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Take Back the Future

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About the cover image:

Imagining Futures of Care is a digital mural created as part of the research project Fostering Dialogues, an arts-based action research project imagining futures of community-based care with homecare personal support workers (PSWs) and LGBTQ older adults. This project explored the potential of arts-based engagement to create connections among LGBTQ older adults and PSWs and inspire imaginings about futures of community-based care. The intention of the mural, composed of multiple layers of participants' art works, is to highlight shared and distinct realities that LGBTQ older adults and PSWs face and to inspire collective conversation. The mural image was facilitated by social artist Melanie Schambach and the project was co-led with Celeste Pang and Brittany Jakubiec at Egale Canada, with funding from a CIHR Catalyst Grant.

If referencing this mural, please cite: Fostering Dialogues project participants (2023). *Imagining Futures of Care* [digital mural]. Egale Canada.

Take Back the Future: 2023 Women's, Gender, Social Justice Association (formerly Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Feministes) Conference

by Claire Carter, Corinne L. Mason, Krystal Kehoe MacLeod and Daniella Robinson

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Introduction

This special issue emerges from presentations, predominantly by graduate students, at the first in-person WGSJ (formerly WGSRF) conference in several years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It felt good to share physical space together, to provide opportunities to reflect on the past few years, and to imagine and strategize ways forward. As the call for papers outlines, there have been significant societal events and legislative shifts that gave us pause and continue to inform our individual and collective work. The following– which is by no means an exhaustive list– have challenged and reshaped our activist-scholarship in the field: at UBC in 2019, a Black graduate student experienced anti-Black racism, racial profiling, and harassment at Congress; in the summer of 2020, Black Lives Matter organizing in communities and on campuses resurged; beginning in May 2021, unmarked graves of Indigenous children were confirmed at sites of former residential schools; the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world, with a disproportionate impact on Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and socially and economically disadvantaged groups; in 2022, Roe vs Wade was overturned in the United States; in 2023, growing discrimination and violence towards 2SLGBTQIA+ people and communities informed legislative attacks on trans kids and youth in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; and in 2023, pro-Palestinian activists began protesting genocide in Gaza, resulting in the criminalization of encampments on campuses.

This special issue includes a range of works that demonstrate efforts to come together, call out and critique dominant discourses and practices, engage in advocacy and awareness, and creatively resist ongoing societal injustices and violence. The pieces come from interdisciplinary scholars, including a large selection of graduate student work, who engage in literary and media analyses, policy and legislative critique, artistic practices, and activist and narrative reconstructions.

The various articles encourage reflection on our relationships with our bodies, among or between different generations, and with public authorities. These articles and research notes make visible normalizing and invisibilizing tactics of public figures, and dominant discourses around race, citizenship, activism, girlhood, homelessness, and sexuality. Drawing from events and actions of the last few years, many engage with how we can respond, what we can learn, and what futures we can imagine.

The issue opens with pieces that provide case studies and analysis of dominant discourses, policies, and procedures. Latty analyzes the practice and media coverage of strip searches of black women and girls to reveal a disavowal of the violence done to black women and girls and a simultaneous reaffirmation of Canada as a benevolent nation. LaCroix and Withers' articles both examine homelessness, from the lens of policing and criminalization in the former and invisiblization within practices of homeless counts in the latter. Each of these opening pieces draw attention to systemic discrimination within institutional services and policies in order to push back against racist and discriminatory practices.

The focus of the special issue then moves into discussions of knowledge gaps and collective action within health care and K-12 education. Collaborative work navigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on 2SLGBTQI+ and allied health mental providers and unites different stakeholders to develop curriculum on consent and non-violence.

Activism and notions of citizenship are the focus of the next three pieces. The first article highlights Asian Canadian women's critique of citizenship ceremonies and nation-building. The second and third articles analyze gendered discourses of visibility of girl and tween activists which position them as either exceptional or marginalized, and offer a reframing of their actions as democratic engagement and grounded in intergenerational and community networks

The final two research articles draw upon art and literature to re-imagine relationships with our bodies and across generations and offer us space for reflection on opportunities for growth when we push against embodied and community limitations.

The five research notes included in this issue are based upon roundtables and activist work presented at the conference.

Tichenor invites us to consider the potential implications of a reclamation of the diagnosis term "borderline" through engagement with the complexities of (some) receiving care and support from the state, when the state enacts forms of violence, causing debilitation of some populations. This research note considers a shift from normative understandings of borderline to creating space for imaging how it might be utilized against forms of debilitation caused by settler colonialism, racialized violence, and corporate health care agendas.

Ioannani's research note examines the intersection of being single and fat on the journey to pregnancy and seeks to imagine a future where people have support and access to prenatal care, without fatphobic walls repeatedly blocking the way.

Scolnic and Halliday's piece focuses on gendered emotional labour in academia and highlights the inequity between the lack of support they received as graduate students and the expectation of extensive support they will provide to students as they transition to [precarious] instructors.

Pang et al.'s research note stems from community-based research that used art to inform a dialogue between 2SLGBTQ older adults and homecare support workers. They aim to provide a reference document for others thinking about arts-based community research, and the outcome of their arts-based dialogue is the image used on this issue's front cover.

Ariel et al. are part of the Feminist digital methods lab within which their participants collaborated on the creation of a code of conduct, project themes, and several AR art pieces that were installed in different sites in Toronto.

In total, this special issue reflects the diverse, attentive, and imaginative activist-scholarship and research creation of those working in the field of women, gender, and social justice studies.

Thank you to the conference organizers, to the staff of *Atlantis*, the reviewers, and all the fabulous contributors to this issue.

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Discourses of Disavowal: Gendered Anti-Blackness in State and Media Strip-Search Archives

by Stephanie Latty

Abstract: This article undertakes a critical examination of prevailing discourses circulated by public authorities and the media during the weeks and months following three instances of Black women and girls being strip-searched by police in Canada: Audrey Smith in Toronto in 1993, three unnamed Black girls in Halifax in 1995, and Stacy Bonds in Ottawa in 2008. By focusing on three primary discourses of disavowal evident in both media accounts and legal records of these cases, this article sheds light on how collusion among the Canadian state, the criminal justice system, and the media culminate in narratives that re-install the national myth of Canada as a benevolent nation. Ultimately, the paper argues that the violence of the strip-search is naturalized through the disavowal of gendered anti-Black violence and liberal discourses of reform are upheld.

Keywords: anti-Black racism; disavowal; gender; police violence; strip-search; state violence

Résumé: Cet article procède à un examen critique des discours dominants véhiculés par les autorités publiques et les médias au cours des semaines et des mois qui ont suivi trois cas où la police a fouillé à nu des femmes et de jeunes filles noires au Canada : Audrey Smith à Toronto en 1993, trois jeunes filles noires non nommées à Halifax en 1995 et Stacy Bonds à Ottawa en 2008. En se penchant sur les trois principaux discours de désaveu que l'on retrouve aussi bien dans les médias que dans les archives juridiques de ces affaires, cet article montre comment la collusion entre l'État canadien, le système de justice pénale et les médias mène à des discours qui rétablissent le mythe national selon lequel le Canada est une nation bienveillante. Enfin, l'article soutient que le désaveu de la violence sexiste à l'égard des Noires naturalise la violence de la fouille à nu et que les discours libéraux de réforme sont maintenus.

Mots clés : racisme envers les Noirs; désaveu; genre; violence policière; fouille à nu; violence de l'État

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Introduction

In many ways, Canada is an expert in forgetting. Throughout history and well into our contemporary moment, one can see that the Canadian nation-state sustains itself as a colonial, white-supremacist nation through denial, disavowal, and the wilful erasure of racial violence and attempted genocide (Jiwani 2006; Gulliver 2018). Through a series of rhetorical and material moves, the state[1] makes particular things, people, places, and violence willfully forgotten, overwriting its own violent spatial, psychic, and material histories of anti-Blackness and settler colonialism with liberal discourses about a state committed to equality and the improvement of the lives of Black, Indigenous, and racialized peoples (Razack 2015).

This article provides a critical analysis of dominant discourses in news media and legal narratives that public authorities and mainstream media outlets disseminated in the weeks and months after three instances of Black women and girls being strip-searched by police in Canada: Audrey Smith in Toronto in 1993, three unnamed Black girls in Halifax in 1995, and Stacy Bonds in Ottawa in 2008. Within the law and media narratives of the strip-searches, discourses of disavowal are discourses that erase the centrality of gendered anti-Blackness and position anti-Blackness as exceptional rather than constitutive of the nation-state (Jiwani 2006). These discourses reveal the ways in which the Canadian state, in tandem with the media, create narratives that re-install the myths of a white nation. As Razack (2002) writes, "A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, a disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour" (2). I argue that the police, legal actors, and the media collectively shape Canada as a white settler colonial nation-state through the deployment of liberal discourses of reform.[2] Disavowal is a crucial part of this process.

The qualitative data that forms the basis of this article included publicly available legal documents and media articles from mainstream newspapers including the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *Ottawa Citizen* and amounted to hundreds of pages of data per case. Databases including CanLii were used to search for legal documents and Google News, Lexis Nexis, and ProQuest were used to search for media documents about each of the three cases. Legal documents analyzed for each case were limited to what was publicly available. I asked the questions: What kinds of knowledges are produced about Black women and girls in the state, legal, and media discourses surrounding the strip search? How does the strip search of Black women and girls become routinized and everyday? In order to answer these questions, I built on and departed from Critical Discourse Analysis methodology by applying a Black feminist approach to center Black women and girls in my analysis and attend to intersecting and interlocking forms of domination that work to shape the discourses about Black women and girls (Hook 2007; Van Dijk 1993; Lazar 2007; Razack 1998; Crenshaw 1993). I not only illuminate the language that surrounds Black women and girls in the texts but also interrogate the work that these discourses do to maintain material-gendered anti-Black violence (Hook 2007).

In Part I, in order to establish disavowal as a grounding concept for this article, I draw from Hesse (2004), Jung and Costa Vargas (2021), and Ambikaipaker (2021) to discuss the ways in which racism is exceptionalised in liberal nation-states and to consider how to re-centre the constitutive nature of anti-Black racism. Next, through a brief genealogy of modern policing in Canada, I argue that while dominant discourses operating in the archives of the strip-search cases position violence as aberrational and a matter of individual police officers, anti-Black and settler-colonial violence form the foundation of policing as an institution in Canada.

In Part II, I discuss three dominant discourses present in the media and legal archives of the strip-search cases that disavow anti-Blackness and the violence of the strip-search encounter. First, I discuss the ways in

which racism is explicitly denied by state actors in the media and legal narratives of the strip-searches of Audrey Smith and Stacy Bonds. Second, I discuss the case of the Halifax Three and how, through a series of discursive moves which render racism unspeakable, the state and media narratives reverse harm, positioning the police as the harmed subject while erasing the violence done to the girls. Third, I discuss how law relies on narratives of exceptionality deploying the language of "exigent circumstances" to justify strip-searches, concealing its own culpability and compounding anti-Black harm.

Case Summaries

In this article, I analyze three cases of Black women and girls being strip-searched in Canada: Stacy Bonds in Ottawa in 2008, Audrey Smith in Toronto in 1993, and three unnamed Black girls in Halifax in 1995. In 2008, 27-year-old Stacy Bonds was stopped by Ottawa Police officers after they alleged that she spoke to two men in a van and took a sip from a bottle, which she then threw into a garbage can. After asking why she was stopped, Bonds was arrested and taken to a nearby police station where four officers violently strip-searched her. During the search, police officers cut off her clothing with a pair of safety scissors and held her down with a Plexiglass riot shield. Video footage of her assault was and continues to be widely circulated on the internet and in the media. Subsequently, Bonds launched a $1.2 million-dollar civil suit against the police officers involved. In March 2011, the Special Investigations Unit charged Sgt. Steven Desjourdy with sexual assault with regards to Bonds' case. He was later acquitted before an Ontario criminal court judge. In 2014, Desjourdy's conduct was found to be discreditable under the Police Services Act and he was ordered to forfeit 20 days of pay.

The second case is that of Audrey Smith, a thirty-seven-year-old Jamaican tourist who visited Toronto in 1993. After receiving information that Smith was in possession of crack cocaine hidden in her underwear, Toronto police officers publicly strip-searched her at the corner of a busy intersection. No drugs were found. Audrey Smith subsequently filed a complaint against the officers; however, the process saw numerous delays. In April 1994, the complaint was referred to an independent board of inquiry, which was halted and disbanded soon after when a possible conflict of interest was discovered. After a lengthy delay, the inquiry was re-established but once more disbanded over allegations of bias on the panel. The allegations of bias focused on one of the members' involvement with the Congress of Black Women, an organisation which had made a public statement condemning the strip-searches done to Audrey Smith earlier that year. A third and final board of inquiry was assembled in December 1994. When the case finally culminated in September 1995, the officers involved were acquitted of any discreditable conduct.

Third, in 1995, three 12-year-old Black girls were strip-searched by Constable Carol Campbell-Waugh in a Halifax school after cash went missing from the desk of an administrator. According to legal documents, Campbell-Waugh was called to St. Patrick's-Alexandra School, described as an inner-city school with students who are predominantly Black and poor. After denying the theft, the girls testified "that they were required to remove their socks, shoes and jeans and pull down their underwear" (Campbell v. Jones 2002, 2). Campbell-Waugh asserted that she did not ask the girls to pull down their underwear but only "to pull it away from their bodies so that she could see if the $10.00 was in their underwear" (para. 2). The girls were not informed of their legal rights prior to or during the search, including the right to refuse to be searched, and their parents or guardians were not contacted prior to the search. Further, the strip-search was conducted with all three girls present in the room and in an office that was not private but with windows looking out into the hallway (Campbell v. Jones 2002). In the wake of the strip-search, the girls and their families sued Campbell-Waugh, the vice-principal of the school who left the girls alone with the officer, the Halifax School Board, the Halifax Police Department, and the City of Halifax. The lawsuit was ultimately settled out of court. Weeks after the girls and their families filed their lawsuit, Campbell-Waugh

sued Anne Derrick and Rocky Jones, the lawyers who defended the children and their families for $240,000 in damages for defamation after the lawyers asserted during a press conference that Campbell-Waugh was "motivated by racism" (Campbell v. Jones 2002, 5). Campbell-Waugh was initially awarded the $240, 000 in May 2001, but in October 2002 the decision was overturned in a Court of Appeal. Campbell-Waugh then brought the defamation case to the Supreme Court, where it was dismissed. These three cases—the case of Stacy Bonds, Audrey Smith and the unnamed Halifax Three form the basis of this article.

Part I: Racism as Aberrational

In a foundational article, "Im/plausible Deniability: Racism's Conceptual Double Bind," Hesse (2004) argues that after the Second World War, racism came to be understood as a concept rooted in morality. Anxious to distance themselves from fascism and the genocidal violence of the Holocaust, Western nations went to great lengths to define racism as "morally indefensible" (Hesse 2004, 18). Racism came to be understood as an exception - as a distortion in worldview or a matter of individual bad decision-making. This conceptualization of racism continues to prevail in neo-liberal nation-states like Canada. Racism is understood as an aberration, a "pernicious influence" (19), or a "contaminant of modernity" rather than an integral and constitutive component of liberal nation-states (22). In institutions like policing, racism is recast as a matter of individual prejudice or discrimination and is "pointedly associated with excesses, lapses, distortions and derelictions" (Hesse 2004, 10). If racism is understood as a corruption in an otherwise morally pure society, it follows that racist societies are only those exceptional cases such as Nazi Germany, in which fascism is seen to have only temporarily gained a foothold (Hesse 2004). Hesse proposes that racism is better understood as "*a socially instituted conceptual form* of arrangements, relations, activities, representations, exploitation, domination and violence" (24, emphasis in original). Racism in modern liberal nation-states came to be understood as solely discrimination and exclusion, while experiences of racism that fell outside of this paradigm were deemed incomprehensible under a liberal rubric (Hesse 2004). The conceptualization of racism in liberal democracies is marked by a "constitutively antagonistic conceptual dialogue" in which racism is foregrounded as extreme acts of violence while, simultaneously, structural, institutional, and everyday violence is denied (14). This simultaneous enacting and obscuring of racism can be observed in the way that Canada as a nation-state positions itself at once as a progressive, multicultural nation while at the same time enacting racial violence in spectacular and everyday ways and disavowing the ways in which ongoing settler colonialism and anti-Blackness constitute the state.

Emphasizing this further, Jung and Costa Vargas (2021) declare that since "the dawn of modernity, Black people have been progressively, singularly positioned—materially and symbolically—as the 'slave race' around the globe" (4). The closing of Blackness, they note, "has been the most decisive and definitive, marking the outer boundary of the human" (5). Walcott (2014), a scholar of Black Canada, similarly observes that what it means to be human is continually defined in opposition to Black people and Blackness. Since the Enlightenment, the figure of the universal human has underwritten all aspects of the current order of knowledge. For the universal human subject to come into existence, there must always be a non-human thing to serve as the backdrop against which the Human can see itself as *not*. Even in the move to define the criteria of humanity, a non-human category is created automatically in contradistinction. Blackness is what structures the figure of the human, providing it the backdrop upon which it can come to exist and violence is integral to the process of creating a category of non-human beings. Wilderson (2010) notes that the human "could not have produced itself without the simultaneous production of that walking destruction which became known as the Black" (21). It is because of this pervasive global anti-Blackness and the unique eviction of Black people from the category of the Human that anti-Blackness must be distinguished from racism (Jung & Costa Vargas 2021; Wilderson 2010).

Scholars have also emphasized that the kind of gendered anti-Blackness we see in strip-searches is constitutive of the modern state. As Ambikaipaker (2021) argues in the British context, "Black women's lived experiences of historically continuous violation, dishonor and routine anti-racist failures in seeking justice emerge not as individual aberrations but as naturalized and perverse modes of inuring anti-Black coherence into British rule of law" (199). To situate this argument further, Ambikaipaker (2021) examines the case of Gillian Smith, a St. Lucian woman living in Britain in 1969 who was out shopping when she got into a heated verbal argument with an old friend she was with at the time. The police arrived and proceeded to badly beat Smith, call her racial slurs, and sexualize her while strip-searching her. Smith was released four hours later and charged with "threatening behaviour and interfering with the police in the course of their duties" (211). For Ambikaipaker, Black women's experiences with the police in Britain are indicative of how the rule of law is secured through gendered anti-Blackness. Given its foundational role, gendered anti-Blackness engenders a sustained and energetic disavowal of violence against Black women.

The disavowal of anti-Blackness in Canada is one of the most pervasive ways that anti-Blackness operates. It occurs in many ever-changing ways, including the use of euphemistic language to describe race and racism, individualization, the dehistoricization and decontextualization of racism and the deeming of conversations about racism as taboo or off-limits (Gulliver 2018; Jiwani 2006). In theorizing the denial of anti-Blackness in the context of Brazil and the United States, Vargas (2018) mobilizes the concept of "oblique identification"—that is, "a type of multiracial political ethos in which Black [people] are at once central and by virtue of the denial of antiblackness not recognized as social beings paradigmatically engaged in structures of foundational dehumanization" (48). Through "oblique identification," Vargas (2018) further explicates the ways in which the acknowledgement of issues such as police violence against Black people can happen at the same time as the disavowal of anti-Blackness within political spheres. In Canada, this occurs in the context of the mythology of Canadian benevolence. The disavowal of anti-Blackness works to animate the mythology of Canada as a white nation free of racism with liberal, multicultural values.

One way in which we can trace discourses of disavowal is to attend to how nations construct themselves in and through media and legal discourses. The material and symbolic work of legal discourses are not contained within the walls of a courtroom and, concomitantly, narratives contained within mainstream media narratives about race and Blackness do not stop at the margins of a newspaper article (Hall 1997; Lawson 2002; Razack 2015; Dayan 2011). Legal and media discourses travel, flow, and shape one another. As part of the logic of colonialism, law itself is violence, deeply implicated in maintaining colonial, racialized, and anti-Black relations of power. Dayan (2011) argues that one must pay close attention to the ways in which legal discourses describe carceral practices such as slavery, confinement, and punishment, as well as how the state defends these practices as necessary through law. Jiwani (2006) asserts that the ideas and feelings circulated within the media influence other institutions, including social policy, policing, immigration, and law. If particular groups of people are consistently represented as criminals, then they may be punished or have their rights curtailed through incarceration or over-policing (Jiwani 2006). The ways in which Black, Indigenous, and racialized peoples are imagined in the media can generate public fear, which can then advance a political agenda that pushes violent carceral practices such as deportation, policing, legal neglect, and enacting harsher punishments in response (Jiwani 2006). This is a crucial point because it emphasizes how media and legal discourses work in concert to shape and influence one another.

Setting the Record Straight: Intervening in the Bad Apple Myth of Policing in Canada

Gendered anti-Black state violence is naturalized, in part, through the circulation of the "bad apple" myth of policing, which falsely holds that the problem of police violence is a matter of individual officers who have "gone rogue." Inherent in the myth of "bad apple" policing is the myth that policing as an institution

in Canada is not fundamentally racist. While Canadian policing is frequently positioned as a lesser evil in comparison to policing in the United States, the roots of criminalisation and policing in Canada are fundamentally anti-Black and settler-colonial.

In Canada, the police were established in the early 19th century using policing systems in France and Britain as models (Comack 2012). The North-West Mounted Police, which would later become the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was created in 1873 to control Indigenous uprisings and uphold and enforce the Jim Crow style segregation that followed the abolition of slavery in Canada (Walker 2012). Officers within the Northwest Mounted Police service were deployed to enforce genocidal laws, including the Indian Act, which imposed the residential school system among other colonially violent infrastructures. Mounties, as they are known, were the front-line of the white settler-colonial state, playing a key role in the abduction of Indigenous children from their homes to attend residential schools. Thus, the earliest function of policing in Canada was to facilitate colonial settlement through the enforcement of laws which dispossessed Indigenous peoples of land, culture, community and life.

Along with the facilitation of settler colonialism, anti-Black racism is a central reason for the creation of modern systems of policing in Canada (Choudry 2019). The history of modern incarceration, racial surveillance and institutional criminalization of Black people originates in enslavement (Maynard 2017; Brown 2015). After the formal abolition of slavery in the British colonies, Canada's carceral institutions took on the role of enacting violence to control and contain Black people. While Canada did not have legally entrenched segregation as in the United States, it remained a common practice that police officers enforced extra-legally. Free Black people were positioned as criminals and subjected to racial violence and surveillance from police and other law enforcement agents (Maynard 2017; Kitossa 2005). The association between Blackness and criminality and the characterization of Black communities as inherently threatening and dangerous was concretized in large part through policing. Part of the function of modern policing in Canada became the reinforcement of the racist association between Black people and criminality (Walker 2012). These discourses of Black criminality served to consolidate the nation-state of Canada by positioning Blackness as a threatening contaminant to the purity of the white settler nation-state (Walker 2012).

Part II: Discourses of Disavowal

Disappearing Acts: "Not a Race Issue"

In the media coverage of the case of Audrey Smith, the issue of racism as a substantive factor is scarcely mentioned. Where race is mentioned, it is done in passing and refers only to the "accusations" of racism from activists at the time, who argued that race was indeed the reason for Audrey Smith's treatment by the police (Hess 1993; Mascoll 1993). Outside these passing references, the issue of race is largely absent from the media and legal discourse surrounding Audrey Smith's case. Instead, the narratives of the case explicitly emphasize that the strip-search was unrelated to race. In an article entitled "Let's Avoid Isms in Audrey Smith's Fight for Dignity," written for the *Toronto Star*, Rosie DiManno (1993) writes that Audrey Smith is not served by activists and community members who argued that the strip-search was in fact a matter of anti-Black racism. In the article, DiManno pontificates about whether she believes these activist groups and their assertions that Black people are routinely subjected to violence at the hands of the police. DiManno closes the article by writing:

> It would behoove everyone to wait until the investigation is completed before they take to the
> streets to march in protest. But, if Smith's claims are adequately disproved, then we should all

be outraged. That would make it not a black thing or a woman thing, but an everyperson thing. And all decent people should recoil from it. (para. 13, emphasis added)

DiManno's (1993) comments illustrate the erasure of anti-Black racism from the media discourse surrounding Audrey Smith's strip-search by dismissing the voices of activists who were demanding that the centrality of race be recognized in the case, and instead opining that Audrey Smith's case ought to be understood as an issue entirely unrelated to anti-Black racism. In this approach to understanding Audrey Smith's case, DiManno upholds the liberal view that all people are equal under the law, failing to recognize the significant differences in structural position between Black people and non-Black people in Canada.

Shortly before the inquiry into Audrey Smith's encounter with police, Mascoll (1994) published an article in the *Toronto Star* entitled "Racism by Police Unproved" that covers then Toronto police Chief William McCormick's angry reaction to an annual report released by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which mentioned the strip-search of Audrey Smith. Mascoll (1994) writes, "An angry Metro police Chief William McCormack has blasted the suggestion by Canada's top human rights body that his officers were involved in racist behaviour during the past year" (para. 1). In the article, McCormack is quoted as stating that the Toronto Police were "not perfect" but that "it has not been proved that anyone on this force has committed any crimes of racism while engaged in any policing activity" (para. 2). McCormack called the report "high-handed," "totally inappropriate" and "lacking in facts" (para. 7). The article also notes that one Toronto Police officer at the time was found to be associated with the Heritage Front, a known Canadian white supremacist group (Mascoll 1994). McCormack goes on to say that he takes "exception with the condemnation of the force as far as being racist is concerned" (para. 7).

Lastly, in a news article published in the *Globe and Mail* shortly after the strip-search of Audrey Smith, Hess (1995) writes about the case and quotes an unnamed journalist who said that even though she had come to believe that Audrey Smith was telling the truth about the strip-search, she felt confident that the Toronto Police were "not a racist police force" (para. 19). The reason that Audrey Smith was denied justice, she felt, was that the lawyers and police officers did not personally know Audrey Smith. The journalist states, "She's a mother of five children. She's a decent, hard-working woman who earns most of the money in her household because her husband's [disabled]. She's an elder in her church" (para. 23).[4] For these reasons, the journalist recognizes that what was happening to Audrey Smith was unjust. However, in denying the role of anti-Black racism within the case, their comment continues to uphold the liberal discourse of Canada as a non-racist nation. Throughout the narratives of the case, anti-Blackness is entirely erased, upholding the Canadian national mythos of post-raciality and ignoring the structuring violence of anti-Blackness.

In the media and legal archive of the strip-search of Stacy Bonds, state actors including lawyers and police officers as well as reporters circulate and reinforce the narrative that the strip-search had nothing to do with race. After the violent strip-search, Stacy Bonds was charged with assault because, during the search, she kicked one of the officers who was trying to search her. The charge was dismissed by Judge Richard Lajoie who condemned the situation as a "travesty" and an "indignity" and said he wanted no role in it. Judge Lajoie agreed that Stacy Bonds' arrest was unlawful, however, race is never mentioned as part of his ruling. Judge Lajoie's silence about the role that race played in the arrest and subsequent strip-search of Stacy Bonds contributes to the erasure and denial of racism in the case.

As quoted in an *Ottawa Citizen* article, Stacy Bonds' lawyer, Matt Webber, agreed with Lajoie that race was not a factor in the case, stating that while "there was evidence of a lot of wrongdoing…there is no evidence that this case was motivated by racial profiling," thus continuing the outright denial of anti-Black racism in the case (Patterson 2010, para. 6). In another *Ottawa Citizen* article, Laucius (2010) writes

about the public outrage that the video footage of Stacy Bonds' strip-search created. Laucius writes about the many emails and phone calls that city councillors and public officials, including Police Service Board Chair Eli El-Chantiry, had received about the case. In the article, El-Chantiry stated:

> I can assure you, it was not a race issue. The conduct is the issue, not race…. This was the most disturbing thing for me, as chair and as an immigrant. We worked so hard to build relations with community, and I don't want to risk that. I hope this incident doesn't take us back. (para. 16)

In his comment, El-Chantiry implicitly disavows the centrality of race in the treatment of Stacy Bonds, leveraging his identity as an immigrant as evidence of shared experience with Stacy Bonds and as validation of his credibility to comment on the matter. He erases the violence of the strip-search, centering instead the impact that he imagines this to have on the reputation of the police. That, for El-Chantiry, is what threatens to harm "relations" with Black communities, not institutional anti-Blackness within policing or sexualized violence enacted on Black communities.

In another *Ottawa Citizen* article, police use-of-force training instructor Sgt. Nick Mitileneos is quoted as dismissing the assertion that Stacy Bonds' strip-search had to do with race and stated that from his perspective as a police trainer, "When you're actually going to use force because of the subject's behaviours, you don't have time to put in colours or race" (MacLeod 2010, para. 21). Mitileneos asserts that police officers do not have time to see race when they are making their decisions about how much force to use. This approach ultimately upholds liberal colour-evasive ideologies by implying that it is *seeing* race that is the problem rather than deeply embedded institutional anti-Blackness.[5] A further *Ottawa Citizen* article written by defence attorney James Morton (2010) describes Stacy Bonds' case and condemns it; Morton expresses his doubt that Stacy Bonds would have had a fair hearing because of a lack of police accountability. However, his condemnation of the strip-search does not once mention Stacy Bonds' Blackness. He writes, "It is all too easy to assume that complaints about police brutality are false claims made to avoid the consequences of criminal wrongdoing. However, the Stacy Bonds case shows a Canadian being mistreated by the police in the nation's capital" (para. 13). He notes that he himself has litigated in cases involving police violence and up until the Stacy Bonds case claims of racism "usually rung hollow to [him]." Confident of his assessment, Morton put it this way: "To be blunt, I did not believe them" (Morton 2010, para. 12).

The denial of racism takes place in several ways including the dehistoricized, depoliticized, and decontextualized ways in which racist occurrences are narrated. Often in public discourse, when anti-Black racism is brought up, it is swiftly denied and positioned as a historical issue that has little relevance in modern-day Canada. Where it is acknowledged, it is positioned as an individualised, flash-in-the-pan issue rather than a systemic one. Upholding the myth of "Canada the Good" can only take place through the erasure and disavowal of anti-Blackness as a constitutive form of domination. Beyond being denied, perspectives that do not support this fictionalized utopic vision of Canadian society are routinely silenced and eliminated.

