representations highlight the contradictory position that working-class women are often

66. P38 White Labourer, September 2004.

faced with in male-dominated unions – needing to negotiate their positions as workers and as women. These perspectives emphasize the importance of collective representation to the quality of work experiences and hence to any approach to inclusion.

White Women Re-inscribing Racism

THOUGH THE MNFC'S DIVERSITY strategy aimed to change the culture of the company by fostering a climate conducive to hiring and retaining Aboriginal peoples and women, in effect it often helped to re-inscribe racism towards Aboriginal peoples. In as much as the liberal individualistic framework underpinning diversity management enabled the valuation of difference, it also created openings for opposition to diversity practices. In particular, the idea of meritocracy was left unchallenged in diversity management, to be easily leveraged to justify the exclusion of Aboriginal peoples. White women were not only targets of diversity management. As part of the white majority within the workplace, they were in a privileged position to dictate whether or not Aboriginal peoples were fully included in the workplace.

In direct contrast to the equation of difference with productivity, some white women represented the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples as unequal since they saw Aboriginal people as under-producers. Creating workplaces that valued difference, an aim of diversity management, would require changing the shared beliefs of employees. This would mean challenging regional racist constructions of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal people in the region and across Canada have historically faced discrimination and backlash in employment related to characterizations that they are deficient, that they are a problem to be fixed, and that they are outside of the working-class.⁶⁷ These discourses are particularly strong in the prairie provinces because of the relative absence of other visible minorities.⁶⁸ Aboriginal education and training for workers was unevenly applied across occupational categories in the MNFC and often emphasized Aboriginal cultural difference and not white racism. Since diversity management was designed at the MNFC's American headquarters, educational materials that did have an anti-racist component were focused on African American and Hispanic people rather than Aboriginal peoples. As a result of the failure to adequately address pre-existing racism, corporate practices to include Aboriginal workers were frequently used by some white women to further solidify racist characterizations of Aboriginal peoples.

67. Thomas Dunk, *It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-Class Culture* (Montreal & Kingston 1994), 101–131; Julie Guard, "Authenticity on the Line: Women Workers, Native 'scabs,' and the Multi-Ethnic Politics of Identity in a Left-Led Strike in Cold War Canada," *Journal of Women's History*, 15 (Winter 2004), 117–140.

68. Schick and St. Denis, "Troubling National Discourses in Anti-Racist Curricular Planning," 295–317.

Although a culture of collectivity in unions has been necessary to the empowerment of workers *vis à vis* the employer, it has also been used by white male workers in some contexts to exclude women and Aboriginal people from highly valued jobs.⁶⁹ Accordingly, while some white working-class women used a vocabulary of equality to promote the inclusion of women, at times these same women used a similar language to portray the inclusion of Aboriginal workers as unequal. The use of the word equality therefore sometimes moved from a substantive to a formal understanding with the changing context of its use throughout a given interview. Not all white women described the inclusion of Aboriginal people as unequal; some women described the targeted hiring of Aboriginal people as fair. In these instances, a substantive understanding of equality justified practices promoting Aboriginal inclusion. More problematic were the descriptions of practices to include Aboriginal peoples as unfair. For example, one woman who had previously described the inclusion of women as fair responded to my question about whether the company had supported Aboriginal peoples by suggesting that they were privileged:

as far as I know they supported the fact that (pause) in fact I think that they even went out of their way ... to put postings up on the reserve that there was a hiring going on so I thought that was quite fair because they didn't go into every other community to do that ... you know they definitely had their opportunity to put in for jobs.

I: And was that successful do you think?