Reversing Harm: Race as a Scarlet Letter

Another discursive strategy of disavowal used by the state and media in the strip-search cases discussed here is the reversal of harm. Through disavowal, the police officers who enact the violence of the strip-search are recast as injured subjects and the women and girls to whom the violence is done are recast as the source of harm. In the case of the Halifax Three, the three girls were strip-searched in a Halifax public school in 1995 by Cst. Carol Campbell-Waugh. In 2001, Campbell-Waugh sued the defence lawyers of the girls for defamation after the lawyers suggested in a press release that the girls were subjected to the strip-search because they were Black. Campbell-Waugh objected to both notions—that the strip-searches were racially motivated and that they should be considered strip-searches at all. Campbell-Waugh argued that the accu-

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sations made against her were made with malice (Campbell v. Jones 2002). One of the statements that Campbell-Waugh sued the girls' lawyers over was a comment made by lawyer Burnley Jones in which he stated that the girls were prepared to testify that Campbell-Waugh had directed them to remove their clothes (Campbell v. Jones 2002). In the press conference, Jones stated that he thought Campbell-Waugh presumed the girls were powerless because the girls' school was in a predominantly Black and poor neighbourhood. He stated that he believed that the girls were strip-searched "because they were Black girls" and, as such, "the police officer and the school administrator felt they could do whatever they wanted to these two girls. And so, they strip-searched them" (Campbell v. Jones 2002, 4). Jones also stated that he thought that the connection between the searches and race were clear in that all three of the children subjected to the search were Black and that he did not believe that the same thing would have happened to three white, affluent children (Campbell v. Jones 2002). It was over these parts of the press release that Campbell-Waugh sued the lawyers for defamation.

Campbell-Waugh felt as though her rights had been violated because "there was no attempt whatsoever to temper the claim" that she had strip-searched these girls (Campbell v. Jones, 2002, 50). The Judge in the case agreed, stating that the term "strip search" was too "attention-grabbing and emotive" a label to describe what had occurred (Campbell v. Jones, 2002, 50). This is indicative of the ways in which Black girls cannot be imagined as victims of violence within the white settler imaginary. In an anti-Black regime, Black girls are stripped of any claim to innocence and, rather than being seen as children, Black girls are ascribed with deviance and seen as unworthy of care and protection (Latty 2022; Latty et al. 2019; Cox 2015). Further, the judge's comments reflect the disavowal of violence in the case.

Campbell-Waugh was initially successful in suing the lawyers for defamation and was awarded $240, 000 in damages, underscoring the ways in which the state recognizes and validates Campbell-Waugh's "suffering" while obscuring and denying anti-Blackness. One year later, the lawyers appealed and the original decision was overturned. Yet, in the appeal hearings, the presiding judge remained steadfast that "racist" was too harsh a term to describe Campbell-Waugh's actions. He stated:

> While these appellants might protest, they would have preferred that the media had expressed itself in terms of systemic racism, a person in the position of the respondent could not be expected to draw much comfort from the suggestion that it was not she but rather an amorphous "system" which had been singled out for opprobrium. It was hardly comforting to be thought of as a member of a group that practiced "systemic racism" as opposed to being an "overt" or a "direct" racist. The sting is no less sharp. (Campbell v. Jones 2002, 58)

He continued:

> There is arguably no more vile a label in today's parlance than to be described as a "racist." It constitutes one of the most egregious attacks upon character and reputation that one could imagine. It is a human stain and for this generation, a scarlet letter. (Campbell v. Jones 2002, 58)

These comments reveal the reversal of harm that takes place through the positioning of Campbell-Waugh as a victim and, conversely, through the positioning of the lawyers as the source of the harm because of their assertions about racism. Indeed, the word racist is a deeply felt insult in dominant white Canadian culture.

During the hearings related to the defamation lawsuit, Canadian Press newswire (2001) published an article entitled "Two Halifax Lawyers Accused of Defaming Cop over Strip-Search of Girls." The article summarizes the case and includes comments from the lawyers and parts of Campbell-Waugh's testimony. The article notes that in her testimony, Campbell-Waugh stated that the reason she did not read the girls their

legal rights or take them to the police station was that she was "trying to be nice," furthering the discursive practice of positioning her as a benevolent and innocent white subject (para. 6). The article goes on to quote Campbell-Waugh as stating that she "didn't think it was necessary… to have them waiting in a room in the police station" (para. 7). She states further that the situation has "tarnished the job she's dreamed of since childhood" (para. 8), continuing to emphasize the ways in which it is Campbell-Waugh that is ultimately the harmed subject in this encounter while leaving anti-Black racism unspoken and actively erased. The centralization of Campbell-Waugh's victimhood obscures the violence that the children experienced and upholds the anti-Black process of denying Black children access to the category of childhood. Within this discourse of disavowal, both racism and sexualized anti-Black violence become unspeakable.

Permissible Violence: A Constellation of Exigent Circumstances

The third discourse of disavowal within the strip-search cases occurs through the mobilisation of law to protect the legal ability of the police to conduct the strip-searches. Pieces of police policy and legislation are leveraged to justify the use of the strip-search, obscuring and compounding anti-Black violence. If, at times, legal discourses acknowledge that strip-searches can be violent, as is evident in the Supreme Court decision in Golden, those instances are rarely considered applicable to Black women and girls (R. v Golden 2001).[3] As Dayan (2011) crucially reminds us, "It is not an absence of law but an abundance of it that allows government to engage in seemingly illegal practices" (72). Drawing from Bentham's notion of "legal fiction," Dayan (2011) theorizes legal fiction as false tales weaved by the state and used to maintain and wield power to produce both quotidian and spectacular effects. Legal fictions are capable of making and unravelling personhood, leaving the subject unprotected and violable under the law. When people are transformed into non-people through the alchemy of the law, rights do not reach them and they are not protected by any constitution, charter, or policy (Williams 1991).

Through various legal maneuvers, the state positions harm done to Black people in police custody as mattering only when the harm is severe and visible enough, necessarily positioning some forms of supposedly less severe violence as acceptable (Dayan 2007). Falling within the boundaries of acceptable violence, forms of violence such as indefinite solitary confinement or, in this case, the strip-search become illegal and unconstitutional only if there is a demonstrable malicious intent or an extraordinary circumstance of substantial physical pain (Dayan 2007). Connecting the figure of the enslaved to the prisoner, Dayan writes, "Although killing a slave was murder, there were always loopholes. Degrees of injury were allowed" (87). If the violence did not result in death but caused significant physical harm or injury, it was not considered "cruel and unusual," but considered within the limits of what was permissible in the law. One can observe a similar phenomenon operating in the context of the strip-search.

The violence of the strip-search, as I will explain, is "defined away" using certain words and legal tactics. Through these mechanisms, the strip-search is recast as necessary violence. Even when strip-searching is deemed cruel, unusual, inhumane, or an unnecessary use of force, it can be deployed against Black women and girls with impunity and no real legal redress because Black women and girls are not seen as living within the boundaries of the human. Concepts such as "cruel and unusual punishment" and other concepts that protect the right of the state to enact "acceptable" forms of violence like the strip-search are inserted into law with Black people in mind, as Dayan (2007) argues. Legal concepts like this one work to install the prisoner as always already violable and punishable. Through the creation of laws, reports, and, at times, policy, the state and its subjects are protected in their license to enact violence onto Black women and girls' bodies. Indeed, this violence continues not despite the law but because of it (Dayan 2011). The law's violence is plainly visible in the strip-search cases.

In the case of Stacy Bonds, Sgt. Desjourdy, the officer who strip-searched her, was charged with sexual as-

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sault but ultimately cleared. The Crown argued that the strip-search was unlawful and unjustified and amounted to sexual assault, stressing that Stacy Bonds had already been subjected to a roadside pat-down at the time of her arrest and that there was no reason for the invasive search besides to punish her and humiliate her (R. v. Desjourdy 2013). The Crown also argued that Desjourdy's actions contravened "most, if not all, of the guidelines set out in *Golden* and that [the] strip search was therefore unlawful" (para. 89). Stacy Bonds was strip-searched by four police officers who were all male, rather than officers of the same gender as stipulated in safeguard number four in *Golden*. In this rare instance where *Golden* is referenced to acknowledge the violence of a strip-search, the very terms of law to declare when a strip-search is permissible and when it is not provides the opportunity for the police to make their case for permissible violence. The officers who strip-searched Stacy Bonds held that "exigent circumstances" prevented them from arranging a female officer to conduct the strip-search: the cellblock was understaffed and the station was busy that morning with other prisoners waiting to be booked into cells (R. v. Desjourdy 2013).

Judge Lipson, the judge who presided over the hearings related to Desjourdy's sexual assault charge, concluded that based on the evidence there was what he called "a constellation of exigent circumstances" which justified Desjourdy's departure from the strip-search guidelines established in *Golden* (Desjourdy 2013, para. 100). In the Criminal Code of Canada, exigent circumstances are defined as "circumstances in which the police officer has reasonable grounds to suspect that entry (or other relevant action) is necessary to prevent imminent bodily harm or death to any person" (Criminal Code, S 529.3[2]). Judge Lipson gave several reasons why he felt that there were "exigent circumstances" that justified the strip-search. The first of these justifications was that Bonds was considered "volatile, uncooperative, belligerent and assaultive" (R. v Desjourdy 2013, para. 101); the second was that she had been arrested for being intoxicated in public; the third was that the police claim that Bonds was a risk to herself because of her "volatile" behaviour; and the fourth was that her upper body had yet to be searched for drugs or weapons (R. v. Desjourdy 2013, paras. 108-109). Judge Lipson goes on to note that it was:

> …a very busy Saturday morning in the cellblock. Police cars with new arrestees to be processed were waiting in the sally port of the station…. There was no female special constable immediately available to take over the search of S.B. Given all of these circumstances, there was in my view, a pressing and immediate need for the officers to complete the search of S.B. I accept that in these circumstances, shutting down the entire cellblock operation to await the arrival of another female officer to search S.B. was not a viable option. (R. v. Desjourdy 2013, para. 105)

Judge Lipson further agreed with the defense that Desjourdy's force was neither excessive nor abusive because, in conducting the strip-search, Desjourdy "never physically touched S.B" and he "used safety scissors" which was, according to Judge Lipson, "the least intrusive method available to complete the search of S.B, given the exigent circumstances" (R. v. Desjourdy 2013, para. 107). Judge Lipson concluded:

> On all of the evidence, I am satisfied that [Sgt. Desjourdy] cut off S.B.'s top and bra for a valid law enforcement objective which was to complete a reasonably necessary search of S.B. for weapons and contraband…. It was reasonable and necessary for Sgt. Desjourdy to conduct the search of S.B. in the manner that he did because of *the presence of exigent circumstances*…." (R. v. Desjourdy 2013, para. 108, emphasis added)

In this excerpt, Judge Lipson affirms Desjourdy's entitlement to violently strip-search Stacy Bonds because of the so-called exigent circumstances that arose, which are themselves rooted in anti-Blackness.

To fully explain the invocation of what he calls the "doctrine of exigent circumstances," Judge Lipson cites an earlier legal precedent in which it was stated that:

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> …whether exigent circumstances are invoked to search for evidence or to protect the public or for officer safety, it is the nature of exigent circumstances that makes some less intrusive investigatory procedure insufficient. By their nature, exigent circumstances are extraordinary and should be involved to justify the violation of a person's privacy only when necessary." (R. v. Desjourdy 2013, para. 62)

The citation goes on:
> …exigent circumstances arise usually where immediate action is required for the safety of the police or to secure and protect evidence of a crime. (R. v, Desjourdy 2013, para. 62-63)

Judge Lipson also cites the presence of exigent circumstances in *Golden* where it is noted that it may be necessary to conduct a "legal" strip-search outside a police station "where there is a demonstrated necessity and urgency to search for weapons or objects which could then be used to threaten the safety of the accused, the arresting officers or other individuals" (as cited in R. v. Desjourdy 2013, para. 61). It begs the question—given that Black women and girls are assumed to be inherently criminal and threatening to white settler subjectivity—is an encounter with a Black woman or girl's body always already considered to be an exigent circumstance? The discourse of "exigent circumstances" is one instance in which one can witness, in real-time, the deployment of a legal narrative that upholds the state's ability to strip-search Black women and girls with impunity (Dayan 2011). When the encounter involves the Black feminine body, there seems to be no limit to the violence that can be done by the state.

In the hearings related to the sexual assault charge against Desjourdy, Judge Lipson also cites Section 25 of the Criminal Code of Canada in supporting his ruling that Desjourdy was justified in his actions. Section 25 of the Criminal Code states that a "peace officer or public officer…is, if he acts on reasonable grounds, justified in doing what he is required to do and in using as much force as is necessary for that purpose" (Criminal Code of Canada, 42). In the subsequent sections, the Criminal Code states that police officers are not protected in using force that is "intended or is likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm *unless the person believes on reasonable grounds that it is necessary for the self-preservation of the person or the preservation of any one under that person's protection from death or grievous bodily harm*" (Criminal Code, 42, emphasis added). In other words, an officer must reasonably believe that force is needed to protect themselves or the public. Given that Black women and girls are always assumed to be dangerous, violence done to Black women and girls will always, under the conditions of anti-Blackness, be considered necessary to protect others from death or harm. Indeed, in its ritualistic repetition of phrases like "exigent circumstances" and "reasonable grounds," the state positions itself as protecting the rights of some while it justifies taking them away from others.

Conclusion: Toward Abolition

This article has examined how disavowal operates within the legal and media archives of strip-searching and how these narratives function to uphold liberal discourses of reform. I began this article by asking: What kinds of knowledges are produced about Black women and girls in the state, legal, and media discourses surrounding the strip search? How does the strip search of Black women and girls become routinized and everyday? The discourses of disavowal present in the archives of the cases are mobilised in many ways throughout the discourses of the cases and reflect the way in which the Canadian state is haunted by the ghosts of anti-Blackness. At times, anti-Blackness is disavowed outright as irrelevant to the strip-search cases. In other moments, one can observe the ways in which the state and media discourses recast the police officers as injured and victimised and construct the Black women and girls who have experienced the violence of the strip-search as the source of the harm. Too often, media and state narratives con-

spire to use a fictional story of policing that does not account for the systemic and institutional racism that is entrenched in the institution as a strategy to generate public trust. In this way, a liberal discourse of reform is upheld and gendered anti-Black violence is obscured. Principally, the state positions itself as opposed to the violence of the strip-search and, at the same time, it leaves the strip-searching of Black girls and women uninterrogated and even justifiable under the law.

Since the carceral system is not isolated or discreet, a project of abolition aimed to dismantle it must also be necessarily expansive and diffuse. Activists and advocates have long been fighting for the abolition of not just the police but the carceral system in its totality and for justice beyond the juridical sense. Conceptualizations of what abolition is have developed over the decades in activist and academic circles. By adopting the term "abolition," activists intentionally draw parallels between the dismantling the prison industrial complex and the abolition of slavery (James 2005). In this way, abolitionist praxis is shaped by "the historical memory of slavery and rebellion" (Sudbury 2009, 8).

I close by calling for the abolition of the carceral system. One must not accept the legitimacy of carceral systems nor the legitimacy of its institutions and agents. Over the last several decades, there has been tension between those who argue for reform and those who argue for abolition. Scholars, activists, and advocates who call for reform believe that it is possible to redress the gratuitous violence and abuse that has taken place within carceral systems without dismantling the system in its totality. They often argue for reduced sentences, an end to police brutality but not necessarily an end to policing, and decreased incarceration rather than an end to imprisonment. A reformist position does not and cannot address structural racism in policing. This approach leaves the logics that produce this violence intact and fails to understand these regimes of violence as not only systemic but constitutive of modern states. There is no reforming a system that is inherently and irremediably violent and designed to uphold anti-Blackness, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, classism, settler colonialism, and other forms of oppression, no matter what (re)form it takes.

Endnotes

1. While this project focuses on the specificity of gendered anti-Blackness, I refer to Canada as a white settler colonial nation-state to intervene in the erasure of settler colonialism as a simultaneously operating system of domination constitutive of Canada, the nation-state, and anti-Blackness. I draw from critical race scholars and scholars of anti-Blackness who build on a Foucauldian analysis to assert that the state is not an autonomous entity in and of itself, nor is it reducible merely to government institutions, agencies, and bureaucracies (Goldberg 2002; Thobani 2007; Da Silva 2007). Instead, the state can be understood as "a political force fashioning and fashioned by economic, legal, and culture forces (forces of production, of sociolegality, and of cultural reproduction)" (Goldberg 2002, 109).

2. The category of state actor might include police officers, social workers, teachers, nurses, doctors, soldiers, administrators, politicians, and other subjects who are responsible for carrying out and enforcing the will of the state. However, under violent white supremacist colonial regimes, seemingly benign and innocuous spaces and people can become instrumental in carrying out the violence of the state. See Pugliese (2009) for a careful articulation of the ways in which seemingly mundane spaces such as hotel rooms, shipping containers, and transport vehicles such as planes, ships, and trucks can also become sites of necropolitical state power.

3. The landmark case of R v. Golden (*Golden*) in 2001, the Supreme Court of Canada declared strip-searches to be inherently degrading and dehumanizing and stressed the need for "reasonable and probable

grounds" to carry out a search. The case was brought before the Supreme Court of Canada after Ian Golden, a Black man, was subjected to multiple strip-searches at a restaurant in downtown Toronto. In *Golden*, presiding Justices Iacobucci and Arbour acknowledged that strip-searches are disproportionately used against racialized people and held that a "strip search will always be unreasonable if it is carried out abusively or for the purpose of humiliating or punishing the arrestee" (Tanovich, 2011, 142).

4. I have used the word "disabled" instead of the word that appears in the original quote, which is a slur used to describe people with disabilities.

5. See Annamma, Jackson, and Morrison (2016) who critique the concept of colour-blindness using a Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) framework and offer colour-evasiveness as an alternative conceptualization.

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The Poverty Police: Police-Proxy University Services and Homelessness

by Lynn LaCroix

Abstract: This paper argues for forming a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness. The purpose of this group is to consult on implementing the recommendations made to York University Security Services (YSS) by an expert review panel, submitted in December of 2022 in Toronto, Canada. This paper also argues against empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*—a central matter under discussion by the expert review panel. Grounded theory and critical discourse analysis are used in this paper to observe YSS "incident summaries," published on YSS's Community Safety webpage, in conjunction with an analysis of the 2022 *York University Security Services Review: Final Report*. The findings reported in this paper include an approximate 43% overall interaction rate between unhoused people and YSS on the York University campus and a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline leading to the arrest of unhoused people by Toronto police. These findings give reason to reject empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision. These findings also give reason to consult peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness on policing and police-proxies, such as YSS.

Keywords: abolition geography; community policing; critical discourse analysis; grounded theory; homeless; Mental Health Act; police; poverty; security; Special Constable; Trespass to Property Act; unhoused

Résumé: Cet article soutient la création d'un groupe de travail composé de personnes ayant une expérience intersectionnelle et vécue de l'itinérance. Le but de ce groupe est de mener des consultations sur la mise en œuvre des recommandations formulées aux Services de sécurité de l'Université York (YSS) par un groupe d'experts et présentées en décembre 2022 à Toronto, au Canada. Cet article s'oppose également à ce que les YSS se voient nommer agents spéciaux en vertu de la *Loi sur la refonte complète des services de police de l'Ontario*, une question qui est au cœur des discussions du groupe d'experts. Dans cet article, on fait appel à la théorie ancrée et à l'analyse critique du discours pour examiner les « résumés d'incidents » des YSS, publiés sur leur page Web relative à la sécurité communautaire, ainsi qu'à une analyse de l'*Évaluation des Services de sécurité de l'Université York : Rapport final* réalisé en 2022. Les conclusions présentées dans cet article font état d'un taux d'interaction global d'environ 43 % entre les sans-abri et les YSS sur le campus de l'Université York, et montrent que le passage de la pauvreté à la criminalisation mène à l'arrestation de personnes itinérantes par la police de Toronto. Ces conclusions démontrent qu'il n'y a pas lieu d'accorder aux YSS le pouvoir d'agir en tant qu'agents spéciaux et qu'il faut consulter les personnes ayant une expérience intersectionnelle et vécue de l'itinérance à propos du maintien de l'ordre et des mandataires de la police, comme les YSS.

Mots clés: abolition selon la situation géographique; police communautaire; analyse critique du discours; théorie ancrée; itinérance; Loi sur la santé mentale; police; pauvreté; sécurité; agent spécial; Loi sur l'entrée sans autorisation; personne itinérante

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1. Introduction

In many areas globally, homelessness is an increasing phenomenon. In North America, security services are used to manage issues that are perceived to be related to homelessness (Strathcona Research Group 2005; Bennet 2008; Kennelly 2015). However, there is little literature on policing homelessness on North American university campuses (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 68). This paper constitutes an effort to encourage more dialogue around the issue of policing homelessness by universities. Specifically, this paper considers how campus security responds to homelessness at York University in Toronto, Canada. The argument central to this paper focuses on forming a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness who can make decisions about university policing policies. Universities will continue to grapple with homelessness. However, they ought not to respond with intensified policing of social injustice. As such, this paper is a modest entry into conceptualising facets of these systemic issues. The medium through which this paper's conceptual work operates is York University's current revision of its security services.

In December 2022, an internal and external expert review panel released a report detailing many central issues and recommendations concerning York Security Services (YSS). These issues and recommendations included ending racism in law enforcement, developing non-police responses to mental health crises, and defunding and/or de-tasking police services (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 5). Additionally, the report concludes that a "community-centric safety" or a "stakeholder-centric" security model is appropriate for York University. Based on the report's assertions, I question whether empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act* will lessen policing on the York University campus—a foremost proposal forwarded by the report (54).

In Section 2, I begin by discussing the *York University Security Services Review: Final Report* ("the report"). In Section 3, I give non-exhaustive, definitional explanations of critical discourse analysis and grounded theory. Specifically, I explain how these two research methods are amenable to each other, constituting a relevant mode of blended research in the present context. I use these methods to analyse YSS activities and argue for forming a working group of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness. This working group ought to make decisions about university policing policies. Further, my analysis amounts to an argument against empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision.

In Section 4, I provide an in-depth discussion of the methods used in my research and findings. Specifically, I discuss the rate at which homelessness is penalised through YSS activities and the related concept of a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline. YSS publishes its activities, or "incident summaries," within Weekly Security Incident Logs on YSS's Community Safety webpage. Drawing from these incident summaries, I demonstrate an approximately 43% overall incident rate of YSS interacting with, what the report calls "unhoused people." I then explain how an apparent poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline operates through YSS's profiling of "unhoused people" as "trespassers" leading to arrest by Toronto police.

In Section 5, I argue for forming a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experi-

ences of homelessness based on the findings reported in Section 4. This group ought to consult on implementing the recommendations made to YSS by the internal and external review panel (the "review panel"). This group ought to also consult on issues beyond the scope of the recommendations made by the review panel. The review panel's recommendations are based on consultations with what the report calls "equity deserving groups" at York University, gained over one year (8, 33). It is worth noting, however, that although peoples with lived experiences of homelessness comprise an "equity group" discussed by the report, they are not among those consulted (14-15). Importantly, the working group I am arguing for ought to be composed of variously situated peoples with lived experiences of homelessness, including those who interact directly with YSS. The composition of this consultation group is important, given the findings in this paper and that the report is grounded in earlier consultations with various "equity deserving groups." I finalise this section by arguing against the empowerment of YSS with the *Special Constable* provision.

In Section 6, I conclude by summarising the pertinent information. The purpose of this summary is to facilitate easier use of this research for potential policy planning at York University and other educational institutions deliberating the continued use of police-proxy security services.

2. Context

This paper draws inspiration from Ruth Wilson Gilmore's conceptualisation of "abolition geographies" (2023, 480). According to Gilmore, abolition geographies consist of how peoples make provisional freedom, as they imagine their way *home*, against racial capitalism's self-valorising processes of partitioning and repartitioning (491). Abolition geographies explain how variously situated and ordinary people repeat and re-repeat their capacities, materilites, and lineages to continuously change themselves and their worlds (490-491). Though a constrained and imperfect, yet capacious, process, abolition geographies are an antagonistic contradiction, and a collective negation, of "carceral geographies." Gilmore uses the term "carceral geographies" to "renovate and make critical what *abolition* is all about" (480). She does this because, by her estimation, the conceptual use of the term "Prison-Industrial-Complex" (PIC) has atrophied instead of expanding our imaginative understanding of both abolitionist and carceral processes of place-making. Instead, she advances a recentering of abolition geographies as shifting reclamations over and above carceral geographies.

At the time of writing, this research intervenes in YSS's current security model as discussed in *York University Security Services Review: Final Report*, which was produced by the review panel. The report was published publicly on York University's Community Safety webpage in December 2022, based on the review conducted for the report over that same year. According to the report (2022), the internal and external review panel was composed of York University faculty, staff, and an external consultant (5). Several options for York University-affiliated consultations were also considered by the review panel for the report, including "written submissions, focus-group meetings, and [virtual] town halls, with offerings in bilingual and accessible formats" (12). When I refer to "university affiliates" in this paper, I am referring to individuals broadly involved with the university, such as on-campus business owners, students, faculty, YSS officials, "unhoused people," student representative groups, faculty groups, maintenance and facilities groups, and administrative groups—including YSS.

Over 38 York University group consultations were conducted for the report. However, again, no housing-related groups who identify as being composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness were consulted, although the report (2022) does recommend commencing further consultations and the formation of various working bodies with "equity deserving groups" (71-72). In the report, "unhoused people" are an "equity deserving group" (14-15, 88). The report also affirms that the review and

resulting report are guided by intersectionality, decolonisation, and an "anti-racism, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion lens" (5, 13) and provides some relevant contextual information and definitional explanations to undergird this assertion.

According to the report (2022), a review of YSS's current security model emerged in response to a "history of concerns from equity deserving groups about security activity at York University" (5). As such, York University's Community Safety Department was formed in 2016 in conjunction with YSS. In 2019, the Community Safety Department developed a *Strategic Plan*, identifying themes and areas to improve YSS, including an overarching review of YSS. Additionally, the *Action Plan on Black Inclusion: A Living Document for Action* was produced following consultations about anti-Black racism with Black community members at York University in 2020. These consultations and the action plan also commit York University to a review of campus security, including exploring alternative models for community safety. Notably, a safety audit was also conducted at York University by the anti-gender-based violence/anti-intimate partner violence/anti-domestic violence organisation METRAC. This audit called for a community safety approach in 2010, which later lead to the formation of the Community Safety Department at York University (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 8-10).

Although the 123-page report covers many topics, its focus can be broadly summarised as reflecting wider societal concerns with law enforcement (5) and is situated within the larger political climate of the Black Lives Matter movement (23). The following three overarching demands are central in the report:

- A demand to end racism in law enforcement;

- A demand to develop non-police-only frontline responses for mental health crises; and,

- A demand to defund or de-task police services and develop more comprehensive safety responses (5).

Additionally, the report identifies and details several central themes and issues arising from consultations with York University affiliates. These themes and issues inform the report's overall structure, including the three overarching demands described above. The objective or conclusive result of the report centres on providing recommendations to transition YSS toward a "community-centric safety" or a "stakeholder-centric" security model, which is premised broadly on a "commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and decolonization and the need to serve a highly diverse university community" (6).

According to the report (2022, 38), a "community-centric safety" or a "stakeholder-centric" security model differs from a "law enforcement" or "police-centric" security model. As the report clarifies, "A law enforcement model assigns all manner of campus safety responsibilities to individuals with an enforcement or policing orientation" (40). The report admits that, although YSS is not a police service, "its structure and culture adhere to many police-like patterns of organization" (38). For instance, the entire YSS management team is composed of "individuals with extensive policing backgrounds and appear to have been recruited with this background and experience in mind" (39). Additionally, all YSS officials must have at least a security-guard licence before employment and the "extensive reliance on actual police to support … security work reinforces the perception that law enforcement best characterizes York's security model" (39).

According to the report (2022), reliance on Toronto police has increased over the past four calendar years (18-19), with an average of 9.12% of security incidents between 2018 and 2022 involving police (18). This rate of police involvement on the York University campus is disproportionately high relative to all

other universities and colleges in Ontario (17, 41, 102). Although, it is worth keeping in mind that some scholars and activists argue that any rate of police involvement is too high (Khan and Newbold 2018; Maynard 2017; Cole 2020; Palmater 2022).

Moreover, on average, approximately 40% of activity involving police on campus is conducted under the *Mental Health Act* (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 20). Broadly, the *Mental Health Act* (1990) governs the functions of psychiatric facilities in Ontario and outlines the conditions under which police can commit individuals to undergo psychiatric examinations by a physician (Canadian Mental Health Association 2023). YSS, Toronto police, and other York University affiliates can initiate incident reports under the *Mental Health Act*. They can initiate these reports because every incident on campus made aware to YSS is recorded, categorised, and acted on by YSS—i.e., YSS *calls* Toronto police for incidents understood as constituting a mental health crisis.

YSS officials cannot legally apprehend individuals experiencing a mental health crisis under the *Mental Health Act* and, therefore, they respond by calling-in Toronto police. This does not mean that YSS officials cannot apprehend individuals. Indeed, arrests can be made through YSS "interventions." However, these "interventions" cannot be conducted under the *Mental Health Act*. Nonetheless, "interventions" can be made under the provision of other acts, for example, the *Trespass to Property Act* and many other York University policies and procedures (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 18-19). The *Trespass to Property Act* (1990) empowers land "owners" to issue written or oral notice to unwanted individuals, to arrest and detain individuals, and to call the police for the immediate arrest of individuals (Ontario Federation of Agriculture 2021).

According to the report (2022), YSS's inability to apprehend individuals under the *Mental Health Act* and Toronto police's disproportionate presence on the York University campus have a common cause (17-19). Namely, unlike other educational institutions in Ontario, York University does not employ "special constables" under the controversial *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*; nor does York University contract full-time private security guard agencies (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 16-19). The *Special Constable* provision empowers institutional entities with many of the same powers as the Ontario police (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 86; Ontario Special Constable Association: Special Constables in Ontario n.d.). As such, with the *Special Constable* provision in place, YSS could become empowered to apprehend individuals under the *Mental Health Act*, thus, "reducing" police presence on the York University campus (i.e., by empowering YSS as *de facto* police).

The report does not offer a definitive position as to whether YSS officials ought to be empowered under the Special Constable provision of the Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act. Rather, the dilemma is characterised as follows: "The disproportionate involvement of police on campus, which is an issue of concern for some equity deserving groups, can only significantly be reduced by involving some security staff empowered with special constable powers, which itself is also a concern for some equity deserving groups" (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 53-54 emphasis mine). The report (2022) resolves that York University should proceed cautiously with this dilemma and a safety resolution needs to be identified with "the buy in of the entire University community and especially equity deserving groups" (53). As such, the report offers "Recommendation 1.8. York should conduct a focused review and consultation to consider limited deployment of security staff with enhanced special constable powers" (54).

By virtue of its medium, the report can only go so far as to determine that a "community-centric safety" or "stakeholder-centric" security model is better suited to York University and offer recommendations to aid in achieving this end. Beyond the recommendations to achieve a "community-centric safety" or "stake-

holder-centric" security model, the report offers information from historical and report-based research, statistical analysis, and consultations conducted with various groups at York University. This information is offered because the function of the report is to do just that: *report*. This function is important to consider because it highlights that the recommendations in the report occupy the tenuous position of being useful or not useful, to various degrees, depending on the groups or peoples who choose to continue advocating for or against them.

According to the information presented in the report, York University and its affiliates may yet choose to implement a "community-centric safety" or "stakeholder-centric" model while empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision. Especially given that Recommendation 1.8 entertains the possibility of at least *some* YSS officials being empowered as "special constables." However, this recommendation is a false dilemma: police presence on campus cannot *only* be significantly reduced by empowering some YSS officials with "special constable" powers, especially insofar as there is a possibility of exploring alternative means for reducing police presence on campus. A working group of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness may help determine these alternatives.

3. Methodology

To form my argument, this research uses critical discourse analysis and grounded theory methodologies. In the following, I give non-exhaustive, definitional explanations of these methodologies. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, vii), grounded theory "improve[s] social scientists's capacities for generating theor[ies] [and conceptual frameworks] that will be relevant to their research." Rather than verifying existing theories, grounded theory is concerned with theory creation through the analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 2016). Typically, objectivist grounded theorists have held that the canons of rigorous science ought to be retained (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 4). However, pragmatist grounded theorists assert that these canons require *redefinition* to "fit the realities of qualitative research and the complexities of social phenomena" (4). A redefinition of canons can mean a redefinition of their *concepts*, such as significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalisability, consistency, reproducibility, precision, and verification. However, this mode of redefinition is not necessarily foremost for grounded theorists working from more pragmatic perspectives. Rather, grounded theory can be *procedural*, developing unique integrated concepts to explain the social phenomena under study. In other words, grounded theory can explain redefinitions of canonical concepts, such as those in the above. Or it can *describe* the application of subsequent redefined iterations (of original redefined concepts). It is the latter approach that the research under discussion takes, primarily through the blending of grounded theory with critical discourse analysis.

From a pragmatist perspective, Corbin and Strauss (1990, 4) assert that there are two *principles* typical of grounded theory. First, phenomena are not understood as static. Rather, they are iterative relative to continuously changing conditions (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). Therefore, "an important component of the [grounded theory] method is to build change, through process, into the method" (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 5). Second, grounded theory rejects the determinism/non-determinism dichotomy. Rather, "actors are seen as having, though not always utilizing, the means of controlling their destinies by their responses to conditions" (5). Here, actors make relatively accurate choices according to their perceptions about their options. Therefore, "grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions" (5).

These two grounded theory principles—(1) phenomena as changing and (2) rejecting the determinism/non-determinism binary—blend well with the two objectives of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with surveying the structures, strategies, and properties of transdisciplinary

texts, language, and other discursive and communicative forms, all of which give rise to modes of social power, injustice, and resistance (Katz et al. 2020; Wong 2016; El-Lahib 2016; van Dijk 1993). In practice, critical discourse analysts identify cues within a discursive medium that prime a reader "to view the world in one way or another, and consequently to take action in one direction or another" (Katz et al. 2020, 603). As such, critical discourse analysis can function as a *pre-emptive* measure by giving coherence to the "ideological white noise" embedded with a discursive piece (603). However, critical discourse analysis is also *interpretive* since it is motivated by current social issues oriented towards influencing change. Generally speaking, critical discourse analysts take an explicit stance relative to value and action with the aim of "a) critiquing discursive moves that undermine these goals; and b) mitigating future harms" (603). These processes may be complemented by drawing on social and cultural theory (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002) and considering socio-political, racial, and economic contexts.

The first objective of critical discourse analysis, pre-emptive coherence, is amenable to the first principle of grounded theory, which embraces change as iteratively ubiquitous to its methods. As such, when critical discourse analysis acts as a pre-emptive (or "stopping") measure by giving coherence to the "ideological white noise" embedded within a given discursive piece (Katz et al. 2020, 603), this forces the change that grounded theorists are concerned with. In other words, through a close reading of a communicative form, critical discourse analysis constitutes an *interruption* to the trajectory of a given discursive piece.

In this way, the second objective of critical discourse analysis, interpretation, lends itself to the second principle of grounded theory: rejecting a deterministic/non-deterministic binary. Recall that critical discourse analysis not only pre-emptively interrupts but also provides an iterative spin. That is, critical discourse analysis confounds certain narrative pathways grounded in nascent determinism *through* interpretation. In other words, critical discourse analysis proffers another story or narrative medium instead of continuing to say: "This is how things are, and they have always been this way."

However, in the same vein, any indication of a non-deterministic view is also thwarted. Critical discourse analysis is transparent about its socio-political goals. As such, there is no replacing one truth with another or hiding behind abstraction. There are no non-deterministic leanings about critical discourse analysis; critical discourse analysis is not random. Instead, critical discourse analysis says: "Here is yet another interpretation, another layer, and it is value-laden and oriented toward matters of socio-political, racial, and economic justice."

The research in this paper blends grounded theory and critical discourse analysis. It borrows the rigour and redefinition inherent to theory creation of grounded theory and the interpretive socio-political goals of critical discourse analysis. Moreover, it presents an amendable amalgam of methodologies that is appropriate for the qualitative phenomena under study, while also aiming toward socio-political change.

4. Findings

This research analyses 1,698 YSS incident summaries between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023. Incident summaries appear in Weekly Security Incident Logs publicly available on the YSS Community Safety website. This research uses open coding to derive a series of commonly appearing categories and subcategories or codes arising from YSS's incident summaries. Open coding is concerned with comparing interactions for similarities and differences and grouping them into categories and subcategories under conceptual labels (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 12). Grouped categories and subcategories are then used to analyse further the data under study, i.e., the initial 1,698 incident summaries. Following open coding, my analysis leads to 733 unique incidents that broadly pertain to homelessness, as found within the initial 1,698 YSS incident summaries.

More specifically, all 733 instances—or an average of approximately 43% of all 1,698 incident summaries analysed—use *anti-homelessness* or *anti-poverty* coded language. What I mean by "anti-homelessness" or "anti-poverty" coded language is a stigmatising language that YSS uses to profile "unhoused people" and their related activities on the York University campus. For instance, a more recognisable example might be a stigmatising report of "panhandling." However, less apparent instances also appear within the summaries.

For example, an incident summary may document an individual "acting in a concerning manner," which appears comparatively vague to a report of "panhandling." Additionally, this descriptor could refer to peoples who are "housed," "unhoused," or somewhere in between, or anyone else labelled non-normative for that matter. Indeed, research indicates that feminised, racialised, ethnicised, disabled, queer, and trans peoples are disproportionately and unjustly criminalised (Cohen 1997; Kinsman and Gentile 2010; Ware et al. 2014; Sepulveda 2020). Moreover, recall that the report responds to concerns from "equity deserving groups," specifically Black and racialised peoples (York University 2021; Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022). And York University is located near the Jane and Finch community, which is understood as a disproportionately and inaccurately criminalised Black and under-resourced/low-income community (Tobias and Joseph 2018, 449; The Jane and Finch Community Research Partnership, 2021; Rebeena 2024). As such, this research recognises that a significant proportion of the 733 incidents discussed likely pertain to racialised peoples with intersectional experiences. That is, there is a history of anti-Black racism in North America, including at York University (Paradkar 2020; The Fifth Estate 2021; Rosen 2023), which is likely reflected in YSS's data.

However, YSS's incident summaries are limiting because they do not provide demographic indicators apart from subjective and unreliable gender labels determined by YSS. As such, my analysis is constitutive of an interpretation of incident summaries and attempts a forced change through an explicit stance to bring peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness into the conversation. That is, the current research seeks to understand the relevant conditions around York University concerning homelessness, determining how YSS responds to contextual changes and how they may conceive of their actions relative to these changes. In other words, this research coheres with critical discourse analysis and grounded theory thinking since it interprets phenomena as subject to continuously shifting conditions.

Of note, an admitted limitation of engaging with "face-less" data and a report that understands intersectionality through the logic of "equity deserving groups," is that this paper's discussion tends to portray peoples with lived experiences of homelessness as relatively homogeneous. However, while the report's language is used in this paper, its limited deployment of intersectionality is contested, and it is recognised that there is no agreed-upon terminology from within lived experience communities. As such, the terms "unhoused" and "people with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness" are used in this research but are admittedly insufficient placeholders.

To mitigate some of the issues of "face-less" data, I analyse less obvious incident summaries—such as reports of "acting in a concerning manner"—holistically within the context of their entire log. As before, a summary may contain other stigmatising and co-constitutive cues that refer to an unhoused person, such as their location (e.g., in a stairwell), a further description of what they are doing (e.g., sleeping), the time of the incident (e.g., 1:00 am), whether they were cautioned or issued a trespass notice, or if they were forcibly removed from campus. That said, the log for a given summary can also provide context. For example, if a summary seems somewhat ambiguous but appears within a given log category (e.g., *Trespass to Property Act*), this can also be informative, especially since, through the iterative analysis I conducted, it became apparent that YSS often annexes unhoused people to the trespassing category in the logs.

Given the variability of incident summaries within these logs, creating a unique data set that specifically

tracks anti-homelessness or anti-poverty coded language was necessary. The specified data set includes a spreadsheet of colour-coded subcategories or codes and analysis memos. Analysis memos are an important grounded theory tool and are necessary for tracking changes arising within incident summaries across time. Memos are also necessary for conducting a comparative analysis that can help mitigate bias (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 9). Ultimately, creating a specified data set makes it possible to organise and conduct a deeper analysis of YSS's activities, particularly those concerning unhoused people.

To create a unique data set, I observed some common categories within the initial 1,698 incident summaries. Categories observed pertain to YSS-inflicted themes of deviance and otherness—i.e., stigma. For instance, I noted the following deviance-themed categories in YSS incident summaries: (1) action-based deviance, (2) psychosomatic deviance, and (3) instances of deviant presence. *Action-based deviance* often presents as reports and removals of individuals who are loitering, smoking, or sleeping in university stairwells, basements, and washrooms. *Psychosomatic deviance*, as recorded by YSS, commonly pertains to individuals causing a disturbance, acting in a concerning manner, acting belligerent, or experiencing a medical crisis. *Deviant presence* appears in YSS incident summaries as harm reduction materials, cigarette butts, alcohol containers, garbage, and other personal items strewn in a stairwell, basement, or washroom.

Importantly, these are not categories that I perceive as deviant. YSS records these instances as deviant, especially given other kinds of stigmatising language paired with these three categories. For instance, a fourth category that became apparent during analysis is the demarcation between *persons language* versus *anti-persons language*. That is, language that is othering due to negation. To demonstrate, examples of persons language might include terms such as: community member, guest, visitor, family member, driver, patron, etc. In contrast, anti-persons language may include terms such as: previously trespassed non-community member, non-community member, unknown individual, known trespasser, former community member, and so forth.

Using these four overarching categories, I created six subcategories or codes to re-analyse the initial 1,698 YSS incident summaries and formulate a unique data set. I chose subcategories and code components based on common terms and comparative points of interest. For example, the term "previously trespassed non-community member" occurs more frequently than "known trespasser." An example of a comparative point of interest includes focusing on police involvement, without the inclusion of other "policing oriented" or carceral entities such as the Toronto Fire Department, emergency responders, Toronto Transit Commission "special constables," and other Toronto city workers. Approximately 3% of incident reports between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023, involve police. This percentage is different from the percentage the report conveys, which averages 9.12% over the last four years (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 18). Besides the sample size, the difference can be explained (at least in part) by variations in estimated occurrences. Whereas the report conveys every instance of police involvement occurring in incident summaries, I only count instances where police respond without the presence of other officials. Estimated occurrences and percentages of each subcategory or code from the initial 1,698 incident summary pool are bracketed and documented in Table 1.

Subcategory	Occurrence	Proportion
previously trespassed + non-community member + deviance themes	377	22%
non-community member + deviance themes	139	8%
unknown persons or former community members + deviance themes	199	7%
groups + deviance themes	87	5%
deviance themes only	11	1%
police + deviance themes	43	3%
Total (Excluding double-counts)	**733**	**43.17%**

Table 1: Estimated occurrence and proportion (percentage) of each subcategory (code) from a corpus of 1,698 incidents reported between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023.

Using these subcategories or codes, 733 of 1, 698 incident summaries are identified that appear to involve unhoused people and YSS. Note that the "total" row in Table 1 is not merely a summary of the "occurrence" and "proportion" columns because some instances are counted in multiple categories. For example, a single incident summary that includes both a subcategory or code composed of "non-community member" + "deviance themes" *and* "police" + "deviance themes" would be counted once toward the total since it is documented as a single event by YSS. All 733 instances use anti-homelessness or anti-poverty coded language. These 733 instances constitute a unique data set that tracks YSS's profiling of unhoused people at York University. In plain language, my analysis indicates that approximately 43% of all YSS activity between September 12th, 2022, and April 09th, 2023, consists of penalising homelessness on the York University campus.

Though grounded theory primarily focuses on phenomena and not tracking divergent categories of individuals (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 8-9), critical discourse analysis is explicitly concerned with group dynamics (van Dijk 1993). Blending critical discourse analysis with grounded theory makes sense for this kind of research and the purposes of accurate data collection precisely because I am interested in tracking phenomena directly tied to individuals. For instance, a subcategory or code that combines the categories of "previously trespassed non-community member" with "deviance themes" appears to capture incidents that involve unhoused people with a higher degree of accuracy than more ambiguous cases. More ambiguous cases, for example, may include the categorical blending of "groups" with "deviance themes" or, simply, "deviance themes only"—i.e., without any individual(s). For instance, items used for basic living, such as clothing and sleep gear, left in a washroom overnight.
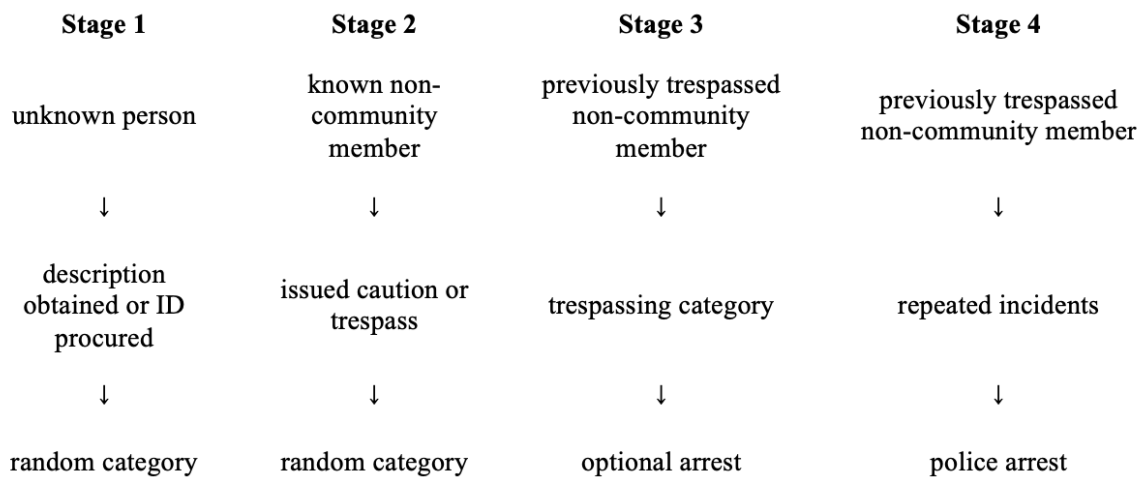
Blending critical discourse analysis with grounded theory also makes sense for observing phenomena about how YSS understands and conducts *their* interactions with unhoused people. That is, through critical discourse analysis, a power-laden anti-homeless or anti-poverty story arises. From a grounded theory perspective, that story appears as a replicating phenomenon, especially given the relevant conditions of how YSS actors respond to changing conditions of homelessness and the consequences of their actions (Corbin and Strauss 1990, 5). Alternatively, conceptualising these changes through a blended approach makes apparent the phenomenon of a *poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline*.

In broad strokes, an analysis of multiple incident summaries within Weekly Security Incident Logs, with the use of subcategories or codes garnered from open coding, exhibits a pattern. During the first stage, an individual present on campus may come to be profiled as unhoused or an "anti-person" by YSS. Cohesive with the information given in the report (2022, 30), it seems such an individual is then induced to provide identification of some kind. Alternatively, perhaps, YSS obtains a description of the individual, given that unhoused people may not have access to identification cards. Next, an individual is evidently placed under a YSS log category that best describes the incident according to YSS.

During the second stage, or upon a second encounter, it seems YSS will "know" an individual, i.e., through identification, and they become labelled as a "known non-community member" or just "non-community member." YSS issues caution or trespass notices to individuals with this label, in accordance with the *Trespass to Property Act* (1990). These individuals are then logged under a category of YSS's choosing.

During the third stage or encounter, an identified and known individual becomes labelled as a "previously trespassed non-community member." Such an individual is evidently designated within YSS logs's *Trespass to Property Act*. Once a *Trespass to Property Act* (1990) is invoked, arrests are at the discretion of YSS, whether by calling-in Toronto police or through YSS "interventions" (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 19). "Interventions" are YSS-speak for arrests (20) although YSS often appears to "escort" or remove unhoused people off campus during this stage.

However, during the fourth stage, it seems any subsequent encounters result in an individual, labelled as a "previously trespassed non-community member," being viewed as consistently trespassing on the York University campus. Within the incident summaries, this stage appears as the poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline's endpoint, where individuals effectively exit the pipeline via Toronto police. At York University, Toronto police responses to the *Trespass to Property Act* (1990) result in custody or arrest unless an individual "flees" or "leaves" before police arrival (The York University Community Safety Department. n.d). To summarise, a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline within YSS Weekly Security Incident Logs appears to follow this pattern:

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
unknown person	known non-community member	previously trespassed non-community member	previously trespassed non-community member
↓	↓	↓	↓
description obtained or ID procured	issued caution or trespass	trespassing category	repeated incidents
↓	↓	↓	↓
random category	random category	optional arrest	police arrest

5. Discussion

It is possible that a sample size of 1,698 YSS incident summaries over seven months is insufficient to determine conclusively that a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline exists at York University. Certainly, additional data may need to be collected and analysed to develop a more nuanced depiction of the relations between YSS and unhoused people at York University. Additional data collection can, of course, arise from sources beyond YSS Weekly Security Incident Logs. The tentative conclusion of this paper, however, gives relevant reasons to consult peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness on the present research and any further related research.

At the very least, this research points to unhoused people interacting with Toronto police and a definitively carceral YSS. Recall, the report (2022) affirms that "law enforcement best characterizes York's security model" (39). As such, YSS interacting with any number of unhoused people is ultimately untenable, especially given the inequitable power dynamics existing between unhoused people, YSS officials, and police. To be sure, however, an approximate 43% average rate of YSS involvement with unhoused people within one academic year is resolutely unacceptable. Suppose this percentage is representative of the socio-political, racial, and economic climate at York University. In that case, it is likely that unhoused people compose one of the largest "equity deserving groups" (79) subject to YSS law enforcement. This is a problem because the report (2022) admits that unhoused people are an "equity deserving group" (14-15) but does not consult or include the perspectives of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness.

Moreover, recall that, compared to other educational institutions in Ontario that do utilise the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*, York University experiences a disproportionately high rate of external police involvement (17, 41). The report (2022) asserts that, over four years, an "average of 9.12 percent of security incidents involved police" (18)—a percentage that is incommensurate when compared to other Ontario educational institutions. Approximately 40% of this activity falls under the *Mental Health Act* (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 20). Under the *Mental Health Act* (1990), anyone experiencing a mental health crisis can be immediately apprehended by Toronto police. This 9.12% rate of police involvement is compounded by an approximate 43% rate of unhoused-penalising YSS activity, amounting to a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline. In short, the "equity deserving group," which I have been referring to as unhoused people or peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness, is subject to an inordinate amount of policing at York University.

Given that unhoused people are an "equity deserving group" that is subject to YSS and Toronto police inflicted harms, it is problematic that this "group" was not consulted during the making of the report and its recommendations. The report decisively focuses on over-policing at York University from Toronto police and the law enforcement quality of YSS. However, it does not consult any peoples from this "equity deserving group." As such, I suggest that some effort at York University be directed toward cultivating a working group of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness, including those interacting directly with YSS and police. This group ought to be involved in determining the shape, structure, culture, and fate of YSS.

This response appears particularly pertinent given the recommendations conveyed in the report, specifically that YSS officials ought to become empowered under the *Special Constable* provision of the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*. This measure will certainly affect unhoused people and peoples in the immediate and surrounding areas (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 79). Recall that the report conveys correlations between YSS "special constables" and the reduction of police presence on the York University campus. However, it remains dubious whether such a prophylactic meas-

ure will result in any of the projections conveyed in the report. Moreover, the long-term implications of the *Special Constable* provision may invariably outweigh any short-term benefits, if there are indeed any at all. Ultimately, employing this provision means equipping an already "law enforcement"-oriented YSS with similar powers to that of Toronto police.

The report primarily functions to convey consultation data and provide recommendations based on these data for transitioning YSS to a "community-centric safety" or a "stakeholder-centric" security model. However, this function makes it such that the report is subject to a certain degree of *equivocation* on some important issues; for instance, an overarching concern regarding whether or not YSS more closely approximates police. Though the report (2022) asserts that YSS is definitively aligned with "law enforcement" (39-40), it also provides data that *differentiate* YSS from police. For example, the report offers differing "intervention" rates between Toronto police and YSS from data collected between 2018 and 2021. These data indicate more Toronto police "interventions" than YSS "interventions." However, these data are then taken a step further, interpreted as signifying a qualitative difference between police "interventions" and YSS "interventions." This is to say, a material difference between police "law enforcement" and YSS "law enforcement." This kind of semantic equivocation—i.e., whether YSS is "police-like" or not—has implications for important decisions at York University, f for instance, whether YSS ought to be empowered with the *Special Constable* provision.

However, Black feminist, transformative justice and abolitionist scholar-activism indicate that differentiations, such as the ones given in the report, are superficial and inaccurate portrayals of systemic injustice. These differentiations are superficial and inaccurate because police and security do not operate in respective vacuums. Rather, they are enmeshed within carceral geographies, as Gilmore (2023) calls them. Recall that carceral geographies are described by Gilmore (2023, 480) as that which is negated through abolition geographies. Abolition geographies are capacious. As such, I use abolition geographies in conjunction with the Critical Resistance definition of the Prison-Industrial-Complex (PIC) since I think the latter concept has some utility.

According to Critical Resistance, the PIC consists of "the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social, and political problems" (Critical Resistance 2024). The neoliberal North American university is a paradigmatic example of a punishing institution representing government and industry interests (Althusser 2001, 85–126; Oparah and Okazawa-Rey 2009, 17-35; Ahmed 2019, 103-134). As such, the oscillation and massification of policing *simpliciter*, through YSS and in conjunction with Toronto police, makes sense within PIC-thinking or carceral geographies. Additionally, the data I discuss in this paper further bolster that there is little substantive difference between YSS and Toronto police, especially given YSS's "police-like" behaviours, including the extensive surveillance, profiling, documentation, and spatial-material control of unhoused people. This research, combined with the report's admittance of a "police-like" quality to YSS, despite a degree of equivocation, gives reason to conclude that YSS is most certainly a policing entity or a "police-proxy."

Additionally, what the report mentions but leaves underdeveloped is *how* YSS interacts with Toronto police. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, one way is through the logic conveyed in the report: the most suitable way to substantially decrease police involvement on the York University campus is to empower YSS with the *Special Constable* provision (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 54) specifically so that YSS will no longer "need" to call Toronto police for the "incidents" they determine.

However, YSS's control relative to Toronto police appears to have been overestimated in this equation. Even if we suppose that YSS discontinues calling-in Toronto police as "special constables," it does not follow that Toronto police will stop coming to the York University campus or the surrounding areas. I do not

mean that it does not matter whether YSS calls the police or not—it does matter. Rather, Toronto police already over-police the area, specifically the nearby Jane and Finch community, due to the criminalisation of race and poverty (GoPaul 2023). It is precisely for this reason, and the fact that York University affiliates are highly diverse (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 8), that YSS ought not to call the police. Notably, however, Toronto police have no reason not to act with impunity, relative to any area. Indeed, it appears impunity is their mandate (Goldhawke 2020; Brockbank 2023; Fagan 2024) and, certainly, some areas and peoples are more impacted by police presence than others (Donahue 2015; Gilmore 2017; Riddle 2020). This is to say, there is little guarantee that Toronto police will view the York University and surrounding areas differently following the instantiation of the *Special Constable* provision. It seems overly ambitious to assume that "special constables" constitute a limit on Toronto police, especially when YSS has contributed to over-policing in the area for quite some time. According to Ruha Benjamin (2019, 77-84), police rely extensively on technology and data sciences to achieve their purported purposes. If there is data precedent of a "high incident" area—say, through multiple 911 calls from YSS—police will increasingly return there. This interplay between reliance on data and policing results in the effective production of "crime" since looking for "crime" and finding it is perpetually circular (Benjamin 2019, 77-84). In other words, the conditions have been set for Toronto police, not for those proximate to York University.

These conditions, informed by digital technologies, are especially relevant since "special constables" have access to the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database. The CPIC is a "national information-sharing system that links criminal justice and law enforcement partners across Canada and internationally" (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 34-35). The problem is that databases, even the supposedly secure ones, are not infallible, and those who input information may be biased. For instance, in 2011, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada conducted an audit of selected Royal Canadian Mounted Police operational databases and found that the CPIC contains "extensive sensitive personal information that, if improperly used or disclosed, could have significant impact on the rights and freedoms of individuals as well their reputations, employability and safety" (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada 2011, 3-4). Specifically, the audit showed that CPIC data has been subject to several security breaches, including improper police agency dissemination of convictions, discharges, and pardons to employers (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada 2011, 3-4). Moreover, several scholars and activists have pointed out that discriminatory information input can follow people across algorithms and platforms through breaches, affecting them in other areas of their lives (O'Neil 2016; Coombes et al. 2022; McQuillan, 2022). In other words, not only do databases encourage policing in specified areas, they also create a context whereby penalties can follow a person digitally. That is, the collaborative interplay between "special constables," Toronto police, and data technology can constitute the production of "crime" that Benjamin (2019, 77-84) discusses.

It is worth mentioning that though YSS is predominantly implicated in the calling-in of Toronto police, they are not alone in this endeavour. Students, faculty, facilities workers, people at on-campus businesses, and so forth can also make independent calls to the police. This does not mean that one ought not to take YSS's role in calling police on campus seriously. YSS is centralised specifically to find, document, and report "incidents" in the interest of York University. As such, it is highly unlikely that individual persons outweigh the impacts that YSS has on the area, including calls to police, among other harms. Notably, the report (2022) indicates that, until 2021, calling the police has been left to the discretion of YSS officials. However, at the time of writing, officials call-in police only when they perceive an "imminent concern for safety" or obtain "supervisor" permission (52). The report does not indicate how an "imminent concern for safety" is standardised or how consistently YSS adheres to this measure; nor does it explain which persons at York University constitute a "supervisor" under any given circumstance. As such, it is possible that Toronto police are being called by both individual YSS officials and their supervisors—some of whom may

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be other administrative bodies at York University apart from YSS. Therefore, it is possible that Toronto police presence may be reduced by way of York University administration ceasing and sanctioning the calling of police onto campus.

Nonetheless, it would be irresponsible to neglect mention of York affiliate involvement with YSS and police. Indeed, curbing policing around campus is neither the sole responsibility nor the purview of YSS. YSS is ill-equipped to respond to the needs of any community and likely ought not exist. However, YSS "special constables" certainly cannot reduce policing on or around the York University campus. Indeed, the report's shrewd acumen that policing can be substantially reduced through the *Special Constable* provision is unsustainable and an affront to communities interacting with York University, ones actively working against carceral geographies on an ongoing, day-to-day, and lived-experience basis. As such, it seems impulsive to conclude that empowering YSS with the *Special Constable* provision will lessen policing on the York University campus and surrounding areas.

6. Conclusion

This paper argues for creating a working group composed of peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness, including those who have interacted directly with York Security Services. This group's purpose is to consult on implementing the recommendations made to YSS by an internal and external expert review panel, submitted and published in December 2022. Beyond consulting on the implementation of these pre-established recommendations, this group can also consult on the shape, structure, culture, and fate of YSS. This working group ought to be majority-led and majority-representative and be financially well compensated to avoid performative labour done for York University.

Consulting on campus policing is especially relevant since, on average, approximately 43% of all YSS activity involves penalising unhoused people. Additionally, a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline seems apparent at York University, leading to the arrest of unhoused people by Toronto police. As I have described here, a poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline affects unhoused people. However, this problem also affects different people in various ways. A poverty-to-criminalisation pipeline points to ongoing issues *and* indicates further issues that can arise following the potential implementation of the *Special Constable* provision under the *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act*.

Notably, although unhoused people comprise a large "equity deserving group" which interacts with YSS, they were not among those consulted during reviews conducted for the *York University Security Services Review: Final Report*. This lack of inclusion is despite the fact that several components of the report advance a community approach to restructuring YSS through an intersectional, decolonial, "anti-racism, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion lens" (Security Services Review Team and Expert Panel Members 2022, 5, 6, 12, 38, 57-58). Based on these principles in the report, a community approach to restructuring includes contributions from "equity deserving groups" (34, 41, 54). And yet, for all intents and purposes, York University, the review, and the report have neglected substantive engagement with "unhoused people." People with intersectional, lived experiences ought to be involved in any decisions regarding policing. Certainly, those involved in decision-making efforts may decide that policing, including YSS policing, be abolished. Peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness can be and are leaders and decision-makers in ongoing and collective efforts to defund, dismantle, and abolish police.

Ordered according to racial capitalism, the utter abandonment of people with intersectional, lived experience constitutes the partitioning and repartitioning logic of carceral geographies, as explained by Gilmore (2023). As such, any liberatory efforts must remain cognisant of potential recapitulations of these logics.

Specifically, seizing on available capacities ought not to devolve into "the problem of innocence" (Gilmore 2023, 482-448). This problem partitions some as "vulnerable enough," and so *undeserving* of criminalisation, relative to some more *criminally deserving* "other" (Gilmore 2023, 482-488). According to Gilmore (2023), such distinctions can lead to "saturation policing," such as "stop-and-frisk; broken windows; and various types of so-called "community policing"" (486); and "police humanitarianisms," which "target… vulnerable people with goods and services that in fact everybody needs—especially everybody who is poor" (Gilmore 2023, 487)—yet, these needs are only ever offered through carceral collaborations that perpetuate the partitions disputed in the first place. Indeed, the "community-centric safety" or "stakeholder-centric" security models discussed in this paper constitute a form of saturation policing, obscuring the "unhoused other." As such, peoples with intersectional, lived experiences of homelessness ought to be wise to carceral subsumptions into mechanisms of saturation policing and police humanitarian tactics.