Well we have one person that I know of that is off the reserve that travels to the reserve, that's working.⁷⁰

When taken as a whole, the women's talk portrayed Aboriginal people as the recipients of special treatment from the company. While the speaker used the word "fair" to describe diversity practices, its meaning was contradicted by the phrases "went out of their way," and "they didn't go to every other community to do that." In combination with her tone of trepidation when talking about Aboriginal inclusion, this ambiguity might signal an attempt by the speaker to not appear racist since, "in any discourse about minorities, white speech participants are aware of the norms of nondiscrimination and conscious of the fact that they should present themselves as tolerant citizens."⁷¹ The speaker may have used the word "fair" to moderate her thoughts that Aboriginal people were getting underserved preferential treatment. The statement that Aboriginal people had "had their opportunity" attributed blame for the low representation of Aboriginal people in the workplace to Aboriginal people and not the company. This sentiment was echoed by another woman who stated,

69. Dunk, *It's a Working Man's Town*, 95–100, 103–131.

70. P25 White Labourer, September 2004.

71. Teun van Dijk, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, Edited by John H. II Stanfield. 7 vols. Vol. 6, *Sage Series on Race and Ethnic Relations* (Newbury Park 1993), 145.

“they’re trying,”⁷² in reference to the company’s attempts to include Aboriginal people. Both text segments implied that the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the workplace is difficult and perhaps impossible.

A more direct use of a language of equality/sameness was employed to oppose any diversity practice that was seen to treat Aboriginal people *differently* from other workers. The application of a concept of formal equality was again presented in response to a question about whether Aboriginal people may face different challenges getting a job at the mill relative to white workers:

Actually [Aboriginal people get] better [opportunities] because they want to hire minority groups because the pressure is on them to make sure that their work site has, and I know around when I got hired ... they hired lots and lots of women, and I think it actually affected their workplace, because there’s women out there that cannot do the job to the same skill level that some of the men can do because some of it is physical and if you have a shift full of women, well who’s going to do the grunt work? ... and they’ve had special hiring just for Métis and Aboriginals, so.⁷³

While the question asked about Aboriginal people, the woman’s response argued against the differential hiring of women, a position that she, as a woman, felt she could take without appearing sexist. The speaker, using gender as a surrogate for Aboriginal identity, reasoned that the company should not engage in preferential hiring for Aboriginal people. She argued that: 1) the company has hired a lot of women; 2) women have on average a lower physical skill level than men; and 3) that the workplace has suffered as a result. The connection between these propositions and the hiring of Aboriginal peoples was left unfinished such that “now there has been a special hiring for Métis and Aboriginals.” The implied completion of the argument relied once again on the circulation of discourses that Aboriginal people had inherent characteristics, like women, that would make them inferior workers. The discrepancy between white unionized women’s talk about the company’s efforts to include women and their talk about practices to include Aboriginal people highlights the political fluidity of the concepts of sameness and difference.

Racialized norms were also re-inscribed through some professional/managerial class women’s portrayals of Aboriginal inclusion. These women identified with the corporation and described Aboriginal inclusion in a paternalistic manner, suggesting that the company was providing assistance to Aboriginal people by hiring them. Responses were often consistent with diversity discourse in that they used a language of including difference rather than of removing inequity. They diverged from diversity discourse, however, since they presented Aboriginal cultural difference as something to be accommodated and not as beneficial to firm productivity. These representations can be contrasted with how some professional/managerial class women characterized the inclusion of women in the workplace as compatible with firm productivity

72. P12 White Clerical Worker, August 2004.

73. P22 White Labourer, September 2004.

goals. Since the corporation was presented as racially neutral, any changes to policy or practice were understood as helping Aboriginal peoples.

Talk of practices pertaining to Aboriginal people often demonstrated a belief that the company's efforts to hire Aboriginal people were rooted in benevolence. One white woman manager described her understanding of the relationship between the company and Aboriginal people as follows:

we work hard to try and incorporate Aboriginals into the workforce and give them opportunities and deal with their things that are of traditional value, like you know the berry picking, the gathering, the hunting and stuff.⁷⁴

The speaker positioned herself as a representative of the firm "we," and in a position of power relative to "Aboriginals." The relationship between the company and Aboriginal people was presented as one where the company "give[s] them opportunities," insinuating that the relationship was unequal and not as mutually beneficial as suggested by diversity discourse. The presentation of traditional harvesting activities as "things" that need to be "dealt with," had the connotation that Aboriginal culture was a barrier to the company's goals and that these needed to be overcome in order to have successful production. Aboriginal workers were characterized as different because of their nature-based activities (berry picking, hunting). The presentation of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal activities as associated with nature and not reconcilable with industrial production draws on discourses that position Aboriginal culture and industrial production as a contradiction. White settlers early representations of authentic Aboriginal culture involved distancing Aboriginal culture from urban spaces using both space and time.⁷⁵ Aboriginal people came to be considered "in place" in natural spaces away from industrial areas and "out of place" in urban areas where Aboriginal difference was translated into racism.