Responses to poverty and homelessness continue to be tenuous in many areas globally. Therefore, meaningfully responding to these issues and their intersecting phenomena requires genuine engagement with peoples who have intersectional, lived experiences, not policing. Policing and police budgets often exacerbate issues related to poverty and homelessness (Zarum 2020; SURJ et al. 2024; SHJN 2024). This exacerbation is reflected in the socio-political, racial, and economic climate in many areas, including Toronto and York University (Green 2023; York University Staff Association/Association Du Personnel De L'Université York, n.d; Cole 2023). As such, this paper aims to contribute to an ongoing, multi-issue, variously localised effort to involve lived experience peoples in decision-making processes, especially decisions regarding policing.

Acknowledgements

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Invisibilizing Trans Homelessness: The Prefiguration of Cis Homelessness through Homelessness Counts

by A.J. Withers

Abstract: Municipalities in Canada routinely count unhoused populations to inform policy and services. By examining 165 English Canadian municipal homeless count reports, this article explores how trans, Two Spirit, and nonbinary (T2SNB) people, and sex and gender more broadly, are constructed. Homelessness is prefigured as cis within and through the counting and reporting methodology and text. In subsequent counts, homeless services—including new and revamped services based on prior counts—are used to locate homeless people to count thus intensifying the construction of and further prefiguring cis homelessness. The gender binary is both overtly and subtly upheld through these reports in many municipalities. It is argued that there can be substantial material consequences for the invisibilization and misrepresentation of T2SNB people that can impact available services and housing.

Keywords: enumeration; homelessness; homelessness counts; quantitative research; trans

Résumé: Les municipalités canadiennes recensent régulièrement les populations de sans-abri en vue d'orienter leurs politiques et services. S'appuyant sur 165 rapports municipaux canadiens-anglais de recensement des sans-abri, cet article examine la façon dont on définit au sens large les personnes transgenres, bispirituelles et non binaires (T2SNB), ainsi que le sexe et le genre. Dans la méthodologie et les textes de recensement et de rapport, on préfigure l'itinérance comme étant cisgenre. Pour les recensements subséquents, les services destinés aux itinérants, comprenant les services nouveaux et remaniés en fonction des recensements précédents, servent à retrouver les personnes itinérantes à dénombrer, ce qui accentue la notion et la préfiguration de l'itinérance chez les personnes cisgenres. Dans plusieurs municipalités, ces rapports perpétuent ouvertement et subtilement le modèle binaire du genre. Le fait de rendre invisibles les personnes T2SNB et de les représenter de manière inexacte peut avoir des conséquences importantes qui peuvent se répercuter sur les services et les logements disponibles.

Mots clés: recensement; itinérance; recensement des sans-abri; recherche quantitative; trans

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Introduction

There is a backlash against trans communities in North America. In three Canadian provinces and multiple American states, trans and gender non-conforming youth are, or are imminently to be, subjected to anti-trans policies at school (Amnesty International Canada 2024; Trans Legislation Tracker 2024). Medical care restrictions are proposed in Alberta and legislation restricting it, even criminalizing it, has been passed in some jurisdictions and is under review by the courts (Amnesty International Canada 2024; Sherman 2024; Trans Legislation Tracker 2024). As trans/transgender, Two Spirit (2S), and non-binary (T2SNB) people try to live their lives, their identities are recast by the right as "gender ideology."[1] The attempted erasure of trans people is not new (Namaste 2000) with many proponents of the current anti-trans backlash seeking the total erasure of trans people (Withers 2023). Consequently, how the state discursively constructs trans people in policy and how it enumerates (or fails to enumerate) trans people have implications not only for the specific policies in question but also in the larger struggle about trans existence. This paper examines how homeless trans people are (and are not) counted and constructed through municipal homeless counts (HCs) and homeless count reports (HCRs) in Canada.

In Canada, as in the United States, many municipalities carry out HCs every few years. Data from these studies are used for making long-term policy. HCs and HCRs prefigure and produce their objects of study: homeless people. There are profound differences among municipalities in how T2SNB people are counted and described in HCRs. HCRs make homelessness bureaucratically and politically knowable. The choices of those who conduct HCs and author HCRs have implications for homeless policy and, intentionally or not, wade into the ongoing debates about (trans)gender and the gender binary. This paper demonstrates that Canadian municipalities prefigure homelessness as cis through HCs and HCRs thereby contributing to the erasure and delegitimization of T2SNB people and identity.

The enumeration of T2SNB people in homeless counts has not been examined in the scholarly literature. There is near universal agreement in both the literature and in HCs themselves that this enumeration tool undercounts certain groups of people. Nevertheless, there is a sizeable body of literature that supports counting unhoused people. HCs are rooted in the idea that Housing First (HF) homelessness policy's data collection and data-driven strategies will end homelessness (Goering et al. 2014; see also Hwang et al. 2012; Tsemberis and Asmussen 1999). Multiple studies have examined methods of improving the counting of unhoused people within this paradigm (e.g., Hopper et al. 2008; Troisi et al. 2015; Tsai and Alarcón 2022).

There are also critiques of HCs. Jocoy (2013) says that HCs are part of the larger "culture of quantification" which has resulted in resources being funnelled into counting with a focus on measurement rather than interpretation and solutions (398). Schneider, Brisson and Burnes (2016) raises concerns about the waste of resources—especially given his findings that different jurisdictions use varied methodologies, resulting in inconsistent results.

Some scholars have contemplated replacing point-in-time counts with by-name lists (BNLs) (Tsai and Alarcón 2022) or a combination of randomly sampled point-in-time (PIT) counts cross-referenced with BNLs (Weare 2019). BNLs provide real-time administrative data from institutions. BNLs are easy to generate once homeless databases have been created. Regardless of the method, homeless counts are neoliberal surveillance technologies that construct and make homeless populations knowable (see Willse 2008). Evolving techniques, including methodological innovations (Hopper et al. 2008) and the use of artificial intelligence (Richmond 2021), drones or helicopters with thermal imaging, and street cameras, are intensifying this surveillance in some, primarily US jurisdictions (Tsai and Alarcón 2022). These tactics will

identify individuals who have evaded previous counts (Williams 2011). The drive to count, to quantify, overrides unhoused individuals' intention and consent.

Both PIT and BNL counts are designed to capture individuals who are considered to be in situations of "absolute homelessness" —sleeping outside, in the shelter system, or, in some jurisdictions, those with no fixed address in other institutions (jails and hospitals). It is not designed to count the "hidden homeless"— people trading sex for a place to stay, couch surfing, squatting, etc. Some communities attempt to include hidden homelessness in their PIT counts but this methodology in itself is incapable of adequately counting this population (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004; Smith and Castañeda-Tinoco 2019). High rates of violence experienced by women and T2SNB people (who are also disproportionately Indigenous, Black, and people of colour) is one of the factors influencing experiences of homelessness, including high rates of hidden homelessness. Because of the high rates of hidden homelessness, unhoused women and T2SNB people are less likely to be counted in homeless counts. Focusing on absolute homelessness, therefore, disproportionately represents (white) cis men's homelessness.

Additionally, neither *homelessness* nor *trans* are fixed concepts; rather, they are socially determined and have changed over time (Currah and Stryker 2015; Willse 2008). With respect to enumerating trans people, Currah and Stryker (2015) say, "The definitional lines of the concept are 'moving targets'" (4). What constitutes and is counted as homelessness is contested.

Beyond critiques of the counts, enumeration of trans people is problematic because "one can be trans* without necessarily having a trans identity" (Ingraham, Pratt and Gorton 2015, 139–40)— much like how a man can have sex with men and not *be* gay but identify in multiple ways. Consequently, there will likely be fewer trans respondents than there are "trans" participants. Disproportionately, poor and BIPOC people do not identify with the word "trans" (Doan 2016; Valentine 2007). Nevertheless, supporters of trans enumeration argue that these projects are important to identify trans experiences, bolster rights claims, and get service improvements (Doan 2016; Trans PULSE Canada n.d.).

Quantitative studies may not be suitable for the small T2SNB population. Further, HCs, which are designed to collect demographic information, do not collect information about the unique needs of the community. According to the City of Halifax's (2018) HCR, T2SNB people need "different methods of data collection and analyses" (4). Given that there is urgent and obvious need for deeply affordable housing and increased social assistance rates, it is not unreasonable to argue that the energy put into HCs is better spent elsewhere; nevertheless, as HCs continue, there are concrete measures that can be taken to improve the counts for T2SNB people and interrupt the cycle of prefiguration of homelessness as cis through HCs and HCRs.

Methodology

In this study, 165 publicly available English-language Canadian municipal homeless count reports were reviewed. Where available, the years 2015/2016, 2018, and 2020/2021/2022 were reviewed (search ended Jan. 1, 2023). These dates were chosen based on federal government funding cycles. If more than one report was available for the 2015-2016 period, 2015 was used; if more than one was available for the 2020/21/22 period, the most recent report was used. I used content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) and critical discourse analysis techniques to analyze the reports and identify key themes.

Background: Homeless Counts and Reports

HCs are federally funded and directed assessments of the population of unhoused people at a specific point in time in Canada (Reaching Home Community Homelessness Report 2022). They are made up of PIT counts, registry periods, BNLs, or a combination of these. PIT counts are the physical counting and surveying of the population and may include the collection of administrative data; they are conducted within a 24-hour period. Registry periods are several days to a week-long period in which data is collected through magnet events (gatherings designed to attract community members), the shelter, and other administrative systems. Registry periods may involve conducting a survey of unhoused persons and typically involve collecting non-anonymous data to register people into homelessness data surveillance systems – including BNLs. BNLs are the extraction of population data from the federally mandated and approved database.

The same core questions have been used in HCs since 2018. Nevertheless, there is significant variation in methodologies and written reports among municipalities—making inter-jurisdictional comparison unreliable (see Schneider, Brisson, and Burnes 2016). Nearly all HCRs report Indigenous identity while the majority do not report racial identity, even though this data is collected. The HCRs are typically prepared by not-for-profit and/or municipal staff, although provincial government staff, consultants, and academics have also prepared reports (see Homeless Count Reports Cited). Reports typically have an infographic visually depicting key data followed by a longer report that includes a methodology section and may include an appendix with the survey instrument(s); some reports only include an infographic or report and some may not include any methodological information. Four provinces issue reports containing information for multiple cities (Alberta, British Columbia (BC), New Brunswick, Quebec). Methodological and reporting variations lead to uneven approaches to how people are counted and, ultimately, who is counted.

Part I: Undercounting

T2SNB people are in virtually every community. According to Statistics Canada (2022), one in 300 people in Canada 15 years old and over (0.3%) are T2SNB.[2] Yet homeless count reports often report zero unhoused T2SNB people. T2SNB people are systemically undercounted in many homeless enumerations because of the formulation of the question, survey conditions, and use of administrative data.

Undercounting: The Question

The question people are asked shapes the answer. The formulation of HCs' most common gender question delegitimizes binary-identified trans people's identities. Since 2018 (and typically before that), all municipalities outside BC attempt to capture trans populations by asking participants: "what gender do you identify with?" Unhoused people are shown a list of possible answers: "man," "woman," "two spirit," "transgender man," "transgender woman," "non-binary (genderqueer)," "not listed: [insert answer]," "don't know," and "decline to answer." Many trans people choose "man" or "woman" because they are men and women – resulting in an undercount (see: Ingraham, Pratt, and Gorton 2015; Rohrer 2015). Consequently, while Peterborough reported no T2SNB people in 2018, it recognized this was "not indicative of a lack of transgender people" (24). Questions formulated this way both fail to capture many trans people and delegitimize trans people's identities as a real "man" or "woman." Indeed, two HCRs (Huron County 2021 and Peterborough 2021) report the number of "cis men" and "cis women" even though there is no data collection about cisgender identity. Peterborough went from acknowledging how the question erases T2SNB people in 2018 to, in 2021, foreclosing the possibility that trans men and trans women are "men" and "women" at all.

There is ample evidence that shows a single gender identity question does not adequately capture trans populations (Holzberg et al. 2017; Puckett et al. 2020; Reisner et al. 2015; The GenIUSS Group 2014). Instead, a two- (or three-) step question is considered to be best practice for assessing gender identity and enumerating trans people while not confusing the majority (cis) population and creating "false positives" (Reisner et al. 2015; The GenIUSS Group 2014). One form of two-step question asks people (1) what sex they were assigned at birth and (2) what gender they identify as today. However, this question can be experienced as "dehumanizing" (Smith quoted in Puri 2022) and it reinforces the sex gender binary, problematically biologizing sex. BC uses the other form of the two-step question and asks people (1) gender and (2) if they have "trans experience." Because it is most likely to be poor and BIPOC people who tend not to claim "trans identity" or "trans experience" (Doan 2016), the lack of claiming will be especially skewing for unhoused communities as they are almost universally poor and are disproportionately BIPOC.

Undercounting: The Context

Beyond the questions asked during the count, T2SNB people face violence and discrimination for being who they are. Some people will, therefore, be reluctant to disclose their identities/experiences at all. Disclosure may be context-dependant for others. Factors that can reduce T2SNB responses include:

1. Surveys conducted verbally with little or no privacy at service sites or outdoors;
2. Simultaneous collection of personal information to enter into systems databases such that participants
   2.a feel they have to provide consistent information but do not want to be identified as T2SNB in non-anonymous data;
   2.b are not asked gender more than once in the suite of surveys because survey makers/takers perceive gender to be fixed;
3. Fear of discrimination. Discrimination and refusal of services against T2SNB trying to access homeless services is well documented (e.g., Abramovich 2017; McCann and Brown 2021; Pyne 2011);
4. Inaccurate parental reporting of gender identity of their dependent children.

These contextual factors likely lead to a substantial undercounting of trans people in HCs.

Accuracy of counting may also depend on who conducts the survey. Multiple HCs used frontline workers and volunteers as survey-takers; they may have dual relationships with some of the respondents. At least five homeless counts involved uniformed officers (police, by-law, etc.) as survey-takers or accompanying survey-takers, while others had police present at magnet events. Systemic mistreatment of T2SNB people (especially sex workers) by police is well documented (e.g. Stenersen, Thomas, and McKee 2022). The majority of T2SNB people worry about police/security stops and/or harassment – especially BIPOC trans people (Trans PULSE Canada 2021). Non-status individuals, criminalised individuals, and those who are otherwise fearful or cautious of police and parapolice may also avoid participation in homeless counts entirely.

Administrative Data: Systematic Erasures

Some jurisdictions suppressed the numbers of T2SNB people in their reports because they used administrative data rather than survey data. The erasure within administrative data occurs through misgendering – an epistemic violence. Correction systems typically operate in gender binaries. Winnipeg (2021) observes

that there were participants who identified as nonbinary in the HCs "while being identified as either male or female in administrative data" (13).

Using administrative data, the province of Alberta (2016) makes two claims about unhoused trans people:

1. They "made up less than 1% of the total Alberta homeless population" and
2. There were "a total of four individuals province wide" (19).

After asserting these two statistical "facts," the Province acknowledges that "most administrative data sources did not report [the] category" of transgender. This is an impressive statistical maneuver: a subjective recognition of an erasure preceded by an "objective" statement of fact - a quantified number of trans people in two ways: percent and number of individuals. Qualified as they are, embedded in the statement of fact that there are only four trans people in the province is the assumption that everyone of the 4,823 people whose administrative data was collected is cis. This is statistically improbable. This HCR, while acknowledging some T2SNB, does the productive labour of constructing homelessness as cis.

Administrative data that records trans identities as an option may allow homeless enumerators to become overconfident in this data. Federally funded municipalities use a homeless database for publicly funded emergency shelters and, in some jurisdictions, for people sleeping outside. This database provides a single question on gender identity (including in BC) (BC Housing n.d.; Homelessness Learning Hub 2021), resulting in the same undercounting issues described earlier. T2SNB people who can pass as cis (as the either gender they identify with or were assigned) may not identify themselves as trans for administrative data – making it especially unreliable with respect to this group. Lastly, some people's identity/expression may have changed since the administrative data was collected or updated and the HC will not reflect this change. Administrative data is particularly vulnerable to undercounting T2SNB people because of the unique issues faced by trans men who may withhold their trans identities to remain in women's spaces where they feel (and likely are) safer.

Although administrative data may be even less reliable and more likely to suppress data counts with respect to enumerating T2SNB people, changing from the PIT count to administrative data enumeration, or to a combination of primarily administrative data coupled with a small random sampling PIT, has been proposed (Tsai and Alarcón 2022; Weare 2019). Many of the municipal HCRs proposed this at the peak of the COVID 19 pandemic; at least one has permanently adopted this form of data for its homeless count reports (Polly Smith, email communication to author, May 7, 2022).

Known Locations—Unknown Populations

It is impractical for most municipalities to cover their entire geographic area in a 24-hour period. Therefore, communities typically conduct counts in "known locations." This may undercount T2SNB people because these groups may avoid cisheterosexist services and spaces and because T2SNB homelessness is misrecognized. Further, unhoused populations are made knowable through homeless counts and their subsequent reports. Previous counts are used to help identify these known locations (additional sources may include police and front-line workers). If homelessness is prefigured as cis though previous HCRs and cisheteropatriarchial relations and practices, T2SNB "known locations" may not be knowable – they may not be identifiable using these methods or by these practitioners and, therefore, may exclude many T2SNB people.

This section has provided a brief overview of four key mechanisms through which unhoused T2SNB

people are undercounted/erased. This takes place through the construction of the question, the context in which the count occurs, the use of administrative data, and the reliance on "known locations."

Part II: Delegitimization

The gender binary is an ideological construct in which there are two opposing genders: man and woman. Some HCRs report sex, others gender, and others use the two concepts interchangeably. For this reason, and that the concept of sex is also an ideological construct mediated by and produced through social relations (Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling 2020), "the gender binary" encompasses sex in this article. Many HCRs uphold and reinforce the gender binary in overt and subtle ways, primarily through practices of exclusion, delegitimization, and reification.

Exclusion of T2SNB People

Exclusion is a form of outright erasure and the most overt of the practices of upholding the gender binary. Many municipalities only report how many men and women are represented in the unhoused population; Two Spirit and nonbinary (2SNB) people are unreported, as are those who report their gender identities as "trans man" or "trans woman." Because of the lack of data transparency and the many variations in reporting, there is no way of knowing how common it is that T2SNB are counted and recorded in the homeless counts but do not appear in HCRs. Without clearly indicating there are no participants outside the gender binary, report authors reify the gender binary by negating the possibility of unhoused nonbinary people.

Some jurisdictions intentionally exclude participants who do not hold binary gender identities. Sault Ste. Marie's 2021 HCR provides 2018 2SNB data not included previously. In 2018, the city reported only "male" (56.3%) and "female" (28.1%) populations, leaving 15.6% of the unhoused population unaccounted for. The 2021 report revealed that 3.1% of the unaccounted for 15.6% was "other i.e. Two-Spirit, Non Binary" (11). In another instance, T2SNB people are not present in the reports but are mathematically discoverable. Thunder Bay reported in 2018 that "63.5% are male and 35.2% are female (0.9% did not respond*)" (4). This totals 99.6%; there is an erasure of 0.4%. This 0.4% is most likely one T2SNB respondent—one stubborn challenge to the gender binary and a tidy infographic. Thunder Bay (2016) listed T2SNB people in 2016; however, acknowledging T2SNB people in the 2018 HCR would have challenged the binary design of the infographic: male/female; straight/LGBTQ; veteran/non-veteran (each with a little "did not respond*"). Here, it seems that the city prioritized aesthetics over inclusion which is, in itself, an ideological position. Without assessing and analyzing the raw data for every municipality that did not report T2SNB people, it is impossible to know how many municipalities that only listed "man" and "woman" did so as a choice rather than as a representation of the enumerated population. Homeless populations are made known by these HCRs. Therefore, the HCRs both reify the binary and produce cis homelessness.

Trans Identities as Illegitimate: Ontological Fact and Self-identification

Cis people, like T2SNB people, have a gender self-identification. However, the normativity, congruence, and common absence of self-examination of cis people's gender identities often means their self-identification is rendered invisible. Indeed, that cis people do not have gender self-identities, and that gender is inborn and natural, is key to upholding the gender binary and trans oppression (Bettcher 2014; Stone 1992). Nineteen HCRs consistently indicate the number of "men"/"males" and "women"/"females" in the population while using a precursor (most often "identified") for T2SNB people (another five do so inconsistently).

For example, Sudbury (2021) reported:

> **Women comprised** 37% of those who indicated their gender as male or female, while **men comprised** 61%. Persons who **self-identified their gender as two-spirit, transwoman, transman, genderqueer** or don't know comprised 2%. (6, emphasis added)

The populations of "women" and "men" are put forward as uncomplicated ontological facts. However, T2SNB people "self-identify" that way; T2SNB do not exist beyond their own individual claims to these identities. Durham (2021) also establishes cisgender as an ontological fact: "58% of the survey respondents **were male**; with **women accounting for** nearly 36%." However, non-cis people provide an answer rather than being "real": "2% of the respondents **provided another gender identity**" (11, emphasis added; also see Grande Prairie, 2018 which uses "reported"). These HCRs reify (assumed cis) binary gender identities while undermining T2SNB ones.

Some reports do refer to "men" and "women" as "identifying" as such. However, word choice can still be used to undermine T2SNB identities in these instances. In six reports (three of which do so inconsistently), less legitimate verbs are mobilized to describe T2SNB as a discrete choice. Where cis people "identified," T2SNB people "selected" (Barrie 2020), "reported" (Edmonton 2021; Vancouver 2018), "provided" (Winnipeg 2018; 2022), etc. T2SNB people are denigrated in HCRs by the reification of cis identities. The language used in many reports suggests that "man" and "woman" are ontological facts, natural and immutable, while there is an element of choice implied with respect to T2SNB identities—even when language of "identification" is used for cisgender people.

Observation as Reification

Some municipalities also reified gender as an ontological fact by determining it to be an externally observable phenomenon. In at least nineteen HCs, street teams counted the number of people they visually observed and determined their genders. Gender cannot be externally observed or determined by others; consequently, HCs are likely to misgender T2SNB people, and the possibility of nonbinary identity is foreclosed in most instances. In these instances, nonbinary people are misgendered (categorized as "male" or "female"), made strange (categorized as "unknown"), or literally othered (categorized as "other"). People are often misgendered based on social cues and there is a pervasive stereotype that trans people look different from cis people (Wittlin et al. 2018). This practice of observing gender is ripe for misgendering people; it also gives space for the misrecognition of binary-gendered trans people as not "real" men and women – something that the survey instrument has already instilled in those doing the tallying. This practice may be individually harmful by misgendering people. It also tends to reify the gender binary and further undercount 2SNB people by allowing only binary opinions and/or by erasing T2SNB people through inaccurate "observation."

Delegitimization Conclusion

HCRs are used to delegitimize T2SNB people and identities in multiple ways, including several that are beyond the scope and word limit of this article. Some HCRs exclusively use male and female visuals or emphasize these images (e.g., Halifax 2018; Halton 2018; Fort McMurray 2018; New Brunswick 2018)—reinforcing the gender binary even when they acknowledge the existence of trans people. Heteronormative families are also often depicted (e.g., Halton 2018; Victoria 2020). Also, in this study, there was near universal listing of 2SLGBTQ+ people under sexual orientation in HCRs even though the "T" for trans is not a sexual orientation and was not part of that question. More concerning, eight HCRs listed sexual orientation as a gender identity, listing "men," "women," and "2SLGBTQ+" (or a variation thereof) as the

genders with which people identify. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not interchangeable, yet they are treated as such in these HCRs. T2SNB people are excluded from HCRs; T2SNB identities are constructed as an implied choice in contrast to the cisgender identities which are reified by both HCRs and methodological practices of observing gender. The delegitimization of trans people is widespread.

Material Consequences

There are real material and policy consequences of the undercounting and delegitimization of T2SNB people in HCs. Prefigured but always incomplete, cis homelessness is produced in HCRs as the gender binary is discursively upheld and identities/experiences beyond or between the binary are delegitimized. Whether through outright erasure or cues that indicate the invalidity of T2SNB people and identities, these documents make "homelessness" knowable, prefigure it as cis, and make T2SNB homeless unknowable.

The T2SNB homelessness that is made visible in HCRs is always partial. However, the rich and complex lives and experiences of unhoused people are flattened by these reports. For example, they describe women, LGBTQ people, and racialized people but queer women of colour do not exist as people. Quantitative research has a "flattening effect" because it always "treat[s] groups as a monolith" (Wang, Ramaswamy, and Russakovsky 2022, 3). A small number of cities have worked to provide more intersectional analyses (e.g., Halifax 2018; 2022; Whitehorse, 2021). While these attempts are an improvement over the standard approach, they still fall very short of capturing the complexities of people's lives. They also "continu[e] along the path of individualizing people into narrow identitarian subpopulations" (Thompson and King 2015, 155). Some cities centre their intersectional analyses on Indigenous populations (see Guelph 2018; Victoria 2018). On one hand, the disproportionality of Indigenous homelessness warrants closer examination of this population's characteristics to better address its needs. On the other hand, however, when this examination focuses primarily or exclusively on individual characteristics, it can create the impression that Indigenous people's homelessness can be attributed to their individual characteristics rather than broader social issues - this is especially problematic in a settler-colony such as Canada.[3] The "flattening" of people in homeless counts is also reflected in the counts' inability to grapple with or reflect people's reasons for becoming and/or staying homeless, which are often complex, interacting phenomena that can only be elicited through people's stories rather than oversimplified multiple choice responses (Williams 2011; Wright Rubin, and Devine 1998).

It is through prefiguring and producing the homeless population that governments "re-mak[e] homelessness by reconfiguring what needs are allowed to register, and what services can address those needs" (Willse 2008, 248). Services are designed to meet the needs of the unhoused population based on the HCRs. Because Alberta only counted four T2SNB people, there is no apparent need for services that meet the needs of trans communities: perhaps just a few individual accommodations are warranted (even if individual accommodations have been found to be harmful to trans people [Omercajic & Martino, 2020]).

HCRs create a cis construction and production cycle (see Figure 1). T2SNB people and identities are undercounted and delegitimized through an initial HC and HCR, using some or all of the techniques discussed in this article. The policies and services based on the HC and HCR then prefigure homelessness as cis because they do not reflect the size of the T2SNB community (and may have negated them entirely). New counts that are designed based on prior data take place at service sites that are inadequate for T2SNB people and in "known locations," even though prior reports and counts have rendered T2SNB homeless somewhat (if not entirely) unknowable. Each HC and HCR produces and prefigures homelessness as cis. If unremedied, this cycle will be intensified with each count.
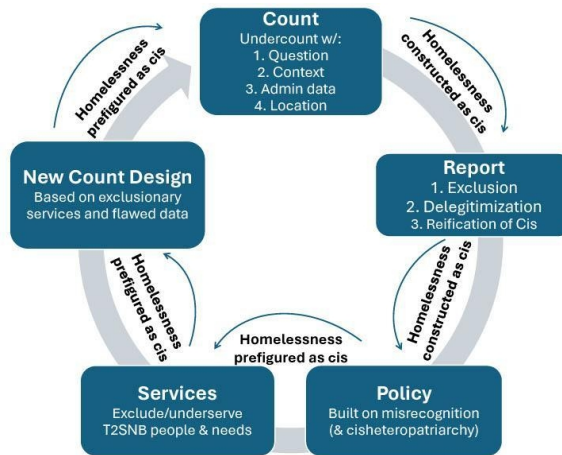
Figure 1: Homeless Counts: The Construction and Cis Production Cycle

Willse (2008) says of homeless-database technologies: "The individual becomes drawn into the possibilities of life determined by biopolitical technologies. The individual must come to reflect the population, not the other way around" (248). This is not to say that all unhoused people must do so; Bacchi and Eveline (2010) observe, "Policies *elicit* forms of subjectivity; they do not impose them" (120 emphasis in original). It is to say, however, that governments are more likely to produce policies and programs that are exclusionary to T2SNB because of their homeless counts and reports and those policies and programs will, in turn, help to perpetuate the production of cis homelessness in future counts (and, therefore, continue the cycle of trans exclusion/invisibilization and cis production).

Conclusion

HCs and HCRs may make T2SNB homelessness seem less widespread and significant than it is through this group's full or partial invisibilization and delegitimization. At present, many homeless counts and reports construct and prefigure homelessness as cis while reifying the gender binary and undermining T2SNB existence. T2SNB people are a small portion of the overall unhoused population; however, rates of T2SNB homelessness are likely disproportionately high—which may call for additional policy interventions. T2SNB communities also have unique service needs that are not addressed through HCs and HCRs.

This study makes the many flaws in HC methodology and reporting evident. There are multiple, often simple, changes that can be made to these processes to improve them. To begin to address the undercounting of unhoused T2SNB people, HCs must, at minimum, implement a two-step gender question that defines trans-experience (and a variation of this for parents answering for their children), address the survey context concerns, and eliminate the use of administrative data. With respect to count context, discontinuing the use of police and other carceral officers is not difficult; issues of privacy and front-line workers will require much more effort and may not be fully realizable in some jurisdictions. Taking leadership from unhoused T2SNB people on count design may help to address methodological issues, particularly related to "known location." Many unhoused T2SNB persons are living in states of "hidden" homelessness; research that examines hidden homelessness in addition to "absolute" homelessness also needs to be conducted – especially because of the risks of gender-based violence to this population. T2SNB-specific tools should also be used to assess the needs of these communities. Studies that contain a qualitative component

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will be the only way to grasp the complexity of T2SNB communities' needs and avoid the quantitative inevitability of identity flattening. HCRs should also, ideally, be written in consultation with unhoused T2SNB people and by those who have trans-equity training. It is evident that HCR authors do not have basic T2SNB literacy in many municipalities.

While there are many ways to improve HCs, it is important not to confuse research and remedy. Urban Indigenous people in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside describe being "researched to death" (Goodman et al. 2018, 1). Research can act as both a mechanism and a justification to postpone meaningful action. Decent housing, income, and appropriate, well-funded services and supports end homelessness – data does not. Improving HC methodologies and making them more T2SNB-inclusive must not be used to delay the influx of urgently needed resources.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

1. Two Spirit (2S) is an Indigenous-specific term that is inclusive of Indigenous LGBTQI persons and people who have both feminine and masculine spirits inside them (Cameron 2005). In this paper, it is used specifically to refer to Two Spirit persons who are not cisgender. Indigenous homelessness does not fit within settler definitions of homelessness in a straightforward way (see Thistle 2017). This can lead to further erasure of both 2S people and the colonial relations that cause 2S homelessness.

2. This is likely also a significant undercount.

3. Official count projects were advised by the federal government to partner with Indigenous organizations and/or Indigenous homelessness communities. Independent of these official counts, Indigenous groups are actively engaged in data collection and policy formation creation rooted in decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty (Newhouse et al. 2023; Thistle 2017).

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"Shared and Collective Stress": 2SLGBTQI and Allied Mental Healthcare Providers' Experiences and Challenges during COVID-19 in Canada

by Kimberly Seida, Félix Desmeules-Trudel, and Brittany A.E. Jakubiec

Abstract: The confluence of increased demand for mental health services and decreased resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic has created multiple challenges for mental healthcare and social service providers. 2SLGBTQI service providers may be disproportionately impacted by pandemic-related challenges, such as psychological distress, vicarious traumatization, and burnout. However, there are significant knowledge gaps regarding the needs and experiences of 2SLGBTQI and allied service providers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. To address these gaps, we conducted a national survey (N = 304), eight semi-structured focus groups, and five semi-structured interviews (N = 61) with 2SLGBTQI care seekers and service providers across Canada. Based on data from the 106 2SLGBTQI service providers and 3 allied service providers who took part in these research activities, this paper explores the challenges service providers encounter when providing care to 2SLGBTQI individuals as well as their adaptive responses to these challenges. Understanding the experiences of service providers who share lived experiences of discrimination and marginalization with their clients is critical to addressing barriers to affirming mental healthcare, shifting services to meet the evolving needs of both care seekers and providers, and developing upstream, comprehensive solutions to address the causes of 2SLGBTQI mental health disparities.

Keywords: burnout; COVID-19; LGBTQ+; mental healthcare; service providers

Résumé : En raison de la demande accrue pour des services de santé mentale et de la diminution des ressources à cause de la pandémie de COVID-19, les fournisseurs de soins de santé mentale et de services sociaux ont dû faire face à plusieurs défis. Les fournisseurs de services aux personnes 2ELGBTQI seraient plus durement touchés par les défis liés à la pandémie, tels que la détresse psychologique, le traumatisme transmis par personne interposée et l'épuisement professionnel. Or, on constate qu'on en sait très peu sur les besoins et les expériences des fournisseurs de services aux personnes 2ELGBTQI et alliées dans le contexte de la pandémie de COVID-19 au Canada. Pour remédier à cette situation, nous avons mené un sondage national (N = 304), huit groupes de discussion semi-structurés et cinq entrevues semi-structurées (N = 61) auprès de demandeurs de soins 2ELGBTQI et de fournisseur de services à ces personnes au Canada. Se fondant sur les données recueillies auprès de 106 fournisseurs de services à des personnes 2ELGBTQI et de 3 fournisseurs de services à des alliés qui ont participé à ces activités de recherche, cet article examine les défis rencontrés par les fournisseurs de services lorsqu'ils prodiguent des soins aux personnes 2ELGBTQI, ainsi que les mesures d'adaptation qu'ils ont prises pour relever ces défis. Il est essentiel de comprendre les expériences des fournisseurs de services qui, tout comme leurs clients, ont vécu la discrimination et la marginalisation si l'on veut éliminer les obstacles aux soins de santé mentale axés sur

l'affirmation, adapter les services pour répondre aux besoins évolutifs des demandeurs de soins et des fournisseurs, et concevoir des solutions globales en amont pour s'attaquer aux causes des disparités en santé mentale chez les personnes 2ELGBTQI.

Mots clés : épuisement professionnel; COVID-19; LGBTQ+; soins en santé mentale; fournisseurs de services

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally altered daily life, population health, and well-being, as well as access to and delivery of healthcare services, including those focused on shoring up the social determinants of mental health (e.g., housing, employment, medical care, and mental healthcare). The pandemic exacerbated rates of mental health disorders (e.g., depression, anxiety, OCD, suicidality, and substance use) among systematically marginalized groups such as Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (2SLGBTQI) populations (Brennan et al. 2020; Slemon et al. 2021). Compounding this problem, systemic exclusion, discrimination, and a lack of cultural responsiveness prevent 2SLGBTQI people from accessing the inclusive services and care they need to manage their mental health and well-being. As a result, 2SLGBTQI people are falling through ever-widening gaps in the Canadian mental healthcare system and are bearing the burden of the pandemic's wide-ranging impacts on mental health, well-being, and social supports (Seida, 2023).

Although it is critical for scholarship to examine the pandemic's impacts on 2SLGBTQI communities' mental health, to date it has focused almost entirely on mental healthcare seekers' perspectives, while comparatively few studies have substantially centered provider perspectives (see Canvin, Twist, and Solomons 2021). Pandemic-era research that included service providers as participants has largely focused on their clinical training experience (Stryker et al. 2022), perspectives on and challenges related to 2SLGBTQI cultural competence (Bishop, Crisp and Scholz 2022; Loo et al. 2023), their reflections on treating 2SLGBTQI clients (Kennedy et al. 2022), and navigating disclosure to clients (Beagan et al. 2023). Even less work has addressed the experiences and challenges of mental healthcare and social services providers who are themselves 2SLGBTQI. As a result, there are significant knowledge gaps regarding the needs and experiences of 2SLGBTQI and allied service providers in the Canadian context and as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers have documented multiple pandemic-related challenges experienced by healthcare providers, including psychological distress, vicarious traumatization, and burnout (De Kock et al. 2021; Greenberg et al. 2020). Based on semi-structured interviews with 15 healthcare providers and administrators in Canada (2SLGBTQI status not disclosed), Kennedy et al. (2022) identified several stressors wrought by pandemic-related changes in service delivery, including reticence about providing virtual mental health supports due to client disengagement and privacy concerns, as well as personal feelings of alienation due to physical distancing. Furthermore, 2SLGBTQI service providers may be disproportionately impacted by changes wrought by the pandemic (Wolfe 2023). For example, 60% of participants in a survey of LGBT healthcare workers in Vancouver reported burnout (Khan et al. 2021). Another survey comparing mental health outcomes between sexual and gender minority (SGM) and non-SGM healthcare workers found that SGM frontline healthcare workers had significantly higher depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (Wojcik et al. 2022).

2SLGBTQI mental health care workers experience particular systemic, interpersonal, and individual barriers and challenges as providers and/or consumers of mental health care. A pre-pandemic qualitative study of eight 2SLGBTQI mental health service providers in Ontario explored systems-level barriers to supportive mental health services for LGBT people (McIntyre et al. 2011). This study found that the medical model's continued influence on both education and care delivery was difficult for 2SLGBTQI providers, who often navigated a binary ('two-gender") and essentialist (as opposed to intersectional) approach to care stemming from implicit assumptions within biomedical frameworks (see also Dickey and Singh 2017). Other systemic barriers to providing quality care noted by 2SLGBTQI providers included long wait times, lack of affirmative mental health services in the public sector, and burnout due to the dearth of funding available for affirmative services (McIntyre et al. 2011). These barriers may be particularly pronounced for racialized 2SLGBTQI service providers, who experience racism and marginalization in both their professional and personal lives (Giwa and Greensmith 2012; Khan et al., 2021), including 2SLGBTQI service settings (Pilling et al. 2017). 2SLGBTQI therapists also face the challenges of heterosexist training environments, navigating disclosure to their peers and to clients, and integrating queer and professional identities (Lykins 2021). Working in heteronormative settings leads to a range of work-related stressors for 2SLGBTQI healthcare providers, including coworkers' lack of knowledge, fears of job loss, and concerns about disclosing to patients, with negative mental health implications (Eliason et al. 2017; Holmberg et al. 2022). Identifying an additional stressor, a recent qualitative study with 2SLGBTQI health professionals from across Canada found that they faced pressure to be "heteroprofessional," entailing demands of appearing and acting heterosexual in professional settings (Bizzeth and Beagan 2023).

The findings presented in this paper are part of a broader initiative, Queering Mental Health Supports in Canada, which is a multi-year, multi-phase project involving research, training, and knowledge mobilization. The impetus behind this project is the rise in mental healthcare needs among 2SLSGBTQI people

amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the troubling lack of affirming and culturally responsive mental healthcare (see Seida, 2023). Exploring the challenges 2SLGTBQI and allied service providers encounter when providing care to 2SLGBTQI individuals is critical to addressing barriers to affirming mental healthcare, shifting services to meet the evolving needs of both care seekers and providers, and developing upstream, comprehensive solutions to address the causes of 2SLGBTQI mental health disparities.

Methods

This project was guided by two research questions:

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the social determinants of mental health among 2SLGBTQI communities in Canada?

What gaps and challenges do 2SLGBTQI and allied mental health professionals and social service providers identify and currently face in delivering inclusive care for 2SLGBTQI people in Canada?

To answer these questions, we conducted several research activities. In Spring 2021, we delivered basic online inclusion training with 1260 service providers from numerous healthcare fields (e.g., psychology, counselling, and social work) across Canada. Along with this training, service providers completed pre- and post-training surveys, the responses of which were analyzed to inform both the current research questions and the next phases of the project (i.e., training development). In 2022, we conducted a mixed-methods national survey in both French and English (N = 304), as well eight semi-structured focus groups (N = 56) with 2SLGBTQI service seekers, 2SLGBTQI service providers, and allied service providers. Each focus group consisted of 5–7 individuals. We also conducted five semi-structured individual interviews with service providers who were unable to participate in the focus groups due to scheduling issues. In total, 106 2SLGBTQI service providers and 3 allied service providers took part in these research activities. Among the survey participants (n = 304), 22 of the 86 service provider participants (26%) identified as BIPOC; among the focus group and interview participants (n = 61), 5 of the 20 service provider participants (25%) identified as BIPOC. This paper focuses on the experiences and challenges of the service providers who participated in at least one of these research activities. All focus group participants have been assigned a pseudonym, while survey participants are described by their job title and service setting. As per participants' requests, we did not note "rural" and "urban" when referring to northern and Atlantic regions in efforts to maximize confidentiality.

Research design

With the input from a community-based advisory committee (see Seida 2023 for more details), and after obtaining ethics approval from the Community Research Ethics Office (approval # 241), we recruited for the survey, focus group, and interview participants through interorganizational listservs, newsletters, social media, and snowball sampling. Our research methodology was guided by critical, participatory approaches: in line with van de Sande and Schwartz's (2017) process of conducting community-based research, we collaborated with the advisory committee to refine the research questions, develop research instruments (e.g., national survey and focus group questions), collect and analyze data, and interpret results. The survey included questions on general mental health, the impacts of the pandemic on social determinants of mental health, experiences of discrimination and exclusion as well as coping and resilience, and recommendations on how to improve mental health services. The focus groups explored the challenges service providers faced in delivering inclusive care, the pandemic's impacts on service delivery, and providers' recommendations concerning promising practices and training to advance 2SLGBTQI-affirming care.

Qualitative analyses of the focus groups, interviews, and open-ended survey questions were guided by a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Joy, Braun, and Clarke 2023). This approach was nested within the guiding frameworks of intersectionality, social determinants of health, and minority stress theories (see Seida (2023) for more details on the frameworks guiding the broader project, entitled "Queering Mental Health Supports in Canada"). All qualitative analyses were conducted in NVivo by the first author, while quantitative analyses of survey data (which are detailed in Seida (2023) were conducted using R by the second author. All research activities and analyses were part of an iterative, community-engaged process reflecting community priorities and the needs of those most impacted. For example, the community-based advisory committee reviewed preliminary thematic overviews and provided insights on further analyses as well as how to translate research findings for various audiences.

Moreover, our work is critical of biomedical, Western approaches which have historically guided mental healthcare in Canada (Sebring 2021) and have pathologized 2SLGBTQI people as "deviant." Perhaps the most blatant example of pathologization was the categorization of "homosexuality" as a mental illness, which justified the development and use of cruel measures such as conversion therapy (Pilling 2022). More recently, medical pathologization of 2SLGBTQI people has taken the form of understanding "gender dysphoria" as a mental illness (see Castro-Peraza et al. 2019). The pathologizing diagnosis of "gender dysphoria" often forces trans people to "rehearse dominant medical narratives reflected in DSM criteria for the sole purpose of convincing clinicians of their legitimacy as trans people" (MacKinnon et al. 2020, 58).

The pitfalls of traditional approaches to mental health, illness, and mental healthcare inform the frameworks and theories used in the Queering Mental Health Supports in Canada project. First, we employed a social determinants of health approach (Alegría et al. 2018), which facilitates an understanding of how one's circumstances impact physical and mental health. This approach also pushes back against neoliberal health narratives that may continue to pathologize 2SLGBTQI mental healthcare seekers by focusing on upstream causes of health and illness rather than individual choices or "deficits." Second, we used intersectionality as a guiding framework. Intersectionality suggests that people's social identities cannot be separated or simply added together; rather, they interact to produce unique lived experiences due to interlocking systems of privilege and discrimination (Walubita et al. 2022). The third framework informing our research was a trauma-informed approach, which is rooted in principles of safety, empowerment, trustworthiness, and collaboration (Levenson, Craig and Austin 2023). Trauma-informed approaches recognize the role of individual and collective trauma in shaping mental health, including traumatic healthcare interactions. Finally, our research design was informed by minority stress theory, which posits that both distal stressors (e.g., experiences of discrimination and rejection) and proximal stressors (e.g., identity concealment) have negative psychological and physiological consequences for stigmatized minority groups (Meyer 2003).

Results

Service providers cited a number of challenges they faced in providing inclusive, 2SLGBTQI-affirming care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyses of their experiences revealed three main challenges as well as a range of adaptive responses to these challenges.

Training gaps

The most prominent challenge identified by mental healthcare providers as it relates to providing services to 2SLGBTQI people was the lack of training on 2SLGBTQI issues in their formal or continuing education. This finding aligns with previous research, which has shown that many healthcare professionals re-

ceive little to no formal training in providing culturally responsive care to 2SLGBTQI people and therefore feel ill-equipped to adequately address their needs (Gavin 2021; McInroy et al. 2014; Rowe et al. 2017). Expanding on these studies, our participants noted that a key training gap was a lack of nuanced training that went beyond the basics (e.g., definition of terms and key concepts and use of appropriate pronouns). Several service providers talked about how broad and vague the 2SLGBTQI competency training they received was. For example, an addictions counsellor working in a non-profit stated: "I think the training we do receive in this area is extremely surface-level and repetitive. I don't think there's a lot of work on challenging ourselves further than simply listening to someone share basic information." Other providers expressed frustrations with "one size fits all" approaches to 2SLGBTQI training which failed to account for regional or identity-specific needs and experiences.

Training gaps often put pressure on 2SLGBTQI providers to address these gaps in training and workplace settings, knowing that nobody would step up to the plate if they did not do so. Participants reported that this emotional labour was tiring and often led to feelings of isolation, particularly since providers were often the only 2SLGBTQI provider in such spaces. As Sandrine, a cis queer service provider working in Northern Canada explained:

> In some groups I'm in or some training that I'm in that isn't LGBTQ+ related, I feel like I'm the one voice that will bring those issues up, and it's a little bit tiring. So I wish I had networks where I didn't have to be the one bringing up those issues all the time. We could get more in-depth in the conversations, because we're not just staying at the level of "oh it's important to remember that not everyone is straight in our services"; you don't get deeper into your conversations and it's annoying and tiring.

Like Sandrine, Chantelle, a cis queer service provider working in rural Ontario, remarked:

> Med school folks are not really given any training around working with trans or queer folks. Being queer in those spaces, you're the one doing all the emotional labor. You're the one spending all the time saying "oh wait a minute, we're forgetting about these folks" or you're also having to exist in this inherently harmful system that doesn't care about you.

Service providers similarly argued for ongoing training and that competency should be evaluated continuously because terms, concepts, and promising practices evolve. Reflecting on some of their peers who had been in the field for many years, participants stressed the need to receive updated training and education to ensure the provision of affirming and inclusive care.

A third training gap participants identified was specific training on trauma and intersectionality. For instance, Jamie, a cis allied service provider working in Atlantic Canada, noted that trauma-informed approaches were not addressed in her schooling, further noting there was only one mandatory "gender and sexuality" introductory seminar. She linked this gap to the overt transphobia she witnessed amongst her coworkers and in in-patient settings, causing overt harm and further trauma. A therapist working in a public school spoke about the need for training on intersectionality: "I work with many BIPOC youth who are also part of the queer community, I could use more specific training or research/resources that would be relevant to this intersection. Especially Transmasculine Black and Indigenous youth." Chantelle also stressed the need for training to explicitly address the concept of intersectionality and the needs of racialized 2SLGBTQI clients: "Most people seeking services will be living some type of intersectionality, so that concept is one that not even a lot of service providers know or take the time to understand why it's important."

Respondents cited training gaps as the cause of their own and their peers' knowledge gaps regarding intersectionality, minority stress, and the role of trauma in shaping mental healthcare needs and concerns such

as addictions, self-harm, and anxiety. These gaps were often situated in broader discussions of how 2SLGBTQI cultural responsiveness in service settings was "whitewashed."By this, providers meant the Eurocentric focus of existing interventions had failed to account for intersecting forms of discrimination such as racism, colonialism, or classism. Service providers expressed grave concerns about the harmful impacts of this Western, narrow approach for intersectionally marginalized clients. For example, Stephanie, an allied cis service provider working in Northern Canada, noted that a lack of cultural sensitivity for Indigenous clients is a "missing piece in trying to deconstruct some of our very colonial systems". Consequently, service providers widely recommended that training should "dig deeper" (i.e., move beyond the typical focus on terms, definitions, and high-level overviews of health disparities) by employing trauma-informed and intersectional frameworks and tailoring training to specific sectors and types of providers. As Cori, a trans queer BIPOC service provider working in Ontario suggested, "digging deeper" entails "externalizing what's going on for a client rather than internalizing it, so recognizing [mental health struggles] as a product of a system of racism rather than 'my thought process is wrong.'"

Referral and systems navigation challenges

Another common challenge discussed by service providers concerned referrals and systems navigation. Many of these challenges were rooted in systemic issues such as a lack of suitable providers, provider burnout, and a lack of providers offering accessible services. Generally, service providers agreed on the need for not only larger referral networks but also the need to feel more secure in providing referrals to 2SLGBTQI clients. As Joelle, a cis queer therapist working in Atlantic Canada, explained:

> There's a lack of safe referral sources. So wanting to refer people to gender-affirming healthcare, and not really knowing if, when you send that person to a collaborative clinic or something, if that's a safe place to be. So helping clients advocate for themselves and know they can ask questions, like "how are you going to create safety for me?" and expect that that's a reasonable thing for a healthcare provider to have to answer.

Indeed, several service providers expressed concerns about referring clients to potentially unsafe providers, particularly if they did not know the other provider or were unsure about their ability to provide 2SLGBTQI-affirming care. This was particularly challenging for providers in non-urban communities, given the general paucity of mental healthcare providers.

The lack of trans-affirming providers created another challenge for providers seeking to make referrals. For instance, a few participants noted that they and/or their peers were familiar with working with sexual, but not gender, minorities, creating a systemic lack of truly gender-affirming providers. This gap puts significant pressure on service providers who are trans or whose expertise is in trans-related mental health concerns. Logan, a trans queer service provider working in Atlantic Canada, said that they had to take down their advertising because they did not want to spend their time telling clients "sorry, I have a waitlist, I can't take you on." They told us about the wave of people reaching out to them out of sheer desperation and feeling the pressure of not being able to meet the need.

The pressures caused by a confluence of high demand and lack of resources led to an additional challenge: navigating the tension of wanting to meet the ethical obligations of supporting clients while taking on clients whose needs may be out of a provider's scope of practice because of a lack of other affirming providers. The pressure to operate beyond their scope of practice or area of expertise, knowing that clients had nowhere else to turn, was elucidated by Cori, a trans queer service provider working in Ontario:

> So many clients on my caseload have experienced trauma from cis therapists in the past and working with that makes me feel really helpless about the system, because there aren't services to refer folks to, and then they'll come to me presenting concerns that are way outside of my

scope of what I feel comfortable in. And then how much do I respect a client saying, "I see myself represented in you and that's all I need," versus me saying, "I don't have skills to support this specific concern, but there's nowhere to refer you where you see yourself represented and get that support." So, I really feel stuck, and either I'm saying "sorry I can't" with no referrals, or treating someone outside of my scope, because what other options are there?

Other 2SLGBTQI providers also described how their lived experiences made them acutely aware of the lack of affordable and appropriate mental healthcare for clients with similar identities. In efforts to address these inequities, some providers not only took on more clients but also saw people at steeply reduced rates. However, this had negative impacts on their own financial stability and was identified as a factor contributing to burnout.

Participants reflected on how standards of practice and boundaries of competence for a given role (e.g., psychotherapist), as set out by professional associations, can create silos between different types of service providers. These silos further complicated referral pathways which both care providers and seekers navigated, as Stephanie, an allied cis service provider working in Northern Canada, explained:

It's like hierarchy and silos, where counselors can't do that, psychologists can do that, I can do this but not that part of it for the government to agree to fund it, so I could do that dysphoria diagnosis but then they have to go see that person for their official assessment to access those other things for affirming surgeries. So there's all these other layers, where you're like no wonder [clients are] just like, "forget about it, I don't want to deal with this stuff."

As Stephanie implied, there are compounding issues arising from different providers not having overlapping scopes of practice that would facilitate referral pathways, patchy government funding for specific forms of care, and gatekeeping access to gender affirming care. Together, these complexities and barriers may lead 2SLGBTQI clients to cease or avoid necessary care and services (see Rimby 2022).

A second upstream cause of gaps in referral chains was related to provider burnout. In line with extant research (see Khan et al. 2021; Wojcik et al. 2022), our participants emphasized the wide-ranging impacts of burnout among their peers. Given the exigencies of the pandemic, the combination of increased mental healthcare needs among 2SLGBTQI care seekers, increased caseloads, and decreased availability of suitable providers created a perfect storm for burnout. Mindy, a cis queer service provider working in British Columbia, described the strategies she invoked to avoid burnout after seeing colleagues get overwhelmed and burn out:

I've taken a couple of steps back and made sure I'm taking care of myself so that I'm not harming in practice, because that's the worst thing we can do […] I've tried to limit what I do, like a smaller caseload with more intensive one-on-one. I've slowly started to shift to a little larger caseload with less intense services, kind of creating workbooks and stuff to go along with it, so there's still that knowledge and resources.

A final source of referral-related challenges was a lack of providers offering affordable (and thus accessible) services. Lindsey, a trans queer service provider practicing in rural Ontario, explained how many of their peers—especially BIPOC queer and trans providers—were going into private practice to be able to meet their own needs in the context of rising living costs and to avoid the burnout that often accompanies public sector care. This in turn exacerbates a lack of affordable mental healthcare options as well as providers who are themselves members of the communities they are serving (e.g., 2SLGBTQI, Indigenous, racialized, and/or non-urban communities):

[There's] a need for more folks from the community and folks who are Indigenous, Black, or people of colour. I think that's really important [but] with the rise of credentialization, what

we're seeing is that a lot of queer and trans service providers have gone private and are char-
ging $130, $160 an hour. And so I really worry about queer, trans, Two Spirit young folks.
And with inflation and the cost of living, that's even spreading to rural and remote com-
munities [….] I think increased privatization is a huge issue. I think representation is a huge
issue.

Lindsey and other participants bemoaned the impacts of privatization on clients most in need of accessible
services (i.e., BIPOC 2SLGBTQI clients as well as clients living in rural or remote regions).

Specific challenges of 2SLGBTQI service providers

Study participants cited several challenges which may be specific to 2SLGBTQI service providers. A first
challenge noted by 2SLGBTQI providers was maintaining financial stability while responding to com-
munity needs. Multiple queer service providers talked about how they felt there was an onus on them to
shift their fee structure or provide pro bono work because they felt that the purpose of their work was not
to make money but to help "support folks so that they don't die," as Maria, a cis queer service provider
working in Ontario, poignantly stated. Because of their own lived experience, participants were acutely
aware of the disproportionate barriers to social determinants of mental health within 2SLGBTQI com-
munities. For instance, Mindy, a cis queer service provider working in British Columbia, stated: "We've
been on the other side of things as well, and being a queer person, seeing those gaps in mental health and
social services [is] frustrating. So I'm just trying to find ways to support, where I can." These providers
were, however, simultaneously cognizant of how providing sliding scale or pro bono services individually
and systemically disadvantaged them, relative to their cisgender, heterosexual peers.

Although Logan, a trans queer service provider working in Atlantic Canada, did not cite their choice to do
direct billing as causing personal administrative or financial struggles, their sentiment belied an awareness
of accessibility barriers created by peers who choose not to do so:

> I try to be very conscientious about people's financial situations. I don't have an official slid-
> ing scale [but] I think a lot of service providers are like "oh, direct billing is a pain in the ass
> so I'm not going to do it," whereas that's something I pride myself on doing. It is much more
> accessible to people when they're not paying out of pocket and waiting to get reimbursed.

Although direct billing can entail paperwork, wait times for reimbursement, and administrative hurdles for
service providers, doing so makes care more accessible for clients. Despite it being more work on their end,
Logan's priorities are in making their services more accessible and equitable.

A second challenge providers discussed was having their own needs met, especially given a lack of services
for 2SLGBTQI service providers. As Emilie, a cis queer service provider working in Québec, stated:
"When you decide to work with LGBTQ+ clients, you have to have an entrepreneurial side because noth-
ing is easy! You need support groups with other workers […] we must help each other because it is difficult
to find resources." Jonathan, a cis gay service provider working in Atlantic Canada, shared:

> It's feeling alone and also pressure to volunteer time, to reduce rates, to find space, when I
> also have to take care of myself. So I think that's a difficult part about being a member of the
> same community I'm trying to help, I see myself reflected in the struggle, but then I also have
> to take care of my own family and my own mental health and have boundaries.

Another provider, a bisexual/queer/lesbian genderqueer woman living in Québec, similarly shared the need

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to maintain personal boundaries in efforts to manage vicarious trauma resulting from witnessing her clients' hardships:

> I have been burdened by the suffering I have encountered, my clients' difficulties in accessing care—both worrying about them and being called upon more often by clients who don't have access to additional supports—my waiting lists—regretting being simply unable to see many people who approach me for help—and having to manage my time carefully to make sure my practice remains sustainable.

A third challenge noted by service providers, particularly those operating in non-urban settings, was connected to keeping their professional and personal identities siloed. While previous research has identified this challenge in terms of navigating visibility and disclosure of providers' queer identity *within* the therapy relationship (Lykins 2021), our participants described this tension at the social and community level. Cori, a trans queer service provider working in Ontario, mentioned: "If I refer clients to services, then I can never access them […] everyone's my friend or colleague or referral, so it's impossible."

Chelsea, a cis queer service provider working in Atlantic Canada, shared:

> How do I date, and how do I work in this community? And especially when there is that one degree of separation in a small community […] I've had clients whose partners I've met before in other circumstances, and so trying to create that division and also know when it's not appropriate for me to counsel that person.

The small social network of 2SLGBTQI individuals in non-urban areas presents unique challenges for 2SLGBTQI service providers, both in terms of their own access to services and their ability to take on or retain clients.

Service providers' adaptive responses to challenges

Participants described a range of challenges they had been facing since the outset of the pandemic. However, their accounts also illustrate various adaptive responses to these challenges. One adaptive response was to ensure that virtual mental health services remained accessible. Chelsea, a cis queer service provider working in Atlantic Canada, noted her clinic's efforts in making virtual services accessible: "We're doing virtual services and trying to lean into accessibility. For some folks […] who might have hearing impairments, they benefit from the closed captioning on the screen." Second, in response to privacy and safety concerns that came with online services, providers adapted by offering both in-person and virtual services. For example, Adrienne, a cis allied provider working in Northern Canada, told us her workplace "funded transportation for clients who either didn't have a safe space at home to engage in counselling, or it was deemed [that] they would benefit more from in-person counselling." Third, providers integrated approaches focused on upstream causes of mental health disparities and intersectional, person-centered approaches into their practice to address the diverse needs of clients as they navigated the stressors of the pandemic. For example, Chantelle, a cis queer service provider working in rural Ontario, relayed how the pandemic had catalyzed her efforts to better support clients by reframing issues that are often individualized into symptoms of societal failures:

> A lot of [my] time and focus is spent on depathologizing the symptoms clients are experiencing, because we're always told we're the problem, we're pathologized, and really helping folks shift their lens to see that a lot of what they're experiencing is symptoms of somebody who's feeling oppressed, is feeling unsafe, [or] who's experienced trauma. And helping them extrapolate those colonial, individualistic, pathologizing ways, and helping them empower themselves outside the traditional medical system, because that is often not where they feel safe. So

that's something that I've shifted during the pandemic, is helping them understand there's a lot of political stuff going on that's been really harmful.

Despite experiencing numerous challenges, 2SLGBTQI and allied service providers "queered" mental healthcare by using interpretive lenses that better address the needs of 2SLGBTQI clients and strategically adapting to pandemic-related demands. In practice, this meant self-disclosing and being authentic with clients to push back against "cold, clinical vibes" (so described by Mindy, a cis queer service provider); recognizing the trauma caused by minority stress; and framing mental health concerns as a result of systemic discrimination rather than an individual problem or pathology.

Many of these adaptive responses likely emerge from the lived experiences 2SLGBTQI service providers shared with clients/patients and the critical reflexivity that accompanies operating within a system that often fails to work even for them. As one cis queer provider working in Alberta emphasized: "We [need to] recognize that queer and trans folks are not just clients, they're also service providers and also everywhere. We're not talking about a 'them' or 'other', but rather an 'us.'"

Discussion

Our findings illustrate the various gaps and challenges that 2SLGBTQI and allied mental healthcare service providers are facing in the current context in their efforts to deliver inclusive and affirming care. At the root of many of these concerns are education and training gaps, which in turn lead to knowledge gaps. Without an understanding of the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors influencing 2SLGBTQI mental health, it is impossible to know what is required to be a safer practitioner. It is also difficult to situate oneself as an agent of change in dismantling the oppressive systems that shape the mental health and well-being of these populations. Even providers who are well intentioned risk causing serious harm if they cannot recognize the gaps in their own skill set. Our participants recognized this risk of harm and stressed the importance of filling knowledge gaps in order to provide culturally sensitive services, properly support people, and direct clients to appropriate resources.

Another common challenge was related to resource issues, which included a lack of affirming providers and a paucity of accessible services. These resource gaps were intensified by increased service demands wrought by the pandemic, which precipitated burnout among providers who had been trying to meet increased needs. The combination of extant resource gaps and provider burnout created breaks in referral pathways, with negative mental health implications for both 2SLGBTQI providers and clients. Addressing these referral challenges will require an upstream, multi-pronged approach which includes: dismantling entry barriers into mental healthcare professions for 2SLGBTQI individuals (particularly racialized providers); alleviating sources of minority stress (e.g., anti-2SLGBTQI stigma and discrimination) for 2SLGBTQI service providers; and providing comprehensive and accessible resources such as local and regional provider databases.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated personal and structural resource gaps, which created several issues for 2SLGBTQI service providers. These challenges included maintaining financial stability while trying to address ever-growing client demands and drawing personal boundaries in order to protect their own mental health in this context. Boundary work is especially important, given the lack of services specifically for providers who are themselves 2SLGBTQI.