Other women also emphasized the company's (and hence their own) benevolence towards Aboriginal people, using phrases such as "we like to give them the opportunity to come on board."⁷⁶ Similarly, when describing the allocation of logging and tree planting contracts another woman stated "the [company name] went to some pretty lengthy extents to in order, [sic.] like even to the extent of helping them set up their business, helping them manage finances."⁷⁷ This woman represented the company's use of Aboriginal contractors as exceptional by talking about the company's efforts as "pretty lengthy extents," and using the word "even" to induce the hearer to see the company's "helping

74. P35 White Manager, September 2004.

75. Evelyn Peters, "'Urban' and 'Aboriginal': An Impossible Contradiction?," in Jon Caulfield and Linda Peake, ed., *City Lives & City Forms: Critical Research & Canadian Urbanism* (Toronto 1996), 47–62.

76. P23 White Clerical Worker, September 2004.

77. P19 White Professional, July 2004.

to set up a business and manage finances,” as beyond the expectations of normal company activities. These portrayals construct a frame of Aboriginal inferiority and dependence. Corporate practices of inclusion, since they did not address racism or challenge the notion of meritocracy, became a tool that could be used by white women to prove the company’s, and hence their own, benevolence. In the face of evidence that Aboriginal people were not being successfully incorporated into the workforce, women needed to construct alternate explanations that did not disrupt their understandings of their own positions as representatives of the company.

Experiencing Racism

THE ARGUMENTS MADE BY several Aboriginal women stand in contrast to those of white women workers. Several Aboriginal working-class women contextualized their understandings of diversity practices with descriptions of backlash that they had faced from white workers. Other Aboriginal women pointed to the inability of diversity management practices to meet their desires for more meaningful cultural representation and greater control in their workplaces. Several Aboriginal women stated that they felt that corporate practices of inclusion were tokenistic and did not involve genuine changes to the company’s power structure or philosophy. Since none of the Aboriginal women interviewed were in managerial/professional positions, all of the Aboriginal women interviewed were in working-class positions. The conflation of Aboriginality with working-class job categories in the interview sample reflected company-wide employment patterns. While Aboriginal women were underrepresented in all areas of the firm, they were particularly absent from higher paid professional and managerial positions (Table 1).

And, although the sample is not large enough to be representative, the Aboriginal women interviewed also reported a notably higher incidence of discrimination and harassment than the white women interviewed, likely attesting to the continuing racism within the workplace. A higher incidence of discrimination and harassment accords with other studies of marginalized visible minorities in the workplace, which also show a greater prevalence of social isolation, stress, and a higher pressure to perform.⁷⁸ Aboriginal women’s representations were not only framed by white racism, however. They were also contextualized by the corporate liberal beliefs of the firm that did not allow for recognition of Aboriginal people’s distinct relationships to territory and cultures. In the context of forest workplaces, recognition of Aboriginal peoples’ rights of self-determination would translate into according Aboriginal peoples’ greater control within the firm and challenging the western cultural norms of business practice.

78. Janice Yoder and Lynn Berendsen, “‘Outsider within’ the Firehouse: African American and White Women Firefighters,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 25 (March 2001), 27–36.