Structural challenges, such as increased credentialization and privatization throughout and in the wake of the pandemic, are likely to have intensified impacts on racialized service providers, as they are already at a

higher risk of burnout due to the confluence of racism and cisheterosexism within the mental healthcare sector (see Khan et al. 2021). Indeed, therapists' cultural background may influence their vulnerability to professional burnout and vicarious traumatization (Myers and Wee 2002; Miu and Moore 2021). The privatization within the mental healthcare sector also impacts BIPOC clients, who experience intensified access barriers to private services given the racialization of poverty (Daley et al. 2023) as well as racism within the 2SLGBTQI community (Munro et al. 2013). Our analyses of service seekers' experiences (see Seida, 2023) corroborate broader issues of representation of 2SLGBTQI service providers who are also BIPOC, with participants connecting a lack of diversity in service providers informing people's decision to not seek care. It is therefore important that BIPOC clients have access to BIPOC providers who have shared lived experience of these issues, and who can explicitly situate mental health concerns within broader processes of systemic racism and socioeconomic inequities. However, as our findings show, BIPOC 2SLGBTQI providers are struggling to meet their own needs, both as it relates to financial stability and mental well-being.

Many of our participants were critical of biomedical, Western approaches to mental healthcare. Aware of the damaging impacts of the pathologizing narratives that accompany biomedical frameworks, participants implemented intersectional, trauma-informed, and person-centered approaches in their service delivery. Further, service providers ensured that services remained safe and accessible despite the shift to virtual care. Participants' experiences illustrate the importance of unlearning biases and problematic approaches to mental healthcare to become a safer, more affirming service provider when working with 2SLGBTQI service seekers. Indeed, being willing to unlearn and relearn is central to cultural humility and trauma-informed care (Ranjibar et al. 2020), since factors shaping people's mental health and their resulting healthcare needs are always contextual and evolving.

The experiences of the service providers who participated in our project point to the pressing need for research, training, educational initiatives, and advocacy rooted in intersectional, trauma-informed, and upstream approaches to 2SLGBTQI mental health. As it relates to intersectionality, for example, it is important to consider how service providers' multiple social identities (e.g., age, gender identity, sexual orientation, and geographical location) shaped their perceptions and experiences of providing mental healthcare. Intersectional analyses of providers' positionality enabled us to better understand how binary, essentialist, and Western approaches to mental healthcare harm both seekers *and* providers of care. Indeed, "queering" mental health requires fundamental shifts in meeting the mental health and healthcare needs of 2SLGBTQI people—both service seekers and providers—across Canada. These shifts involve repairing the harms caused by biomedical, privatized approaches to mental healthcare by investing in peer-based support and community-centered models of care; situating mental health concerns as a consequence of injustice and oppression rather than individual failings or weaknesses; and supporting the unique needs of 2SLGBTQI service providers by developing local and sector-specific Communities of Practice. Such initiatives would create resources and avenues of social support, particularly for providers in non-urban settings, who require additional support to avoid burnout (Anaraki et al. 2022). It is also critical to address training and service delivery gaps by listening to community voices and emergent needs and by providing more funding to 2SLGBTQI service providers (in both public and private sectors) to ensure they have adequate resources for providing affirming and inclusive care.

Implementing these shifts will not only ensure that 2SLGBTQI people receive the affirming and inclusive mental healthcare and related services they require but will also support 2SLGBTQI and allied service providers in their work of meeting growing mental healthcare needs. The experiences of 2SLGBTQI and allied service providers highlighted in this paper provide a solid base for developing interventions geared to a range of mental health care providers across sectors. More broadly, implementing the aforementioned shifts via policy reform, funding allocation decisions, processual changes, and sociocultural changes within

workplaces, organizations, and governments will ultimately create services that are better equipped to support the mental health needs of 2SLGBTQI people across the country.

Conclusion

This article invites us to consider the ways in which 2SLGBTQI and allied mental healthcare providers' needs and approaches have evolved and continue to evolve in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2SLGBTQI and allied service providers across Canada face a range of challenges, including training and education gaps, a lack of referral pathways, a lack of peers who can provide affirming services, and challenges meeting their personal needs. These challenges are exacerbated by systemic issues such as provider burnout, the continued privatization of mental healthcare, and increased need and demand for affirming and inclusive services.

Identifying critical gaps 2SLGBTQI and allied mental healthcare providers face in delivering affirming care is an important first step. However, robust implementation of recommendations made by participants is necessary to address these gaps and to ensure that the unique mental healthcare and service needs of 2SLGBTQI people—on both sides of the healthcare interaction—are being addressed amid COVID-19 and beyond.

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Taking Back Curriculum: Feminist Innovations Towards Nonviolent Futures

by Emily Moorhouse

Abstract: This paper maps key factors that activate adult stakeholders in Ontario to support curriculum pertaining to consent and non-violence in K-12 education. The paper draws from a study that used three qualitative approaches: (1) the design of an original media literacy curriculum module for Ontario youth ages 13-15; (2) curriculum assessment of the module by diverse stakeholders in Ontario K-12 education (n=20); and (3) analysis of archival documents pertaining to consent education and media literacy in Ontario, including official curriculum and media reports. Four key factors united stakeholders in supporting K-12 curriculum pertaining to consent and non-violence in Ontario. Firstly, stakeholders are intrigued by media-based pedagogies that can facilitate consent education that is "culturally relevant" (Ladson-Billings 1994; 1995) for diverse learners in Ontario. Stakeholders are also more likely to support consent and violence prevention initiatives if accompanied by professional development and teaching tools. Educator collectives and political organizing also allow for more feminist and social-justice pedagogies in the classroom, including consent education. Finally, parent councils and community groups are essential places for activism and knowledge sharing that can meet the needs of community members, while addressing stakeholders' attitudes and behaviours that gatekeep violence prevention initiatives in education.

Keywords: consent education; critical curriculum studies; critical media literacy; sexual violence prevention; social justice education; transnational feminism

Résumé : Cet article présente les principaux facteurs qui incitent les intervenants adultes de l'Ontario à soutenir le programme éducatif portant sur le consentement et la non-violence dans l'éducation primaire et secondaire. Il s'appuie sur une étude qui a utilisé trois approches qualitatives : (1) la conception d'un module original d'éducation aux médias pour les jeunes ontariens âgés de 13 à 15 ans; (2) l'évaluation du module par divers intervenants du système d'éducation primaire et secondaire de l'Ontario (n= 20); et (3) l'analyse de documents d'archives relatifs à l'éducation au consentement et aux médias en Ontario, dont des programmes officiels et des reportages médiatiques. Quatre grands facteurs ont amené les intervenants à soutenir le programme éducatif pour le primaire et le secondaire sur le consentement et la non-violence en Ontario. Tout d'abord, les méthodes pédagogiques axées sur les médias qui peuvent faciliter l'éducation au consentement qui est « adaptée à la culture » (Ladson-Billings 1994; 1995) pour divers apprenants de l'Ontario intriguent les intervenants. Les intervenants sont aussi plus disposés à appuyer les initiatives liées au consentement et à la prévention de la violence si elles s'accompagnent d'un perfectionnement professionnel et d'outils pédagogiques. Les groupes d'éducateurs et l'organisation politique permettent également des méthodes pédagogiques plus féministes et plus axées sur la justice sociale dans les salles de classe, notamment l'éducation au consentement. Enfin, les conseils de parents et les groupes communautaires sont des lieux dans lesquels le militantisme et l'échange de connaissances sont essentiels pour répondre aux besoins des membres de la collectivité, tout en enrayant les attitudes et les comportements des intervenants qui empêchent les initiatives de prévention de la violence dans le domaine de l'éducation.

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Introduction

bell hooks (2000) reflects on Fromm's definitions of love as "the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (11). This reflection reminds us how significant love is to feminist praxis. Everyday life contains violence erasure and competition, and countering this requires a shift towards interventions rooted in the opposites—love, creativity, and mutuality. This paper expands on hooks (2000) reflections by discussing how curriculum centered in love, creativity, and mutuality can make important feminist interventions. More specifically, this paper shares findings from a larger study that explores how media-based curriculum modules can help sustain sexual violence prevention and non-violent relationships. The study found that four key factors united stakeholders in supporting curriculum pertaining to consent, healthy relationships, and non-violence in Ontario K-12 education: (1) media-based and culturally relevant pedagogies; (2) professional development; (3) educator collectives; and (4) parent/community councils. These factors help to address racist and sexist attitudes and behaviours exhibited by stakeholders in Ontario education. Learning from these unifying factors helps move scholars, practitioners, and educators from critique to solutions.

Ontario's health and sex education curriculum was indeed the subject of much critique, making top news headlines for over a decade. Former Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne described the curriculum as "the most widely consulted upon curriculum in the history of the province" (Jones 2015). Sex education drew attention again in 2019 when Ontario Premier Doug Ford promised to repeal the 2015 curriculum. Conservative media outlets fueled debates about race and belonging by focusing heavily on non-white religious groups and especially on South Asian and Muslim parents who opposed the Ontario sex-education curriculum changes (Bialystok and Wright 2017; Rayside 2017). The curriculum became an outlet for ongoing debates about race and national belonging that worsened post 9/11, privileging a desirable kind of Canadian that adapts to Western standards (Thobani 2007; Razack 2008).

The media's biased reporting that scapegoats racialized immigrant communities is evidenced by international research. For example, a study of 715 students' attitudes towards school-based sex and relationship education in two districts in Tanzania reported that over 80% of students supported sex and relationship education and wanted it to be delivered between the ages of 10-14 (Mkumbo 2014). Studies of teachers and parents from different regions in India have also found that the majority had a positive attitude towards sex education (Goel 2014; Lalremruata 2019; Toor 2012). This literature highlights the unethical reporting of "immigrant communities." Skewed media reports also ignored public opinion polls claiming that the majority support teaching sex education in schools (Shipley 2014). More specifically, surveys of Ontario parents found that over 87% of parents agreed that sexual health information should be delivered in schools (McKay et al. 2014). However, updates to the Health and Physical Education curriculum continued to be the subject of great political debate with the 2015 updates and the 2019 repeal.

Literature Review

The political climate and intense debate surrounding Ontario sex education demonstrated the need for interdisciplinary approaches and dialogue within and across fields. The literature reviewed in this study was thus intentionally interdisciplinary, drawing inspiration from transnational feminists who have encouraged communities to build bridges and cross disciplines (Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa and Moraga 2015). Systems of oppression uphold and maintain one another and, thus, working in silos or taking "single issue approaches" (Lorde, 2007) is ineffective. The study bridged consent education, sexual violence prevention, critical curriculum studies, critical media literacy, theories of critical youth empowerment, and transnational feminist theories.

"Consent" dominates the field of sexual violence prevention in Ontario K-12 education and has been the subject of great political debate over the last decade (see Bialystok 2018; Bialystok 2019; Bialystok et al. 2020). Scholars argue that consent education has potential to prevent and reduce rates of violence (Mallet and Herbé 2011; Bialystok 2018) because education can be delivered to cohorts of students before violence occurs (Schneider and Hirsch 2020). Feminist scholars have noted, however, that the historical and geopolitical context of learners is essential for violence prevention to be effective (Todorova 2018). While some scholars have explored how dominant consent frameworks do not always resonate with international students in Ontario higher education (Todorova et al. 2022), the Eurocentricity of "consent" frameworks has hardly been explored in Ontario K-12 education until the Moorhouse (2023) study.

This paper also draws from critical curriculum studies scholars who argue that "official knowledge" is not neutral but always tied to power and structures of inequality (Au 2012; Apple 2000; 2018), including racism and colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, heteropatriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. Critical curriculum studies use interdisciplinary frameworks to map how official curriculum documents are generated and what knowledges are devalued by their continual exclusion. Scholars have also mapped "hidden curriculum": implicit and explicit values that are reinforced through everyday interactions in educational spaces (Au and Apple 2009). For example, the lack of comprehensive sex education in Ontario curriculum reinforces a "hidden" curriculum that sex is taboo or that interpersonal relationships are not worthy of study. Critical scholars also understand education as a paradoxical space. Education often reaffirms existing power structures and inhibits feminist thought by prioritizing capitalist ideologies and gatekeeping social justice initiatives. Simultaneously, education provides fertile ground for scholars and practitioners to engage in creative and "liberatory practices" (hooks 1991). This paper suggests that bridging critical media literacy education with transnational feminist frameworks allows for liberatory practices in education centered in non-violence.

Critical media literacy (CML) teaches analysis of how media reflects sociopolitical issues related to race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability (Hobbs 1998; Kellner and Share 2007). CML scholars and educators have also discussed creative counter-production of media as a key pedagogy so that learners recognize their active role in sustaining or shifting media representations (Pangrazio 2016; Todorova 2015). Youth in North American cite media and pop culture as key places where they learn about sex and relationships (Pinkleton et al. 2008; McGrath 2016), making CML that includes media production particularly potent. Creative counter-production also requires active involvement which has been more effective than pedagogies that only include passive listening (Jeong, Cho, and Hwang 2012). Few studies have used CML frameworks to inform sex education, but existing studies show promise (see Pinkleton et al., 2008; Scull, Kupersmidt, Malik, and Keefe, 2018; Scull, Kupersmidt, Malik, and Morgan-Lopez 2018).

CML pedagogies also promote Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE), which has six key dimensions: (1) a welcoming and safe environment (Cargo et al. 2003; Messias et al. 2005); (2) meaningful participation and engagement with real-world challenges; (3) equitable power sharing between youth and adults (Checkoway 1998); (4) critical reflection of social and political structures (Jennings et al. 2006); (5) participation in sociopolitical processes such as shifting norms and values (Jennings et al. 2006; Zimmerman 1995); and (6) empowerment at individual and community levels so youth are aware that they can create change. Engagement with media production and discussion on "real world" challenges with relationships and conflict resolution provides students opportunities to put hooks' notion of love (2000) and transnational feminism into practice.

Transnational feminism attends to how intertwined structures of capitalism, globalization, patriarchy, and colonialism continuously impact understandings of race, gender, class, and sexuality (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003; Swarr and Nagar 2010). These same forces have caused intergenerational trauma that often make vulnerability, emotional expression, and love feel unsafe (Naryan, Lieberman and Masten 2021). Vulnerability is an essential requirement to experience joy, belonging, and love (Burke and Brown, 2021, xviii), which are natural human needs. Transnational feminist scholar Alexander (2005) reminds us that healing the fragmentation that colonization caused requires us to make room for the deep yearning for wholeness in material and existential forms. Media-based pedagogies that depict a spectrum of relationships may increase an understanding of shared humanity that can lead to "reciprocal investments" and interdependence (Alexander 2005) that is a core aspect of transnational feminism and key to non-violent relationships.

Methods

This paper draws from a larger study that examined which factors compelled adult stakeholders to support curriculum pertaining to consent and non-violence in Ontario. The study utilized three data collection approaches: (1) the design of an original media literacy curriculum module for Ontario youth ages 13-15 to teach consent and health relationships; (2) curriculum assessment of the module by diverse stakeholders in Ontario (n=20), and (3) analysis of archival documents pertaining to consent education and media literacy in Ontario, including official curricula and media reports.

Curriculum Design

The curriculum module that was assessed by adult stakeholders is an adaptation of the critical media literacy pedagogies outlined in Moorhouse and Brooks (2020). A detailed description of the module is beyond the scope of the paper but can be reviewed in Moorhouse and Brooks (2020) and Moorhouse (2023). The module is also informed by best practices in violence prevention (Nation et al. 2003; De Gue et al. 2014). The module also draws from theories of CYE (Jennings et al., 2006) that bridge personal empowerment with active civic engagement. Transnational feminist frameworks (Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa and Moraga 2015) also allowed a more holistic approach to the module's pedagogy. The curriculum module sought to apply this transnational feminist teaching by using a "desire-based framework" (Fine 1988; Fine and McClelland 2006) that allows youth participants a sense of agency in designing consent-based relationships that fit with their unique experiences, subjectivities, and value systems. The curriculum module used an "inquiry-based approach" to pedagogy (Abd-El-Khalick et al. 2004) that begins with open-ended questions students analyze together, emphasizing the student's role in the learning process. For example, the curriculum module asked youth to rewrite problematic media scripts to reflect the kind of relationships they would like to have instead of prescribing definitions and solutions.

Curriculum Assessment

The second step of data collection involved curricular assessment of the module by 20 adult stakeholders in Ontario education. Stakeholders for this study included: (1) K-12 educators working in public and private education, including librarians who are sometimes tasked with delivering "media literacy"; (2) educational administrators such as principals and vice principals; (3) policy and curriculum writers such as employees of Ontario school boards or the Ontario Ministry of Education; (4) parents, guardians or adult siblings of youth ages 13-15; (5) graduate students or researchers in higher education with specializations in media literacy and/or sexual violence prevention in education. Participants were provided with the curriculum module prior to the semi-structured interviews. Participants then gave feedback on perceived merits and limitations of the curriculum module, how it aligned or diverged from existing Ontario curriculum, and whether professional development or supports might be valuable. Follow-up questions probed the origins of stakeholder perceptions by asking them to recall experiences in the classroom as educators and/or learners, interactions with other groups of stakeholders, and media-based examples about gender, sexuality, and relationships. Interviews allow researchers to capture the richness of participants' multidimensional experiences (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). While a small qualitative sample can never represent the entire Ontario population, the study sample captures what the literature identifies as key stakeholders in K-12 Ontario schools. The sample is diverse in terms of cultural background, sexual orientation, spiritual views, and life experience in addition to a spectrum of adult viewpoints. Diversity within the sample allows for researchers to map the variance of ideas, needs and concerns of parents, educators, and policy makers who live and work with Ontario youth. These diverse perspectives allow for analysis of what inhibits curriculum revisions and innovations so that community needs can be better understood and reflected through curriculum modules and culturally responsive feminist pedagogies.

Analysis of Archival Documents

The third component of data collection involved the identification and retrieval of archival documents pertaining to sex education in Ontario, including the Ministry of Education curriculum on Health and Physical Education (2015; 2019) that includes discussions on relationships, consent, and sex education. Additional curriculum documents that were important to the study were: Grade 6 Social Studies, Grades 7 and 8 History and Geography (2018); Grade 9 and 10 Canadian and World Studies (2018) which includes Geography, History and Civics (Politics); Language Curriculum Grades 1-8 (2006); and Grades 9-10 (2007) which each contain Media Literacy strands. Curriculum documents are important to the study because they illuminate how researchers and policy writers determine "age-appropriate" topics, relevant pedagogies, and the prior knowledges that Ontario youth are expected to have when entering classrooms.

Data Coding and Analysis

This study utilized four types of coding: initial, in vivo, frequency, and cultural coding. Initial codes are described as "first impressions" that allow for researcher reflexivity—examining how personal experiences, professional training, and knowledge of pre-established theories shape analytical interpretations (Saldana 2008). In vivo codes take words or phrases directly from a transcript, policy, or curriculum document. In vivo coding highlights the voices of participants, allowing them to give meaning to data (Manning 2017). "Frequency coding" (Saldana 2008) was applied to the transcripts using QSR International's NVivo 12 Software (2018) to identify key terms that were significant to stakeholders. Frequency coding was also applied to the archival documents to notice patterns and omissions within the Ontario curriculum. For example, themes related to violence prevention and the guiding questions of the study such as "power," "race," "agency," or "freedom" do not appear in the Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum

documents. Lastly, the study coded for "cultural resources," defined as external narratives that help negotiate the meaning of self, others, cultures, and events (Wetherell 2003). Cultural coding highlights how different processes of meaning-making intersect relationally based on geographical and temporal context. Contextualizing cultural resources illuminates how racial power, inequality, and subjectivities are (re)produced in discourse. Cultural coding in this study illuminated the prior knowledges and cultural resources stakeholders used to assess the existing Ontario curriculum and the curriculum module designed for this study.

Findings and Discussion

Study participants highlighted four key factors that united stakeholders in supporting curriculum pertaining to consent, healthy relationships, and non-violence in Ontario K-12 education: media-based and culturally relevant pedagogies, professional development, educator collectives, and parent/community councils.

Media-based and culturally relevant pedagogies

Adult stakeholders in education are intrigued by media-based pedagogies because they can facilitate "culturally relevant pedagogy" for diverse learners in Ontario. Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) was developed to meet the unique pedagogical needs of students of colour in the United States (Ladson-Billings 1992; 1995a; 1995b; Gay 2000). Core components of CRRP include: (1) using "culture as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings 1995a, 161) such as references to poetry, hip-hop, and the development of critical consciousness; (2) believing in the potential for student success by having high expectations (Ladson-Billings 1995b); and (3) having educators understand themselves as part of a community to facilitate collaborative and equitable social relations within their classroom.

Media literacy and CRRP align because both frameworks allow youth to bring media-based examples into the classroom (Mears 2012). Study participants echoed these sentiments, expressing that it allowed for better understanding of the media-based scripts that impacted students' identities and were difficult to keep up with due to the rapid pace at which media changes. As one teacher lamented, "Last years' hashtags are already old." Student-generated examples ensure that educators are not stuck using outdated examples. Instead, youth can engage in cultural knowledge exchange, teaching educators about cultural and generational scripts. Media literacy approaches that involve creative counter-production also serve as culturally relevant pedagogies, especially if they embed "Asia literacy" (Hamston 2012) or Afro-centric curriculum that discusses the interconnectedness of all beings including land, plants, and animals (Mswazie and Mudyahoto 2013). Media literacy scholars, including Todorova and Brooks (2019), suggest these pedagogies can foster deeper understanding of interconnected struggles across borders and social identities, thus inspiring solidarity across social differences.

Culturally relevant pedagogies that address social differences are also key for consent and relationship education, as the Ontario K-12 student population is increasingly diverse. In Canada, 23% of the population identified as immigrants or permanent residents with 62% of the immigrant population coming from Asia and the Middle East and the largest proportion of immigrants originating from India, followed by the Philippines and China (Statistics Canada 2022). Related, 69.4% of new immigrants reported languages other than English or French as their first language. Employees from the Ministry of Education and Ontario school boards discussed how racialized and/or immigrant communities constitute the majority of the student population in many regions. These stakeholders affirmed findings in the literature about the importance of culturally relevant examples to ensuring student engagement.

Research shows that Ontario youth felt that sexual health education focused too much on biology, was rarely sex-positive, and was not culturally relevant (Causarano et al. 2010; Larkin et al. 2017). Related, the Toronto Teen Survey gathered data from 1,216 youth respondents ages 13-17 and reported that the top four topics youth wanted to learn more about were: healthy relationships, sexual pleasures, communication, and sexual violence/abuse. Most recently, the Youth Engagement Project (YEP) examined Ontario youth perspectives on sexual health education and found that youth wanted more inclusive and relevant sexual health education starting from an early age (Narushima et al. 2020). Inclusive sex education was defined as sex education for 2SLGBTQ2+ youth as well as racially and religiously diverse groups.

The study discussed here found similar gaps, where participants who were parents expressed concerns with Ontario consent education missing culturally relevant examples. Other stakeholders who were adult siblings of Ontario teens expressed concern about "the idea of experimentation being forced onto youth" in Ontario K-12 schools. Racialized parents and siblings of Ontario teens also discussed how some youth felt "left out" of consent conversations with Hollywood references due to different media choices in their country of origin. This is due in part to the dominance of the field of "consent" by white scholars from the global North who have yet to use transnational feminist approaches to consent-based discussions or curriculum developments. This gap in the field has contributed to the lack of culturally relevant approaches to discussing non-violent relationships with youth in K-12 Ontario public education. Imposing monolithic definitions that do not fit with the everyday experiences of young learners and their families has contributed to heated debates and a resistance to Ontario curricular innovations pertaining to consent.

Study findings suggest that educators and feminist scholars must adequately discuss the role of race, culture, and diverse religious values as it pertains to consent and healthy relationships rather than talking in what one participant described as "awkward metaphors describing consent as tea" instead of allowing for "more nuanced discussions on race and even how boundaries are culturally specific." The participant discussed the concept of "personal space" in-depth, which she reflected upon while travelling in urban, densely populated areas in East Asia that were in stark contrast to her experiences in her hometown in Ontario.

Rather than discussing consent in metaphors, researchers and educators could present a range of options and openly discuss pressures to sexually experiment or abstain from sex that allow youth to reflect on *their own* values and behaviours. Stakeholders in the study also discussed how conversations on race were likely to naturally emerge in discussions on love, consent, and relationships given Ontario's multicultural population, Ontario curriculum expectations, and the political climate of the past few years that has pushed race to the forefront of mainstream media conversations (e.g., white supremacist groups in the news, the global Black Lives Matter movement). Youth also regularly engage in social media and influencer discussions on race and culture, indicating the need for educators to adapt curriculum and pedagogy to better represent the lived experiences of their students.

Professional Development

Effective pedagogy is the product of good training and practice. Studies in Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick found that teachers receive little to no adequate training on sex, consent, and relationship education (Meaney et al. 2009; Garcia 2015; Kelly 2017; Almanssori 2022a; Almanssori 2022b). Training gaps often translate into a lack of confidence in curriculum development and delivery. Study participants echoed literature findings, speaking candidly about the lack of sex and consent education training available to them during initial teacher education or Ontario K-12 professional development. Related, some stakeholders reflected on how ill-equipped educators were in responding to instances or disclosures of violence.

These findings show the need for improvements to initial teacher education programs, as well as professional development initiatives for K-12 educators. Greater collaboration is needed between feminist researchers, policy writers, and educators so that pedagogy is informed by best practices. While professional development is not a panacea, training would significantly improve support and confidence for educators, complement curricular updates, and benefit students in Ontario public schools. A participant from the Ministry of Education spoke to the importance of training and professional development initiatives to help educators feel "empowered to be able to carry this [curriculum] out in the classroom." Participants who were parents were also more likely to support consent and violence prevention initiatives if accompanied by professional development and adaptable blueprints or resources for teaching, including assessment tools and rubrics. The larger study (Moorhouse 2023) begins to fill that gap but also calls for further support from other feminist researchers and educators.

Educator Collectives

This study also revealed that "safety" and "community" were key themes for participants working to implement consent, sex, and relationship education. Educators expressed difficulty balancing effective delivery of curriculum with external pressures from parents, school administrators, board trustees, and other government officials. External pressures threatened a sense of safety for some educators. Others discussed how the curriculum changes made it "difficult to plan lessons," as it regularly takes educators time to implement change effectively and with confidence.

Some K-12 teachers and library staff shared how they created safety. One Ontario middle-school teacher talked about how he "built community" online, citing Facebook, WhatsApp groups, Twitter chats, and hashtags as places he used to cope with "feeling alone" in pedagogical or political pursuits. Others discussed how social media channels helped educators unite across schools, provinces, and national borders. These virtual connections became precious community space for sharing lesson plans, educational resources for students, resources for learning such as podcasts, workshops and books, and strategies for negotiating with administration and/or parents.

These community spaces are powerful because they transcend neoliberal values and embody transnational feminist bridges across identities and disciplines (Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa and Moraga 2015), even if stakeholders did not name it "transnational feminism." These educators embodied transnational feminist practices of uniting across social differences for common political goals: discussing common challenges, sharing resources, improving teaching, and transcending barriers in education. These educators united with the goal of sharing political consciousness and love, or the "desire to nurture" that bell hooks (2000) describes. This is best expressed by study participants who describe their profession as "a career, not just a job," "a duty," or "a calling." Other educators in the study noted they took their job "more seriously than the average." This finding contradicts research claiming that change is implemented by those who feel a sense of ownership of educational changes (Fenwick 2003). Instead, the data aligns with studies claiming that educators who are earlier in their careers are more adaptive to change compared to seasoned educators who are sometimes "disenchanted" (Hargreaves 2005; Harris and Graham 2019). This finding is practically and theoretically significant because it highlights the need to support those invested in change as opposed to those with more institutional power. It also highlights the need to unite those interested in creating change as a solution to the barriers and feelings of isolation. A community or a collective was also listed as a support that helped overcome fear of any backlash from parents or administrators—a common strategy in feminist and social justice organizing.

Parent/Community Councils

The study also found that parent collective and community councils were essential places for dialogue, activism, and sharing of resources about consent, sex education, and healthy relationships. This finding is especially significant in Ontario given the great deal of media attention that was given to the racialized and immigrant parents who protested the sex education curriculum updates, as discussed in the introduction to this paper. Many consent scholars theorized the Ontario debates about sex and consent curriculum updates in Ontario. However, few scholars have mapped *how* to foster civil conversations within and across communities with different values, cultural norms, and gendered scripts to ensure that diverse racialized and religious communities feel heard in consent conversations. This is due in part to the dominant frameworks in the field of "consent" that focus on the global North and have yet to use transnational approaches to consent-based discussions. A more holistic perspective could include reflection on the *quality* of relationships one has, naming specific attitudes and behaviours and methods for conflict resolution. In-depth examples of what this could like in the form of curriculum templates are discussed in the larger study (see Moorhouse 2023).

An important way to shift conversations about consent is creating community spaces for people to discuss across communities. Parent and school councils could help address the gatekeeping of violence prevention initiatives in education because they are created by/for community members. These spaces are not free from conflict. Schools each have their own ecosystems where racial animosities, class divisions, and other tensions become apparent. However, stakeholders who understood their importance were interested in using communication to resolve conflict. History also shows that dissenters indeed mobilized to repeal the Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum (2015) when they felt that their needs were not heard in relation to consent and sexual health education.

Community-based discussion that is open to debate is a key form of practicing non-violence and a transnational feminist practice because it encourages discussion across communities, rather than simply working in silos of presumed safety that still contain lateral violence. Discussion across groups would also reduce misinformation, while also reducing the disconnect between researchers and the public. Some stakeholders who were parents and teachers spoke to feeling that their needs and wants were not always represented in research, curriculum, and educational policies. Others felt that research was inaccessible and not easy to implement into practice but that curriculum modules, such as the media literacy modules outlined in Moorhouse and Brooks (2020) and Moorhouse (2023), were easier to implement in classrooms.

Lastly, councils provide opportunities to discuss "taboo" topics that are often ignored, including consent, sexuality, and family violence, even in feminist spaces. For example, one participant who identifies as feminist was quick to defend her father who accepted what she described as "deeply misogynistic" narratives in film. Another participant admitted that she understood that her parents were quite controlling of her younger sibling but rationalized the behaviour as "care." It is important to create spaces for public reflection on when feminists actively challenge problematic narratives and when we stay silent. Spaces for dialogue allow us to practice aligning our theory to our everyday practices. It is interesting to note the hesitance to avoid challenging discussions on problematic attitudes and behaviours within family. These examples are highlighted not to shame participants but to encourage them to practice accountability and to live their feminist values more consistently.

Related, hooks (2000, 47) reflects on the contradiction posed by those who claim that physical violence in a romantic relationship is unacceptable while supporting a parents' right to physically punish their child. Taboo topics such as discipline are hard to address. Taking community-centered approaches to conversations on topics such as parenting, discipline, sex education, media, and emotional literacy could give par-

ents the necessary tools to change their own practices and would help gain community support for the implementation of feminist innovations to curriculum and pedagogy in K-12 classrooms.

Conclusion

Sexual and gender-based violence permeates daily life in connected but distinct ways. The solutions mapped in this paper are specific to Ontario and, therefore, scholars and practitioners across the globe should be mindful of demographic, historical, and political differences when applying findings. This paper maps pathways forward that may unite diverse stakeholders in implementing feminist curriculum about "consent" and non-violent relationships in Ontario classrooms. The factors that united and activated support do not dismiss the political struggles and structural barriers. Rather, they are a call to action inspired by transnational feminist scholar Cherie Moraga who writes, "I can't afford to be afraid of you, nor you of me. If it takes head-on collisions, let's do it: this polite timidity is killing us" (Moraga 2002, 32). Opportunities for political transformation are created when we practice courage by engaging in conversations aligned with our feminist values and commit to working together across differences. The curriculum module offers youth the opportunity to practice communicating about desires, fears, uncertainty, taking accountability, and repairing relations. Feminists must also embody these practices by working across our differences in educational spaces. Relational skills are not only possible to improve through in education, but necessary for non-violent futures to be born.

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The Subjectivity and Futurity of the Asian Canadian Woman

by Annie Chau

Abstract: This article asserts that subjectivity and futurity are critical sites of contestation between Asian Canadian women and the nation-state of Canada. It draws on primary research involving Asian Canadian women in the spring of 2022: a participant observation of a Canadian citizenship ceremony held virtually during Asian Heritage Month and an interview with Ellen (pseudonym), a member of the Asian Canadian Women's Alliance. First, in my analysis of the citizenship ceremony, I argue that the figure of the Asian Canadian woman is bound to her allegiance to the nation-state. In the ceremony, discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and the model minority myth are conjoined and pronounced. Second, turning to my interview with Ellen and to instances of resistance by Asian Canadian women during the citizenship ceremony, I argue that Asian Canadian women confront Canadian nation-building and the model minority myth through their articulations and utterances of diversity, feminisms, and decolonization. With Asian Canadian women working to take back their futures from Canada, I propose that possibilities for collective and decolonial futures with Indigenous Peoples can also be imagined.

Keywords: Asian Canadian feminisms; citizenship; decolonization; multiculturalism; model minority myth

Résumé: Cet article soutient que la subjectivité et l'avenir sont d'importants sujets de contestation entre les Canadiennes d'origine asiatique et l'État-nation du Canada. Il s'appuie sur une recherche primaire à laquelle ont participé des Canadiennes d'origine asiatique au printemps 2022 : une observation participante d'une cérémonie de citoyenneté canadienne organisée virtuellement pendant le Mois du patrimoine asiatique et une entrevue avec Ellen (pseudonyme), membre de l'Asian Canadian Women's Alliance. Tout d'abord, dans mon analyse de la cérémonie de citoyenneté, je soutiens que la figure de la Canadienne d'origine asiatique est liée à son allégeance à l'État-nation. Lors de la cérémonie, sont entendus des discours sur le multiculturalisme canadien ainsi que sur le mythe de la minorité modèle. Ensuite, d'après mon entrevue avec Ellen et les exemples de résistance des Canadiennes d'origine asiatique lors de la cérémonie de citoyenneté, je dirai que ces Canadiennes contestent l'édification de la nation canadienne et le mythe de la minorité modèle en évoquant la diversité, le féminisme et la décolonisation. Puisque les Canadiennes d'origine asiatique s'efforcent de reprendre en main leur avenir au Canada, je propose que l'on imagine aussi la possibilité d'un avenir collectif et décolonial avec les peuples autochtones.

Mots clés: féminisme canadien d'origine asiatique; citoyenneté; décolonisation; multiculturalisme; mythe de la minorité modèle

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Introduction

Taking back the future involves a wrestling away of the future from its preordained fate. For Canada, a settler nation that draws upon the ideology of manifest destiny (Robinson 2016), fate is overdetermined by patriarchal, colonial, white supremacist interests. Diaz (2023) remarks:

> The Settler State weaves its ideas of future into us—its empire… can only exist in that future, where it keeps its people precarious and urgent *now*, in an emergency only the State's future can solve. I catch myself some days existing only in that future, which doesn't have to be an inevitable blueprint [original emphasis]. (59)

As a critical ethnography, this article concerns the futurity of the Asian Canadian woman and offers "the potential to explore the textured and contradictory space between 'structure' and 'agency'" (Alexander 2004, 148). My approach to subjectivity recognizes oppression but does not concede to the fate of oppression. In Act One, *A Future Made*, I examine the future of the Asian Canadian woman from the point of her inception at citizenship, where a multicultural nationalism is performed and a model minority is formed. It is in this ceremony where the conjoined discourses of Canadian multiculturalism and the model minority myth begin to bind her allegiance to the nation. In Act Two, *Making Her Future*, I turn to how Asian Canadian women confront the model minority myth through their articulations and utterances of diversity, feminisms, and decolonization. With Asian Canadian women taking back their futures, possibilities for collective and decolonial futures with Indigenous Peoples can also be imagined. This article draws on primary research involving Asian Canadian women in the spring of 2022 from two sources: a participant observation of a Canadian citizenship ceremony held virtually during Asian Heritage Month and an interview with Ellen (pseudonym), a member of the Asian Canadian Women's Alliance (ACWA).

Background

I attended a special virtual citizenship ceremony on May 27, 2022, hosted by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC), a non-profit "[whose] programs and special projects inspire inclusion, celebrate newcomers, and encourage active citizenship" (ICC Our Approach 2022, para. 1). The organization encourages all people, especially Canadian-born citizens, to attend a citizenship ceremony. Being the only one in my immediate family to have received Canadian citizenship simply due to being Canadian-born, I felt compelled to observe a ceremony to better understand this definitive event of naturalization. My family emigrated from Vietnam to Canada as refugees in 1979. I was born two years later. A year after my birth, my family became Canadian citizens. The ceremony I attended was an especially auspicious one, held during Citizenship Week (May 23-29) and Asian Heritage Month (May), both federally observed occasions. The guests in this ceremony include a community activist, a Guzheng (ancient Chinese plucked instrument) musician, and an anthem singer, all who identify as Asian Canadian women.

During the time of the ceremony, I was also interested in Asian Canadian feminisms. I reached out to the ACWA after coming across their website in an internet search. The alliance is a "progressive, feminist, anti-

oppressive… network that amplifies voices of our communities" (ACWA Mission n.d., para. 1). From my email request for an interview, I was connected with ACWA member Ellen (pseudonym), a 66-year-old Japanese Canadian woman, who agreed to a one-hour interview over Zoom in June of 2022. The interview was conducted upon approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. Ellen was not remunerated for her participation. She was the only member interviewed.

Act One—A Future Made

Commenting on the newly minted Canadians in this citizenship ceremony, Citizenship Judge Marie Senécal-Tremblay says they are "on a new chapter, the shiny new first pages as Canadian citizens." Despite implying a tabula rasa for the new Canadians, their aspirations are inseparable from the nation. Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, says, "Your future is our future." There is a conflating and co-opting of futures. Senécal-Tremblay reiterates this connection: "Your future is limited only by the size of your dreams. So, dream big! When we welcome, we grow." In this act, I show the Canadian dream, guided by manifest destiny ideology (Robinson 2016), is one that goes unrealized for many Asian Canadian women.

Canadian Citizenship

Drawing on Arendt (2004), Abu-Laban, Tungohan, and Gabriel (2023) assert that "'the right to have rights' remains contingent on political community… specifically on one's membership in a state" (75). Thobani (2017) states: "Citizenship has… long served as the signifier par excellence of membership in the nation-state" (29). Simply, citizenship matters because it has become the predominant way in which people access their human rights. It operates in securing allegiance to the nation. Further, the ceremony itself matters. Thobani (2017) notes the formal and informal rituals and rites of citizenship as "sites where members of the collective perform their own belonging and recognize that of their compatriots" (34). A nation indeed imagines itself as a community (Anderson 1985). Gaztambide-Fernández (2015) argues that observations of highly performative and tightly controlled spaces provide unique insight into systems of power. The citizenship ceremony must be contextualized in larger structures of nation-state oppression. Alcoff (1992) says, "The meaning of the words spoken as well as the meaning of the event… shifts the ontology of meaning from its location in a text or utterance to a larger space… the discursive context" (12). The citizenship ceremony operates legally and discursively to "give birth" to the Asian Canadian woman and then to govern her future, as part and parcel of her initiation into her new nation. The ceremony also illustrates the banality of dominant power; the citizenship candidates who do not sufficiently perform their role face serious repercussions. The clerk of the ceremony reminds the candidates that taking the oath is "the final legal requirement to become a Canadian citizen." She explains, "If there [is] any doubt you have not [repeated the oath], you will not receive your citizenship."

As a public performance, visuals are also important to the meaning-making of the event. "Canadiana" is on full display in the virtual citizenship ceremony, as many of the participants have Canadian flags and red and white on their clothing or in their respective spaces. This is especially visible in Senécal-Tremblay's office, which contains several visual cues in a small space: two Canadian flags, a framed photo of Queen Elizabeth, and a stand-up poster with the text #ImmigrationMatters. The event begins with a video of short clips over sweeping instrumental music that include: the CN tower, horses, icebergs, polar bears, lighthouses, ships, loons, beavers, autumnal trees, solar panels, trains, Parliament, RCMP, Niagara Falls, hockey (multiple times), Indigenous dancers, a pride parade, African drumming, Terry Fox, forts, Queen Elizabeth, highland dancing, and totem poles. Glossing over the white supremacist project of Canada, the diversity and plurality of the nation is proudly asserted in this video. Foucault (1982) describes the totaliz-

ing individualism of the modern state "as an entity of a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated under one condition" (783). For contemporary Canada, multiculturalism appears to be that one condition.

Multicultural Nationalism

In the citizenship ceremony, Fraser says, "This is my favourite kind of event… Canadians are born all over the world and some take longer to get here." To his own question, "What does it mean to be Canadian?" he replies, "There are 38 million answers," in reference to the nation's population. While there might be 38 million answers to what it means to be Canadian, Fraser's remarks imply that one response covers them all. To be "Canadian" in this sense means to be "multicultural." Fraser comments proudly on Canada's "humanitarian traditions of freedom, equality, and dignity," tenets of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is a particularly Canadian tool for imagining the nation and its ways of governing difference within its national community. "Canada is the place where the term 'multiculturalism' was coined" (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2020, 12). On the 50th anniversary of Canada's much-lauded multiculturalism policy, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (2021) stated:

> Multiculturalism [became] an official government policy – the first of its kind in the world – to recognize the contribution of cultural diversity and multicultural citizenship to the Canadian social fabric. The diversity of Canadians is a fundamental characteristic of our heritage and identity. For generations, newcomers from all over the world, of all backgrounds, ethnicities, faiths, cultures, and languages, have been coming to Canada with the hopes of making it their home. Today, in addition to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, people from more than 250 ethnic groups call Canada home and celebrate their cultural heritage with pride – they are at the heart of our success as a vibrant, prosperous, and progressive country. (paras. 1-2)

Ultimately, multiculturalism functions to disguise the racialized, gendered, and classed nature of Canadian citizenship.

Birthing the Asian Canadian Woman

The Asian Canadian woman comes into existence during the citizenship ceremony. However, legal citizenship is just one facet of a negotiated belonging (Stasiulis and Bakan 2013). Full substantive citizenship remains elusive for the gendered and sexualized other (Volpp 2017) and the racialized other (FitzGerald 2017). Thobani (2007) theorizes a divisive, triangulated, hierarchical subject formation unique to settler colonial states in which "the national remains at the centre of the state's (stated) commitment to enhance national wellbeing, the immigrant receives a tenuous and conditional inclusion, and the Aboriginal continues to be marked for loss of sovereignty" (18). In this highly racialized citizenship regime, the white male national is "exalted above all others as the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation and the personification of its values, ethics, and civilizational mores" (Thobani 2017, 3). He is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the state, as he most purely represents and is represented by the nation (Thobani 2017). While the non-white immigrant woman is invited in some measure into Canada, she remains a conditional, "hyphenated" Canadian (Miki 2004), an Asian Canadian woman. Her struggle for a more fulsome belonging is highly productive for the nation.

For racialized immigrants, their degree of "Canadianness" depends on their willingness to aspire, labour, and sacrifice for the nation (Thobani 2007). Allegiance is first performed and pronounced at the citizenship ceremony but it becomes an unremitting duty for Asian Canadians. During the COVID-19 pan-

demic, Conservative Member of Parliament Derek Sloan's criticism of Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, provoked alarm concerning Asian Canadians' loyalty to Canada. He asked "rhetorically" whether she works "for Canada or for China" (Boutilier 2020, subheading). Responsibility as a payment or a debt to citizenship (Day 2016) is demonstrated in the citizenship ceremony. Senécal-Tremblay harnesses a militaristic tone in calling for citizen participation: "Your active involvement is the key to the ongoing good health of Canadian democracy. We will be counting on you." She draws on former Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's words: "Canada is free, and freedom is its nationality." She says, the "idea of freedom, living without fear… does not walk alone." In her articulation, freedom is not a right but a privilege with substantial duties. It is not exactly a reciprocal relationship: the nation does for the citizen what the citizen does for the nation. Returning to the example of Dr. Tam, racialized citizens are especially criticized as disloyal; their allegiance is particularly scrutinized. The burden of responsibility is carried by the citizen, specifically the racialized immigrant who is persistently marked as new in "White Canada" (Ward 2002). With the intertwining of the "ideological designation[s] [of] immigrants, newcomers, new Canadians, and visible minorities" (Thobani 2017, 32), those racialized as non-white continue to be estranged despite generations of residency in Canada.

Forming the Model Minority

Another subjectivity formed through the citizenship ceremony is the "model minority." Literature on the model minority focuses on narratives of bootstrapping and stereotypes of Asian immigrant subjects who are obedient, subservient, grateful, and insular (Kimoto 2018, Roshanravan 2018, Wu 2018). These stereotypes are also highly gendered, as evidenced in the feminization of Asian men and their labour. The 1902 Royal Commission on Asian Immigration into British Columbia depicted Chinese men as "members of a 'servile' and 'effete' civilization," fitting only in the "female" occupations of food preparation and laundry service (Backhouse 1996, 336). Asian immigrant subjects are expected to work hard to achieve fuller recognition, while working hard is attributed to their innate "cultural" qualities. Their hard work does not go unrecognized, as Nguyen (2013) states:

> [The] model minority… is able to achieve educational, economic, and social success with no or very little assistance from the state… [Because of this,] model minorities are made visible as exemplary ethnic citizens and as disciplinary cases marginalizing other, less compliant minorities who speak out against racism and classism. (23)

Race logics are important to the model minority myth. Ong (2003) asserts that the model minority was invented to position Asian Americans against a so-called underclass, a label denigrating Blacks experiencing poverty in the US. The highly visibilized "success" of the Asian Canadian woman functions to divide her from other non-white women (e.g., Black and Indigenous women) and to secure her submission to the citizenship regime, so that she might attain some semblance of inclusion. The model minority myth compels Asian immigrants "to equate themselves with their oppressors to remedy the conditions of their subordination. [This] shows white supremacist ideology at work, reproducing and reinforcing the ideology that [Asians are] actually struggling to resist" (Kim 2001, 100). Similarly, Coloma (2017) cautions against ethno-nationalist discourses of belonging present in some Asian Canadian activisms. While the socio-economic mobility for some Asian immigrants "proves" that "success" is possible for those racialized as non-white (Kim 2001), full belonging continues to elude them, as they are reminded of their non-whiteness in "White Canada" (Ward 2002). This was evident in the rise of anti-Asian hate in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic (Project 1907, 2022).

Considering the Model Minority Woman

The model minority is not only a racialized concept but also a gendered one. Stasiulis and Bakan's (2013) work on the negotiated citizenship of non-white, foreign domestic workers shows that many non-white, migrant women workers remain excluded from Canadian citizenship. Ng's (1988) analysis of the "immigrant woman worker" as a labour-market category to supply low-waged and precarious jobs in Canada reveals that Asian Canadian women are produced by national politico-economic forces. Certainly, Asian Canadian women's experiences of the model minority myth are complicated by a history of control of their migration to the nation. Asian women were presumed to have the

> potential to disrupt the 'biological reproduction of the white nation'… Chinese women who were in Canada [were assumed to work] as sex workers [possessing] a different moral character than that attributed to white women. Consequently, the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act specifically stated the exclusion of sex workers to prevent the entry of most Chinese women. (Violence Against Women Learning Network 2021, 4)

When they were finally included, their inclusion continued to be predicated on men. Asian women were first granted entry because of white fear of miscegenation between Asian men and white women in Canada. Despite the removal of explicit racism and sexism in Canadian immigration policies upon introduction of the merit-based points system in 1967, other policies persisted to challenge the inclusion of non-white, migrant women, notably those employed under the Live-In-Caregiver program (Abu-Laban, Tungohan, and Gabriel 2023, 48). Finally, the increase in anti-Asian hate in Canada throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was disproportionately directed at women, indicating the endurance of racist misogyny against Asian women's inclusion in the nation (Project 1907, 2022).

Act Two—Making Her Future

I have discussed the relationship between the Asian Canadian woman and the confining identity of the model minority. However, she, like all marginalized people, is exemplary of a "doubled" subjectivity: one who "subject[s] to someone else by control and dependence [and one who subjects herself] by a conscience and self-knowledge" (Foucault 1982, 781). Against the nation's construction, how might the Asian Canadian woman make her own future? In this Act, I turn to how individual Asian Canadian women in my ethnographic research have articulated and expanded on diversity, feminisms, and decolonization to confront the model minority myth and make their own futures. I predominately draw on my interview with Ellen (pseudonym), a member of the ACWA. In the interview, Ellen shares that her parents, grandparents, and great grandparents experienced internment, relocation, and disenfranchisement as Japanese Canadians of the World War Two era. Her activist work is informed by her family's histories.

The Diversity of Asian Canada

One way to address the model minority myth is to centre the diversity of Asian Canada, disrupting the notion that the Asian Canadian community is a monolith. Nguyen (2013) argues "for a more nuanced consideration of the complexity and heterogeneity of Asian North American subjectivities, particularly those borne out of the violence of empire" (19). Ellen notes the diversity of Asian Canada, positioning herself both in relation to her ethnic origin and to the length of time her family has resided in Canada. She is a Japanese Canadian with deep roots in Canada. The interview begins with her stating, "I should say that I'm a three and [a] half generation kind of Japanese Canadian…. As you know, there are so many different Asian experiences in Canada." She enquires about my own heritage, stopping not only at my parents' histories as Vietnamese refugees but also inquiring into my ethnic Chinese heritage. Throughout the inter-

view, Ellen comments extensively on the multiplicity of the Asian Canadian experience, repeating the words *different* and *diversity* 19 times. Of course, while "Asian Canadian" is evoked by the nation-state to secure its regime of citizenship, it is also harnessed by those who are identified as "Asian" for community-building and resistance (Zhou 2003). Citing the lack of Japanese in Montreal (the city in which she grew up), Ellen says, "I think I felt more Asian than Japanese Canadian… .To be honest, I think we were called slur names for Chinese, as opposed to Japanese, more often. So, we could identify with [that]."

Regarding the objectives of the ACWA, Ellen remarks on Asian Canadian solidarity and diasporic responsibility. She says that the ACWA wanted a "uniquely Canadian" way of bridging different issues: the "atomic bombings in Japan," "comfort women," and the "Nanjing massacre." Ellen shares both the importance of coalition and the uniqueness of position, which trouble the depoliticized multiculturalism used by Canada. She suggests a multiculturalism from the ground up; one that is grounded in the specific histories and lived experiences of those living in the margins of difference. But Ellen concedes that "[the ACWA didn't] really want to get into the sort of politics of our ancestral countries," recognizing that, to the members of the ACWA, activism that challenges the Canadian state is perhaps even more important than activism directed at other and ancestral nations. "Our family's been here since like 1900…. If you're in Asia, these things are issues, but we're in Canada, and many of us [have] been in Canada." While acknowledging Japan's atrocities against women, Ellen also seeks justice concerning Canada's treatment of Japanese people. She discusses at length the injustices her family have faced in Canada. "For those of us who went through the internment, the last thing on our mind[s] is what happened in Japan during the war. I mean, basically, we were the victims of Japanese militarism." She comments on the incarceration as well as the displacement of Canadian citizens of Japanese descent:

> Japanese Canadians of our generation were scattered across Canada…. You're kicked out of BC and then nobody else wants to take you…. The city of Toronto had an actual ban and quotas. So, my parents, my grandparents, and my great grandparents had to move to Quebec, where they didn't speak the language.

Regarding Japanese Canadians who have such histories of systemic racism in Canada, she says, "I find it really hard to totally apply [the model minority concept] to Japanese Canadians…. There's a whole period where that model minority thing is…. You can't even begin to talk about it…. When you're the most despised group in Canada." She asserts that working against poverty to secure educational and employment opportunities is not about being a model minority. "For Japanese Canadians, just to be able to be accepted was a matter of survival, right?" The model minority myth then is undermined by material concerns: "You want a job, right?"; "[you] work twice as hard as other people; "[you] put food on the table." Ellen also notes a "universal" struggle of parents to create "a better life for their kids." After generations of struggle, Ellen grew up "middle-class... [My parents] were happy when their kids were able to get the education that they didn't get and to be accepted and employed." She contends, "You [can't] really hold [those aspirations] against people, especially Japanese Canadians." She subverts the concept of success. Success must not only be thought of as a productive ideal for the nation but also conceived of and remembered as a form of resistance against oppression. That non-white women can exist and survive in a context of patriarchal, white supremacy suggests such resistance. Ellen bursts myths of the monolith Asian Canadian and the model minority Asian Canadian in her elaborations on the Asian Canadian experience as diverse and complex.

The model minority myth has different implications across the diversity of Asian Canada. She says, "There are so many different Asian experiences in Canada" and it's "hard to compare the model minority experience." Ellen suggests class as a defining factor of the experience. There are not only national and cultural differences but also class differences that must be reckoned with among Asians in Canada. The future looks very different depending on one's material reality on arrival. To Ellen, what resources Asians bring to Canada in terms of schooling and money have significant implications for their capacity to belong.

"Someone who comes from an Asian country already educated… already upper class, upper-middle class, [they fit in]." She recalls her experience of working as a union steward in a hotel, where an Asian man worked as a dishwasher. Pondering what has happened to him, Ellen acknowledges that for many Asian Canadians cycles of poverty endure.

Finally, there are generational differences in understanding the Asian Canadian experience. Referring to the upsurge in anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ellen was shocked to know that younger generations of Asians were experiencing racism for the first time. They have no memories of racism of their own and/or have lost memories of their family's histories. Ellen says, "It was sort of shocking to me when all this anti-Asian racism came up, especially when younger people [felt] like it's sort of new. They haven't experienced it before." For her, "it's not new." Ellen illuminates the variations in Asian Canadian histories and trajectories. It is imperative to ask, then, what are the possibilities in seeking Asian Canadian solidarity? For this question, I turn to instances and expressions of feminist resistance by Asian Canadian women.

Asian Canadian Feminisms

One way to confront the model minority myth is to centre "unmodel" acts made by Asian Canadians. Ellen comments on the infantilizing expectations of the model minority to stay silent. She states: "Asian people are treated kind of like children…. This idea of not speaking up and being obedient… is expected of us." The assumption of Asian silence is contradicted by her own lived experience. She is from a long line of people and women who spoke out. Ellen shares, "My parents and grandparents were a little unique. I'm kind of an outlier in a way. Because my grandparents were quite active in the community." Both her grandmother and grandfather were leaders in the redress movement for Japanese Canadians. Ellen provides a story of the resistance of her mother. She recalls her mother paying a visit to her school's office to criticize the school for "collecting money for children in Africa but [not teaching] the kids about racism [here]." She notes that "in some ways I guess I'm not a good example [of the model minority Asian]… because my parents weren't afraid to speak up. I think a lot of people, the majority of Asians, are." She recalls attending anti-apartheid marches with her parents as a child and that they were frequently the only Asians present.

Concerning her engagement with feminist theory, Ellen recounts taking a post-secondary women's studies course and reading classic feminist literature. She says, "It was really an eyeopener because certainly we could relate to everything. I think I was like 17 or 18 when I took it. [It] definitely gave me some kind of orientation in terms of gender." Ellen comments specifically on the significance of Black women as "starting… second wave feminism." She gestures to how Black feminists simultaneously identified patriarchy within Black communities and racism within women's movements, leading the way for other non-white feminists. Ellen remarks that she often "was the only Asian person" in attendance in pro-choice and International Women's Day marches and in many other social justice circles.

What might be possible if solidarity among diverse Asian women was fostered? The ACWA is a feminist community of Asian Canadian women. Ellen names "some very important Asian Canadian women involved in [its] founding," including the activist Go sisters, journalist Jan Wong, and politician Olivia Chow. Ellen suggests that I interview other members as she comments, "We're all so different." Because the COVID-19 pandemic drained members' energies and demanded many members respond to the increase in anti-Asian racism, the ACWA became more like a "network…. We check-in with each other because people are really connected to their own communities…. Every now and then something comes up." Though this alliance explicitly communicates its feminist approach, Asian feminism remains in doubt. Ellen says, "To talk specifically about Asian women's feminism…. I don't know if that's actually a thing."

Lee (2006) ponders, "For whom does the term 'Asian Canadian feminisms' (acf) resonate? What is at stake in asserting this name?" (21). In her wrestling with this term, Lee (2006) says she refuses to capitalize the acronym, believing it to be an underdeveloped concept. She questions her very search for Asian Canadian feminisms, wondering if her inquiry is a kind of inclusion-seeking that is, in fact, exclusionary. Lee (2006) notes that acf might be questioned by Black and Indigenous feminists as theory that distracts from rather than contributes to the struggles of those communities. But to ask *why* Asian Canadian feminisms invites the question: *why not* Asian Canadian feminisms. Lee (2006) lists issues that might be important to acf: "refugee [rights]; reproductive technologies and sexist oppression; immigrant settlement and exclusion; violence in communities; sexuality and health; representation; exploitative working conditions in factories, farms, and service jobs" (31). Conceding that Asian Canadian feminisms exist, even if not predominantly understood as such, she surmises that "Asian feminisms are hybrid, complex, divided, and multiply accented" (43). Lee (2006) calls for more theoretical writing on Asian Canadian feminisms, asserting that "without Asian Canadian feminist writings, we have no memory of the past and no legacy for the future" (38). Similarly, Kwak (2017) posits that Asian Canadian feminisms are a critical intervention in Asian Canadian theorizing. The doubt that surrounds Asian Canadian feminisms might be best understood through recognizing similar critiques made by other non-white women concerning feminism. As Ellen suggests, Black women have concurrently critiqued and expanded dominant, mainstream feminism. Ng (1982) suggests for us to "abandon our commitment to a theoretical framework and simply focus on what women actually do" (116). Ng (1982) insists on a "groundedness" in Asian Canadian feminisms.

Lastly, Ellen mentions allyship as important to activism. Allyship can be forged in contexts where people are marginalized. Ellen notes that Montreal was "not a very welcoming city. I did end up having a lot of gay friends at the time because, you know, you kind of stick together.... When others are marginalized, you gravitate towards each other." She shares that her first boyfriend was Jewish and, as a result, she was exposed to "issues of anti-Semitism." Further, Ellen talks about her support of AIDS orphans in Ethiopia and Syrian refugees as an adult. Critical of colonial futures, Diaz (2023) proposes that allyship can be a practice of decolonization, asking, "When we seek possibility, when we seek our future, whose should it align with or be alongside?" (59).

Decolonizing Canada

In addition to Asian Canadian feminisms, Kwak (2017) suggests three other interventions in theorizing Asian Canada: relational racialization (connected to issues of Canadian multiculturalism), Asian Canadian politics (connected to issues of political representation), and settler colonialism. Settler colonialism relates to Indigenous sovereignty, especially relevant in the contemporary politics of Canada. Razack, Smith, and Thobani (2010) remark on the complicity of new settlers to settler colonialism. For immigrants, Canadian citizenship is the "final" summit to climb in achieving "full" belonging. For Indigenous Peoples, it is the terminal act of assimilation. What is the future of the Asian Canadian woman when tied to the Indigenous woman's erasure in Canada?

As a result of Indigenous activism behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), I notice a pronounced focus on Indigeneity in the citizenship ceremony. On June 22, 2021 (National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada), a new citizenship oath was introduced, as part of the 94 calls to action of the TRC (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants 2021, paras. 1-2). The oath, speaking to the responsibility of Canadian citizens to the Queen of Canada and Indigenous Peoples, states:

I swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada, including the Constitution, which recognizes and affirms the Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations,

Inuit and Métis Peoples, and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen. (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants 2021, para. 3)

Adese and Phung (2021), Indigenous and refugee scholars respectively, offer the concept of genealogical disclosure as a way towards reconciliation between new settlers and Indigenous Peoples. Genealogical disclosure is a storied way of knowing that asks "not just 'who are you' but 'who do you come from' and 'who are you accountable to'" (121). As part of the citizenship ceremony, Kim Wheatley, a traditional Anishinaabe grandmother, offers an Indigenous welcome, an honour song, and a smudging. She reminds the citizenship candidates that they are entering treaty partnerships. She encourages relationship-building and self-led education. "You have so much learning to undertake as a Canadian citizen." Responsibility and duty, then, can bind us not just to the nation-state but to marginalized others. Kristin Fung, the anthem singer for the citizenship ceremony, sings an altered lyric in her rendition of "O Canada." She enunciates the alteration from "our home and native land" (Government of Canada n.d.) to "our home *on* native land." In this utterance, Fung resists being a model minority by recognizing Indigenous sovereignty. Her act of singing these changed lyrics demonstrates a way immigrants can show solidarity with Indigenous peoples, even as they become Canadian citizens.

Community alliances between Indigenous and Asian Canadian people exist. One example is the mask project created by Gwich'in jewelry artist Tania Larsson. The project brought together Indigenous and Asian women artists to collaboratively design masks that speak to how their communities were experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic (Zingel 2020). While anti-Asian hate was on the rise, attacks on Indigenous sovereignty and health persisted through the activities of extractive industries on Indigenous lands during the pandemic (Leonard 2021). Further, Indigenous women continued to be missing and murdered (Zingel 2020). The masks not only represented the backgrounds of the artists but also illustrated how Indigenous and Asian women are frequently silenced (Rodriguez 2021, para. 7). Of the project, Larsson says, "It was about finding our commonalities so that we could support each other and raise our voice louder together, instead of just being silenced by the world" (Zingel 2020, para. 2). Larsson asserts: "Sometimes it feels like we're screaming to the world, but only our community is hearing about it" (Rodriguez 2021, para. 6).