The oppression faced by Aboriginal women cannot be fully explained through either a lens of patriarchy or racism, but rather needs to be understood as the outcome of how colonialism and patriarchy intersected to structure Aboriginal women's lives.⁷⁹ Consequently, Aboriginal women's experiences of labour markets and employment are structured by specific forms of negative stereotyping and structural racism, and by how the dispossession from their territories affected them as Aboriginal women. Markedly, the Aboriginal women interviewed talked little about diversity practices to include women. When asked about gender-based inequality in the workplace, one woman who had previously discussed inequality linked to Aboriginality stated, "there is no favouritism there when it comes to man and woman hey?"⁸⁰ This woman's disavowal of gender-based discrimination suggests that she saw questions pertaining to the inclusion of women as synonymous with the essentialism of white feminism.⁸¹ Yet, gender was not entirely absent from the talk of Aboriginal women. Rather the entirety of respondents' experiences as Aboriginal women workers was reflected in responses to questions about Aboriginal inclusion. For example, some Aboriginal women mentioned their gender as a feature that amplified their status as a token employee and that may have improved their chances of being hired.⁸² When describing a specific experience of discrimination, one woman stated: "But I still don't know to this day what that was all about. Whether it was because I was a woman, because I was Native."⁸³

In response to questions about practices to include Aboriginal people, this same woman described experiences of dealing with co-worker backlash against diversity initiatives.

Well when Aboriginal people come in there, the comment from ... the ones that flap their lips and it's like, 'oh they're only here because they're Indian, they're Aboriginal, they're not qualified.' You know, you still have to prove yourself hey? But that takes a long time sometimes.⁸⁴

This woman contextualized backlash to the hiring of Aboriginal people by quoting the speech of a co-worker who was presumably white. Her portrayal of a discourse, that Aboriginal workers were 'not qualified,' and were the recipients of unfair advantages in company hiring, resembled the discourses about Aboriginal people communicated in interviews with white women. The

79. Patricia Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations' Independence* (Halifax 1999); Lawrence, "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity," 3–31.

80. P37 Aboriginal Labourer, July 2004.

81. Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward*.

82. This point was reiterated by five separate Aboriginal interviewees P18, P14, P23, P27 and P35.

83. P10 Aboriginal Labourer, September 2004.

84. P10 Aboriginal Labourer, September 2004.

speaker described the affect that this type of discourse had on Aboriginal workers: in order to compensate for the construction of Aboriginal workers as “lazy,” many Native peoples feel the need to work harder to be accepted by white workers. Inclusionary practices and policies that do not challenge beliefs in meritocracy can have negative personal repercussions for individuals from target groups who become additionally marked as different and as a result become associated with perceived disadvantage and deficiency.⁸⁵

Unsurprisingly, many of the Aboriginal women interviewed did not feel as represented or protected by their unions. In response to my question: “Does being unionized affect working conditions for you?” six working-class Aboriginal women responded with paraphrases to the avail of “...I don’t think our union does much for us.”⁸⁶ Accordingly, references to discourses of union equality were relatively absent from the talk of the Aboriginal women interviewed. Although several Aboriginal women communicated a sense of collectivity with other Aboriginal workers, this collectivity did not extend to feelings of solidarity with the union.

Another contradiction that emerged through Aboriginal women’s representations was the portrayal of the firm’s approach to Aboriginal inclusion as at once desirable and as superficial. One woman complained that she felt that she was always used as a “token” Aboriginal worker at career fairs,⁸⁷ and four others stated that they felt that the company’s pro-Aboriginal and family friendly policies had not materialized into tangible changes.⁸⁸ In response to a more open-ended question about how the firm might support cultural values in the workplace, the interviewee had the following to say: “There were no culture values there. Nothing. Just the hiring of Aboriginals just to make it look good.”⁸⁹ This woman denied the presence of Aboriginal culture in the workplace, asserting that the firm’s inclusion of Aboriginal peoples was unrelated to true values or ethics and was rooted in public relations aims. Many women described how they felt that the firm did not have a genuine desire to empower Aboriginal people through promotion; through the incorporation of Aboriginal culture; or by giving Aboriginal people a voice in shaping strategies designed for their inclusion. These critiques of the company’s approach reflect larger struggles of Aboriginal peoples in Canada to regain control over their lives, resources and territories. Attaining these aims has often involved

85. Didi Khayatt, “The Boundaries of Identity at the Intersection of Race, Class and Gender,” *Canadian Woman Studies*, 14 (Spring 1994), 6–12.

86. P14 Aboriginal Labourer, August 2004.

87. P10 Aboriginal Labourer, September 2004.

88. P4 Aboriginal Labourer, July 2004; P26 Aboriginal Labourer August 2004, P37 Aboriginal Labourer, September 2004; P14 Aboriginal Labourer, August 2004.

89. P37 Aboriginal Labourer, September 2004.

communicating Aboriginal people's distinct cultures and relationship to territory and hence their difference from non-Aboriginal Canadians.

The feeling that Aboriginal people were not able to move into positions of power in the company was communicated by one woman, who, when asked how the company might support Aboriginal cultural values in the workplace, reframed my question by stating:

if they did have, like someone who was Aboriginal working in management because I know of people that belong to some of the, like the First Nations and that and who have applied out there but have never been accepted even for a simple secretary job.⁹⁰

For this woman, hiring and promotion took precedence over the inclusion of culture. However, her concern over promotion was not with her own rank within the company, but with the attainment of power by Aboriginal people as a whole within the firm. The woman linked a desire to have greater Aboriginal representation at higher levels in the company to increased hiring of Aboriginal workers. The woman's statement that she knew First Nations people who were not being promoted or hired at the mill, reflected a general sentiment among Aboriginal workers that diversity management practices were more about rhetoric than about providing Aboriginal workers with power within the company. Rather, racism that relegated Aboriginal workers as outside of the unionized working-class, or into lower-paid positions, was limiting the class mobility of Aboriginal workers.

Although diversity management professed to value difference, it did little to challenge the racist and colonial structures shaping the employment experiences of many Aboriginal women. Several Aboriginal women critiqued diversity management for its business rationale and not for its use of the concept of difference. Diversity management's understanding of difference had a limited ability to transform the work lives of Aboriginal women since it did not adequately reflect the broader framework of Aboriginal rights to resources and cultural revitalization.

Conclusion: Revisiting Diversity

WHITE AND ABORIGINAL women's talk about diversity management complicated critiques of diversity management. The corporate liberalism underpinning diversity management, evident in its promotion of concepts of individual merit, neutrality and market discipline, bracketed deeper gender, racialized and class inequalities out of consideration. Perceptions and experiences of these limitations, however were influenced by the company's class hierarchy and by white racism towards Aboriginal peoples in the northern prairies. The heterogeneity of women's experiences challenged the assumption that labour processes can be understood without recourse to social identities, and provided a deeper and more accurate understanding of the social

90. P24 Aboriginal Labourer, July 2004.

mechanisms through which diversity management operates. Women's talk about the inclusion of women and Aboriginal men demonstrated the ways in which experiences of diversity management are filtered by social identity categories. While I emphasize the instability and heterogeneity of diversity management, however, I do not imply that the implementation of a strategy such as diversity management is inconsequential. Many women were hired because of the company's focus on diversity. Rather, I suggest that the multiple ways that diversity management was unable to fully include different women workers together point to the inability of a strategy founded in corporate liberalism to include meaningful difference. While not discounting capital's ability to exploit racial and gender difference for profit,⁹¹ this finding problematizes claims that practices promoting inclusion and founded in corporate productivity concerns are compatible with a more genuine inclusion of people from marginalized groups.

Women's talk introduced different challenges to diversity management's liberal approach to inclusion. Women's representations pointed to the way in which the productivity requirements underpinning diversity management limited the advancement of women's interests. For example, in their refusal to apply for promotions on account of their roles in reproductive work, several managerial and professional class women demonstrated the gendered partiality of liberal productivity norms that did not allow for reproductive work in the home. Women's communication of how they felt unable to handle the productivity pressures in the firm question claims that diversity and productivity are always in consort. Alternatively, several working-class women's continued allegiance to their union locals, even when personally disadvantageous, challenged the individualization of employment contracts promoted through diversity management. By supporting the union in their talk about diversity policies, these women implied that collective representation was equally, if not more, important than diversity management to their well being as women workers.

The unfavourable descriptions of diversity management by the Aboriginal respondents also challenged diversity management's basis in western liberal individualism. Despite rhetoric supporting diversity, the MNFC imposed western business values on Aboriginal workers and did not address their desire for collective empowerment. Aboriginal peoples have posed a historical challenge to Canada's liberal rights framework.⁹² Within liberalism, rights are accorded to the individual and are accessible to all. Alternatively, Aboriginal rights are collective rights and are only accessible to Aboriginal peoples.

91. See for example Audrey Kobayashi and Peter Jackson, "Japanese Canadians and the racialization of labour in the British Columbia sawmill industry," *BC Studies*, 103 (Autumn 1994), 33–58.

92. Gordon Christie, "Aboriginal Citizenship: Section 35, Section 15 and Section 25," *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (June 2003), 481–495.

Recognition of Aboriginal peoples' distinct relationships to forests has been critical to Aboriginal people's empowerment in the forest industry. This recognition, however, would challenge the MNFC's access to forest resources and ultimately its claim to profits. The adoption of Aboriginal values such as prioritizing responsibilities to extended family and community would similarly be antithetical to the company's drive for profits.

In proclaiming that it valued and adapted to difference, however, diversity management helped to re-inscribe liberal orthodoxy among white workers. Because the liberal principles of human resource management were not disrupted, when the MNFC did adapt practices in attempts to increase Aboriginal hires, some white women were able to use the company's language of merit and performance to lodge claims of inequality and of an absence of meritocracy. White women's beliefs that diversity management was unequal, conditioned Aboriginal women's experiences of diversity management. This finding both highlights language's dual role in reflecting and constructing workplace experiences, while also destabilizing the understanding of women in forestry as victims, as described in previous research on women in the industry.⁹³

The business rationale underlying the MNFC's practices did not allow for challenges to the liberal ideas that maintained inequality. Approaches to inclusion that flow from identity group struggles for social justice would have greater latitude to challenge practices and norms within and outside of the workplace.⁹⁴ Although approaches to employment inclusion using a language of equality have often emanated from struggles against inequality and injustice to a greater degree than approaches using a language of diversity, the association between language and meaningful inclusion is not consistent. Women's representations demonstrated how both equality and difference can be used in exclusionary ways in different contexts. In that approaches to inclusion that stem from marginalized groups require the designation of social groups, however, results suggest that categorical approaches to inclusion are important, whether or not they argue on the basis of equality, difference, or both.

Marginalized groups within unions have long worked to improve their working conditions through the formation of separate organizing committees within unions, assigned positions on union committees, and education campaigns. The advantage of this bottom-up approach is that it ensures that the inclusion of marginalized groups is not pitted against individual interests of workers. Union-driven initiatives to allow flexibility options for women, for example, have sought to ensure that flexibility provisions are controlled by workers and not employers. Regulatory approaches can also address a broader spectrum of needs. Strong maternity leave legislation and employment equity

93. Berit Brandth and Marit S. Haugen, "From Lumberjack to Business Manager: Masculinity in the Norwegian Forestry Press," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16 (July 2000), 343–355; Reed, "Marginality and Gender at Work," 373–389.

94. Ahmed, "The Language of Diversity," 235–256.

legislation for government workers in Canada are both examples of ways that the state has been able to address broader sets of barriers facing women's participation in the workplace. Finally, organizations can transform themselves to meaningfully include Aboriginal peoples through the delegation of authority and control to Aboriginal nations, through vigorous staff anti-racism and cultural awareness training, and through the incorporation of indigenous values and knowledges.

By extracting the question of difference from its foundation in broader patterns of oppression, diversity management overlooked the totality of women's different experiences necessary to promoting their true inclusion in the workplace. Examining the perspectives of women situated at different points of intersection allowed for a deeper understanding of how diversity management leveraged cultural ideals of diversity to further the economic imperatives of the company while keeping social inequalities intact. These conclusions suggest that new knowledge can be generated through further examination of how complex identity categories within particular spaces are integrated with economic processes of workplace change.

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