As a post-script to the citizenship ceremony, I wonder how decolonization might be expressed and practiced by Asian women in Canada. Yao (2021) presents an idea in her opinion editorial in the *Toronto Star*. She writes that for many Chinese Canadians, Canada Day, July 1st, "is known as 'Humiliation Day'… [The day] when Canada enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1923" (subheading). This act raised the head tax on Chinese migrants to $500 and restricted nearly all Chinese immigration to Canada (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 n.d.). Yao (2021) argues that this is not a day to celebrate Canada but to recognize Canada's history of violent oppression against marginalized others, especially those racialized as non-white. She brings up the resurgence of anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic as a moment in which Asian Canadians should acknowledge not only their own oppression but also the oppressions of others. Yao (2021) shares one history of solidarity between Indigenous Peoples and Asian Canadians, namely the Xaxli'p First Nations' protection of Chinese railway labourers from white violence. What other histories of solidarity might need to be unearthed to reimagine these futures so invariably intertwined? Yao (2021) encourages a "[refusal] to celebrate Canada Day—a day of grief for all of us" (para. 10). She says, "It is only by standing united that we can heal and build a more just future" (para. 10).

Conclusion

Through a participant observation of a Canadian citizenship ceremony held during Asian Heritage Month and an interview with Ellen (pseudonym), a member of the ACWA, I have shown how Asian Canadian

women are created and how their futures are designed according to the model minority myth. I have also demonstrated how Asian Canadian women resist the myth of their "model" futures through the ways that they centre diversity, explore feminisms, and practice decolonization. For the Asian Canadian woman, the future continues to be a critical site of contestation and relation; may the writing of it never be finished.

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What Girls Want: An Affective Reading of Using Pair Interviewing Methods to Research Activist Girls and Their Relationships with Their Mothers and Mother Figures

by Hannah Maitland

Abstract: This paper is a critical reflection on the fieldwork and analysis stage of my dissertation project on activist girls. My project explores how an intergenerational lens can be critically applied to the actions and motivations of activist girls and asks how contemporary girls negotiate and feel about their activism, their relationships with their mothers and communities, and their imaginings for a feminist future. Between 2021 and 2022, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten activist girls (aged 11-20) and their mothers/mother figures in a series of one-on-one and paired interviews. In this paper, I reflect on the affective landscape that emerged when interviewing girls, not only about their mothers but also with their mothers, and what this methodology might offer to the field of girls' studies. I engage with how daughters and mothers negotiate, express, and sometimes struggle to articulate their desires for the future and their relationship in the context of the paired interviews and how both the subject matter and method of this study posed challenges for me as a researcher.

Keywords: activism; girls' studies; interviewing; mother-daughter relationships

Résumé : Cet article est une réflexion critique sur l'étude de terrain ainsi que sur la phase d'analyse de mon projet de thèse portant sur les jeunes filles militantes. Mon projet s'intéresse à la façon dont on peut, d'un point de vue intergénérationnel, porter un regard critique sur les actions et les motivations de jeunes filles militantes. Il cherche aussi à savoir comment les jeunes filles d'aujourd'hui abordent et perçoivent leur militantisme, leurs relations avec leurs mères et leur collectivité, ainsi que leur vision d'un avenir féministe. Entre 2021 et 2022, j'ai mené des entrevues approfondies semi-structurées auprès de dix jeunes filles militantes (âgées de 11 à 20 ans) et de leurs mères ou figures maternelles, dans le cadre d'une série d'entrevues individuelles et par paires. Dans cet article, je me penche sur la dimension affective qui est ressortie des entrevues avec les jeunes filles, en ce qui concerne non seulement leurs mères, mais aussi avec elles, et sur ce que cette méthodologie pourrait apporter au domaine des études sur les jeunes filles. J'aborde comment les jeunes filles et les mères s'y prennent pour se faire entendre, comment elles ont parfois de la difficulté à exprimer leurs désirs pour l'avenir et leur relation dans le contexte des entrevues par paires, et comment le sujet et la méthodologie de cette étude m'ont posé certains défis en tant que chercheuse.

Mots clés : militantisme; études sur les jeunes filles; entrevues; relations mère-fille

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Introduction

Youth activism has captured significant public attention as young people around the globe confront the social and ecological issues of a changing world. Media coverage of politically engaged young people is not hard to come by—popular teen-focused publications like Teen Vogue have not only embraced activist and social-justice-oriented content but have received much scholarly attention for doing so (Coulter and Moruzi 2022; Crookston and Klonowski 2021). Activism is seemingly commonplace for contemporary young people, especially girls. However, most media outlets still focus on a small handful of famously political girls. Though these activists, like education advocate Malala Yousafzai, water protector Autumn Peltier, and climate activist Greta Thunberg, have reached a level of hypervisibility that demonstrates an intense interest in political girls as both idealized and anxiety-inducing subjects, they are often framed through discourses of extraordinary girlhood and tend to be positioned as singular and exceptional (Benigno 2021; Brown 2016; Taft 2020).

Instead of seeing today's young activists as extraordinary girls who stand alone in demanding a better future, in my research, I explore the ways girls encounter the world and build a sense of self as embedded community members with close and complex relationships with the people around them. I bring an intergenerational lens to the actions and motivations of activist girls to ask how contemporary girls negotiate and feel about their activism, their place within ongoing social movements, and their relationships with their communities. To provide further focus to these networks of relationships, I am especially interested in developing a feminist interrogation of daughterhood to synthesize the ways that girls' relationships with their mothers influence their feminism and activism. Using daughterhood as the locus of connections between girls' political participation and family relationships, I aim to centre girls in my analysis without isolating them from larger support structures and without disconnecting their political activism from their family and community contexts.

To undertake this contextual and intergenerational approach to girls' activism, I not only interviewed girls but also involved their mothers and mother figures in the interview process. From September 2021 to May 2022, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews over Zoom with eleven activist daughters (aged 11-20) and their mothers and mother figures. I combined one-on-one and paired interviews with daughters and mothers to explore the kinds of affective landscapes that emerge when interviewing activist girls not only about their mothers but with their mothers.

This article offers a reflection on the field of girls' studies by way of a reflection on my dissertation fieldwork. As I will explain, my research method is a departure from the usually recommended methods of the field. Exploring mother-daughter relationships as a central research theme is uncommon in girls' studies, and interviewing girls, particularly younger girls, alongside their mothers is rare. Implementing this methodology came with many challenges. This reflection explores what girls' studies wants for and from girls and what prying into the space where the personal and political collide in girls' lives could mean.

Girling Desire

I am especially drawn to questions surrounding what activist girls want from their world and relationships and what this—that is, my research – wants from them. Wanting comes with an intriguing double meaning; wanting means both desire and lack. Girls are caught up in the doubleness of wanting—by taking up activism, they express that they desire something that is lacking in our world. However, wanting is also understood as a site of lack that indicates a kind of failure or incompleteness. Even when they are not actively engaging in politics, girls are constantly rendered through a matrix of vulnerability and risk that sees them as always inadequate and in need of adult rescue or correction. Anita Harris elucidates this in her book *Future Girl* (2004), where she points to the dominant discourses of late capitalist girlhood as the can-do girl and the at-risk girl. Harris explains that these figures are not judged just by actions such as educational attainment, reproductive age, or employment but by their aspirations. Girls either want too much, and their excessiveness is seen as dangerous, or they do not want enough and are accused of being too apathetic about the world around them. Whether society imagines girls succeeding or suffering ultimately does not matter because either scenario justifies further scrutiny. In short, we are concerned not only with whether girls are doing the right thing but if they want the right things.

Focusing on girls as wanting subjects risks reinscribing this pathologizing view where girls are missing something and need adult instruction or interpretation to be complete. Trying to get to their desires feels like repeating this anxious surveillance of girls' innermost lives. However, engaging with girls' wants does not have to be an act of anxious or corrective scrutiny. Desire is integral to understanding the connections between intergenerational relationships and girls' aspirations to make their worlds better. In the article "Breaking up with Deleuze: Desire and Valuing the Irreconcilable," Eve Tuck describes desire as a kind of intergenerationally transmitted feeling and site of knowledge: "This wisdom is assembled not just across a lifetime, but across generations, so that my desire is linked, rhizomatically, to my past and my future" (2010, 645). In this study, rather than seeing wanting as something that needs to be resolved, I suggest it can be a way to explore vulnerability and the ways that we both desire and are dependent on the people around us in both sustaining and precarious ways.

Girls' Studies and Mothers

Many girls' studies scholars write about and advocate for the importance of intergenerational relationships and solidarity between girls and adults and take a community-focused approach to girls' lives (Bent 2016; Brown 2016; Brown 2009; de Finney 2014; 2017; Winstanley and Bernier 2022). However, even in this kind of intergenerational work with girls, mothers and mothering are rarely a point of focus. In fact, the adults who carry out girls' studies research generally avoid anything that could be perceived as replicating the inequality of a mother-daughter relationship between themselves and the girls with whom they work (Bent 2016). Girls' studies scholars want to take girls seriously as people who show agency and resistance to oppression. Exploring the lives of activist girls as daughters in the domestic sphere, where they are so often confined, often feels antithetical to this goal. However, this project of centring girls' voices has had consequences for the kinds of literature that exists about girls and their mothers. As a field, girls' studies has often been reticent to explore mother-daughter relationships as a topic and resistant to explore it as a methodology. As a result, parent-child interviews are not common in girls' studies.

Girls' studies conceptualizes girls as people who inhabit a distinct social location at the intersection of age and gender; girls constitute both a diverse group whose members have been systemically marginalized and social actors who can influence the world even as it influences them (Mandrona 2016, 3). In the introduction to their edited collection, *Difficult Dialogues About Twenty-First Century Girls* (2015), Donna Marie

Johnson and Alice Ginsberg outline the history of girls' studies in the West and some of the key concepts and interventions of the field. They note that one of the core motivations for creating a distinct field of study around girlhood was the fact that girls had distinct experiences that were not adequately addressed by feminist theorizing focused on adult women (2015, 4–5). Girls are socially and politically disadvantaged in ways that resemble but do not directly mirror the experiences of boys and adult women. The combination of ageism and sexism directed at girls requires its own liberation strategies. As minors, girls still experience considerable restrictions on their lives from parents and other authorities and are often explicitly barred from civic processes like voting.

Anita Harris (2004; 2008) has noted how, within the neoliberalism of late modernity, girls are celebrated as flexible, adaptable, and successful. Still, this kind of visibility is ultimately a regulatory system where girls must live up to rising standards but keep up the appearance of looking good and having fun while doing it (Coulter 2018). In this context, girls not only face the policing of their behaviour and movement but are also expected to do the work to maintain harmonious relationships with the people around them and may, therefore, decline to openly express their feelings and opinions in certain settings (Brown and Gilligan 1992; Johnson and Ginsberg 2015). These pressures are heightened for Black, Indigenous, and other girls of colour who experience state-sponsored policing and overcriminalization and are subject to much harsher state and social consequences for taking up space and expressing political opinions (Brown 2009; de Finney 2014; 2017; Smooth and Richardson 2019).

Even programs meant to empower girls often engage in this regulatory, if not carceral, approach to girls' development and citizenship. Though often well-meaning, girl-focused programming run by adults often individualizes girls and positions them as responsible for the systemic issues they face by emphasizing individual coping skills over organizing for wider change (Winstanley and Bernier 2022). Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) points out that programming by adult white women for Black girls often replicates racist assumptions about the risks of Black girlhood and recreates the misogynoir that marginalizes Black girls (10). In her own work with Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), Brown emphasizes the need for adult women to enter into solidarity with girls rather than just supervising them or attempting to rescue them from their assumed status as victims. Courtney Cook makes a similar critique, pointing out that the nonprofit sector has few Black women in leadership roles. Organizations with a mission to empower Black girls employ a "can-do" approach that sells girls of colour a leadership dream that may never be realized (Cook 2020, 53). Like Brown (2009), Cook (2020) also emphasizes the need for Black women and girls to participate together in the activist project of dismantling exclusionary systems rather than individually overcoming systemic barriers.

In response to these marginalizing dynamics and the persistent inequality between children and adults, many girlhood studies scholars rightfully recommend that researchers engage with girls one-on-one or with their peer groups to empower girls to speak freely about their lives and have their words met by adults willing to listen to and respect their perspectives. Adult researchers should not, as the girls working with Emily Bent at the UN put it, "momsplain" to their young participants (Bent 2016, 114). As a field, girlhood studies centres girls' voices and employs methods like participatory action research, photovoice, and journaling to allow girls to express their perspectives without feeling that they must defend themselves, protect others, or otherwise please adults (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2013). The adults who carry out this research should ideally enter a research relationship with girl participants where they are speaking *with* rather than *for* girls.

While these conditions have pushed the subject of mothers to the edges of the field, this research gap is not an oversight so much as a response to how girls are continually pushed to the margins in research that does not directly focus on their experiences. It is important to note that young people, particularly those

who are queer, disabled, or otherwise marginalized, are not always safe with their parents. Involving parents and children in research can lead to material harm if something is asked or revealed that causes one or both members of the pair to feel outed, betrayed, challenged, or embarrassed. This can be especially precarious when the children live at home or are otherwise dependent on their families. Mother-daughter relationships are often the site of conflict, mistrust, and abuse, and I am not arguing that the field should engage more with mothers because mothers are an inherently positive part of girls' politics. However, whether they are a positive or negative force in a girl's life, mothers and mother figures are part of the greater context of what it means to be a girl and, significantly, a daughter.

There is no shortage of academic writing on mother-daughter relationships in general, and many feminists reflect on their lives and work from a "narrating daughter" standpoint, where they locate themselves as a single link in a much larger chain of feminist action and events. These reflections from adult women often begin with how they first learned feminism or some other form of political participation from their mothers at home (alt, Marks, and Clarke-Mitchell 2016; deAnda and Geist-Martin 2018; Fouquier 2011; Reimer and Sahagian 2013; Rastogi and Wampler 1999; Torres 2011; Sharpe 2023). Memories of girlhood are integral to narratives of adult feminist consciousness and these narratives remind us that adults are not simply post-girls. Girlhood is not just a life stage that neatly fades away once adulthood takes its place. Instead, early girlhood experiences continue influencing how adults think about their gender, relationships, and politics.

Many girls' studies scholars, such as Jessica Taft (2011), point out that because there is no such thing as a "completed" subjectivity where one reaches a finalized static identity, young people and adults inhabit the same ongoing process of becoming that occurs throughout the entire lifespan. Monica Swindle (2011) extends this idea further to argue that "girl" is an "affect that sticks to certain bodies mattering them by creating the surfaces, boundaries, and relations that seem to delimit them, the affect that animates girldom, and that is felt as girl, though not only by girls" (5). Sometimes, specific memories, sensations, or encounters can transport someone to girldom; in this respect, girlhood is something mothers and daughters share rather than a point of separation.

However, though these accounts of mother-daughter relationships from adult daughters demonstrate the ways that girlhood ebbs and flows throughout a lifetime, they are adult reflections on girlhood. Reconstructing childhood from memory involves both the benefits and limitations of adult hindsight and insight. More time has passed for these stories to be processed. Many of the scholars mentioned above return to stories of their childhoods once they have become parents and this recontextualizes how they think about their own childhood relationships with their parents. The real-time narrative of girlhood in the mother-daughter relationship is not more authentic or legitimate than the adult reflection, but it is distinct. In her introduction to *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection* (2019), Aria Halliday notes that she intentionally excluded works written exclusively from the standpoint of Black women reflecting on Black girlhood "out of concern for the general dearth of scholarship focused solely on theorizing Black girls' experiences in cultural studies" (6). The adult narrators who reflect on their familial and feminist mothers tend to be the sole authors of these accounts and have not entrusted their personal lives to a third party. Adult daughters get to narrate their lives as and if they please and they are not obligated to involve their mothers or anyone else in the process unless they feel so inclined.

Girls in their childhood and adolescence can also find ways to tell their own stories on their own terms but they often have fewer options for telling personal narratives without some kind of adult intervention. Between their parents and other authority figures, girls live with a significant amount of adult scrutiny and control and may be unable to critique these figures as freely as their adult counterparts. Young people can also have close and loving relationships with these same authority figures. Girls may be reluctant to criti-

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cize these adults not out of fear, inequality, or a lack of control but out of love and protection. Children tend to be attached to their parents and express this care in how they speak about their family to others.

Affect Theory and Method

As I approached this daunting task of trying to bring mothers and daughters together into political conversations, I knew that this would be a project with a lot of feelings. Because of this, I selected feminist affect theory to offer guidance on how to conceptualize the cycles of meaning-making involved in activism, feminism, girlhood, and mothering that would emerge throughout this project. Affect is taken up differently by different scholars and is often concerned with the in-betweens, besides, capacities, and potentials that exist within and beyond our bodies. These are moments where the energy shifts when a joke fails to land or a spark of attraction is felt. In *Ordinary Affects* (2007), Kathleen Stewart explores how affects often go unnoticed but are still an integral part of the social world, writing: "A world of shared banalities can be a basis of sociality, or an exhausting undertow, or just something to do. It can pop up as a picture of staged perfection, as a momentary recognition, or as a sense of shock or relief at being 'in' something with others" (27-28).

"Affect" is often described as the conditions of emotion rather than the emotions themselves. However, the two do not have to be so clearly separated. In *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), Ann Cvetkovich uses the term "feeling" to name the "undifferentiated stuff" that spans the distinctions between emotion and affect in intentionally imprecise ways (5). Women in general and girls in particular are often imagined as inferior because they are seen as emotional (Ahmed 2014, 8). Because of this, I have taken after scholars like Sara Ahmed and primarily drawn from feminist approaches to affect theory that do not separate affect and emotion and I take feelings seriously as a site of knowledge production as girls feel their way through the world and their activism (Ahmed 2014,12). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), Ahmed offers an approach to affect that, like Cvetkovich (2012), keeps the affective and emotional connected. For Ahmed, the political and the emotional have always been intertwined and emotions are crucial to the self and the social in ways that constitute and blur the boundaries between the two (2014, 4).

Activism, feminism, and daughter-mother relationships are all categories that carry certain culturally defined expectations but when they are inhabited by real girls and women, they involve a porous flow between the social and the private that involve feelings like love, passion, anger, and desire as girls feel their way through their activism and relationships. Talking about activism and mother-daughter relationships involved the diffused hum of undefinable feelings and the directly stated emotions that mothers and daughters would name when describing their lives. An intentionally fluid and imprecise sense of these feelings felt like the best way to engage with the work of interpreting affect without claiming definitive mastery over what daughters and mothers were feeling and why.

Between politics and mother-daughter relationships, the subject matter of the interviews was intimate— and yet a stranger initiated these discussions. We had little preexisting knowledge of one another and had to feel our way through the boundaries of what could be asked and shared. Interviews with mothers and daughters often felt like a cross between a carefully staged scene and yet another encounter with something so ordinary it could scarcely need more attention. There were many instances where gestures, turns of phrase, and unfinished sentences created moments where something moved and was felt but went unspoken between the participants and me. These moments were as crucial to the layered meanings of the interviews as things stated outright.

Preparing for The Interviews

I approached the planning stage of this project with open curiosity about the kinds of relationships, activisms, and feminisms that contemporary mothers and daughters carry out. I understood activism, feminism, mothering, and daughtering as practices that anyone can enact rather than a specific standard to be met. My recruitment materials set broad parameters that invited anyone who identified with girlhood, motherhood, or daughterhood to participate. I left activism similarly undefined and was open to people who considered themselves activists for any cause. I decided to do semi-structured, in-depth interviews because I wanted to follow the participants as they described the connections – or lack thereof – between their political and personal lives. I combined direct narrative questions about activism, feminism, and their mother-daughter relationship—"How did you start with your activist work?"; "When did you first hear the word *feminism*?"; "What is your mother like?"—with more speculative questions that invited imaginative responses: "If you were interviewing mothers and daughters, what would you want to ask them?"; "What do you think a feminist future would look like?"

I also approached the planning stage with great hesitation. This openness toward the kinds of politics and relationships I would encounter extended from curiosity but also involved my own reluctance to impose on these relationships and their political implications. I was anxious about repeating the usual cycle of scrutinizing girls' inner lives or blaming mothers for social problems. I was unsure how I, a childless adult, would relate to either the daughters or the mothers and whether being between the two would create an insightful or detrimental distance between me and the participants. I was also unsure about how much of myself I should bring to the interviews. I did not want to reveal too much of my own ideals around feminism and activism and risk making a participant feel that their understandings had to meet this same standard.

I also was not sure if I should talk about my mother. I love my mother and I consider her my first feminist influence. However, I often find it difficult to talk about her without our relationship becoming distracting. I am a gay feminist scholar; my mother is a priest. People rarely know how to receive this information. Experience has taught me that revealing this part of my biography tends to shift the tone of the interaction as people are unsure if they are about to be subjected to a conversation about religion. With this in mind, I would answer questions about myself if participants asked but I tried to keep myself out of the way as much as possible during the interviews.

Beyond my particularities as a researcher, the fieldwork stage of this project was shaped by both the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and the typical difficulties of talking about mother-daughter relationships. I began recruitment in the fall of 2021 when my institution forbade most in-person fieldwork in response to COVID-19. While video conferencing made it much easier to coordinate with participants who lived in other parts of the country—especially mothers and daughters who did not live in the same household—many people were spending their entire work and school days on Zoom at the time. This made an additional two hours of Zoom calls unappealing for some while others did not have the devices or internet bandwidth available to accommodate an hour-long voluntary interview while also managing virtual work and school.

I sent over two hundred calls for participants to feminist and activist organizations, university gender studies and social justice departments, individual activists, and colleagues. My fixation on wanting was put into stark relief when I realized that no one wanted to participate in this research. The first barrier I encountered in exploring this relationship is that participation in a pair-interviewing method requires a positive enough mother-daughter relationship to facilitate discussing it together in front of a stranger – and

this does not describe every mother-daughter relationship. Even in the context of positive and supportive mother-daughter relationships, asking young people to sit down and talk about their politics and relationships with their mothers is asking a lot of them. There are many social conditions that steer girls away from talking too openly about the topics of this study. One of these conditions is expectations around who "counts" as an activist. Other scholars like Jessica Taft have found that politically active girls will decline to call themselves activists because they feel they have not done or experienced enough to earn the title and are instead becoming or learning activism (Taft 2006; 2011; 2017) Even when girls are invested in political action, they continue to receive the message that they should not take up so much space.

The other (and likely more impactful) reason for the low interest in the study is that girls are often expected to maintain harmonious relationships with the people around them and uphold the status and cohesion of their families—this can include protecting the family from prying questions asked by white professionals from state-sponsored institutions. The researcher is not separate from their society and enters relationships with participants that are always already contoured by social systems like white supremacy, colonization, and class inequality. Both historically and now, it is often "nice white ladies" like me who come to enforce white supremacy and colonization precisely by asking invasive questions to families who are racialized, poor, undocumented, and disabled. This is likely why most families who did participate were not only white but had some kind of existing familiarity and trust with educational institutions. The mothers and daughters interested in the study were overwhelmingly students, were currently working in education, or had heard about the research through a trusted friend or colleague who attended or worked for a university.

The Interviews

Once the interviews were underway, they were as varied as the mother-daughter relationships. I did not impose a consistent order of interviews to accommodate the mothers' and daughters' schedules. Sometimes, I would meet mother and daughter for the first time together for their pair interview; other times I would meet them individually for their solo interviews before the pair interview. For each family, the interviews took place over days, weeks, or even months. On a few occasions, the interviews all took place back-to-back in one day. While I remained alone and uninterrupted in my apartment, the participants were in more porous interview spaces as their families and workplaces hummed around them. Roommates would walk past and pets would demand attention. On two different occasions, a teenage son burst into the room to ask his mother a question while she was being interviewed.

I was not physically in the same room as the mothers and daughters I interviewed but the Zoom calls actually created a greater level of intimacy than I had assumed. Though we were separated by screens, participants would sit for interviews in their bedrooms and even position their laptops on their laps. I would not have been so physically close or in such intimate spaces during in-person interviews. This closeness contrasted with my own cautiousness in initiating questions about the more private aspects of people's lives and relationships. I had a very general structure to these interviews but I tended to order the topics of my questions to begin with activism, transition to feminism, and then arrive at mother-daughter relationships. Because I had recruited many participants through their activist work, I felt this was the most public topic to discuss with a stranger and we would build rapport by discussing politics before moving into family life.

Among the families participating, and particularly among the daughters, there was still a sense of protectiveness around how much could or should be entrusted to a researcher. There are many social pressures and stereotypes that pathologize women's and girls' roles in domestic life and, even in households with har-

monious relationships, many families understand the risks of being *perceived* through these stereotypes. During pair interviews, when mothers and daughters first described their relationships, it was common for them to describe their relationship as close but not too close. Heather, a graduate student and single mother and her daughter Danielle, a grade eight student, offered an example of this dynamic.

> **Heather** 01:34
>
> I call her my buddy. Cuz she's, I mean, most people who know me have met Danielle because she comes with me many places. You know, when she was little out of necessity, but now kind of, she's just fun to have around. So I'll ask you know, if she has a PA day "you want to come into work with me?" Not so much with COVID, but "and help me with something at the office?" Or "do you want to?-" you know, did this and that, so our relationship? my buddy I call it.

> **Danielle** 02:05
>
> Well, I wouldn't say like best friend stuff. Because like it's mother, daughter first, then, like friends, but I would say like, a very understanding, like, very talkative [both laugh]. But like, I'd say that we're very understanding. And we're like, listen, and like, we'll hear opinions. And then say our own clearly and that's tough. Yeah.

In her solo interview, Heather described how, as a single mother, she is viewed as uniquely responsible for any of her child's struggles. Heather continuously described her daughter Danielle as an easy child and a "houseplant." Dani, a bright and confident girl, described her life in the same pleasant terms. Still, Heather often returned to the idea that she felt others judged her based on her daughter's behaviour and therefore emphasized her daughter's good behaviour because good kids are believed to come from good parents. Danielle was also aware of this dynamic; when her mother described their relationship in terms of friendship, she quickly asserted that they were not too close and remained mother and daughter first. Their closeness was still within the appropriate bounds of a normal mother-and-daughter relationship.

Throughout this research, there was an ongoing tension between wanting to participate and not allowing the researcher too much access to private life. One example of this was Ellie and Elise. After a transgender student was attacked at her school, 17-year-old Ellie, who identified as straight and cis, devoted much of her time to organizing an anti-bullying pledge and a unity march in her community. Elise, a school guidance counsellor, was a family friend to Ellie, and had known her since she was in preschool. The two were very close (even choosing their own alliterative pseudonyms). They provided a great deal of support to one another as they both tried to advocate for queer and feminist changes in a conservative small town. Interestingly, Elise had her own teenage daughters who also joined Ellie in her anti-bullying initiatives and Ellie described her mother as very supportive of her work. Despite this, in their pair interview, they both expressed that it would simply be too awkward to participate in the study with family members who lived in the same household. Elise felt that her daughter might find such an earnest conversation to be "too cringey" and Ellie worried that this kind of interview process might stir up past conflicts with her mother. The two still understood their relationship to be a kind of mothering and daughtering that was as integral to their lives as their connection to their household family members; however, there remained a kind of refusal to allow the researcher too much insight into these relationships since both seemed to express how doing so would be essentially unbearable.

In other cases, a daughter would participate but the interviews never reached the pair interviewing stage

with their mother. Though one pair interview seemed to fall through because of scheduling conflicts, another failure seemed to stem from a daughter's desire to protect her mother. At age 20, Brett was already an experienced activist with much public exposure after advocating for comprehensive sex education in Ontario. We were connected through a mutual colleague and, while Brett was excited to participate, she worried that her mother, who struggled with chronic illness, might not be available for an hour-long Zoom conversation. I offered some alternatives, like a written interview, and, in the meantime, Brett was happy to meet with me for her solo interview. We talked for about an hour and Brett generously shared many stories of her activist work and had many astute things to say about the complexities of being a daughter. Toward the end of our conversation, we had the following exchange about how her mother was always supportive of feminist causes but not as interested in theoretical conversations as Brett:

Hannah 45:14

And, you know, despite that sort of being to material benefit, is that ever, like frustrating, that that level of depth isn't necessarily going to be part of the conversation?

Brett 45:24

Um, maybe. Don't tell my mom that I said that. I don't want her to feel bad [laughs]. Um, just don't, I mean- are you going to talk to my mom about? I'm just curious. So you're going to talk to my mom, but any of the specific things that I say here?

Hannah 45:41

No. I'll ask the same sort of questions. Like I'll ask her about feminism.

Brett 45:45

ok cool

Hannah 45:46

I will not report your answers back, no.

In the end, Brett never put me in touch with her mother. There could be any number of reasons for this; it is possible that her mother was simply not in good health at the time. However, while I will never know for sure, I am left to wonder if Brett decided that her daughterly responsibility was to protect her mother from not only this research but also from some of the opinions she had expressed during the interview.

There were also times when the mothers and daughters were not hesitant about sharing their lives and I was the one left feeling protective or unsure about the kinds of questions I should ask. When I interviewed Jessica and her two daughters, the three of them not only spoke candidly about race, gender, and their relationship, but they also had a disagreement during their combined interview. Jessica was a fellow graduate student, community organizer, artist and mother of four. I first met her two daughters, Nicole, age 13, and Daisy, age 11, during their family interview. The three gathered in Jessica's sunny office, surrounded by her paintings. As the interview progressed and Daisy and Nicole grew more confident speaking with me, the three began to debate what the girls were allowed to watch on TV. The girls argued that they were old enough to critically watch a Netflix program about social media influencers. They said that their brothers

made sexist comments about the main character's provocative clothes and Nicole explained that it was wrong to be dismissive of the showrunner's outfits because she was a transgender woman who had not been able to openly express her femininity earlier in life. Jessica was not impressed to hear that her children were watching a show about the consumerist lifestyles of wealthy celebrities that she so openly disagreed with. She wanted her daughters to embrace their own identities and not live lives consumed by the external pressures of misogyny, white supremacy, fame, and money.

During this exchange, I felt myself shift between feeling more like a mother and more like a daughter as each side made their arguments about the show. The girls' account of the show and their desire to keep watching it returned me to my girlhood and memories of feeling that my mother was out of touch or failing to recognize that I was growing up. I remember being Nicole's and Daisy's age and vigorously trying to have my maturity recognized and taken seriously by my parents by arguing about what I could watch, where I could go, or what I could wear. At the time of the interview, I was also an adult feminist concerned about the world that girls inherit. I agreed with Jessica's assertion that this kind of programming and celebrity branding are not only superficial but offer an incredibly narrow image of what it means to be a successful woman. Jessica was also rightfully concerned that this kind of hyper-consumerist television reinforces not only misogyny but also white supremacy, and, as she further noted in her interview, her concern about the media landscape available to her young Black daughters extends far beyond one reality show. I was caught between feeling aligned with mother and daughters but also recognized that this family's experiences did not perfectly mirror my own. I have a scholarly understanding of how the media and other institutions contribute to the adultification of Black children (Bailey 2021; Nunn 2018; Smith 2019) but this is not my lived experience. Daisy and Nicole do not experience the exact same sexism that I encounter and, while Jessica's concerns about media influence are familiar, I am not a mother.

There were also times when, instead of feeling hesitant to intervene or control the interview, I was actively engineering the kinds of activist subjects I sought to research. The recruitment phase of this study was an arduous experience; despite sending hundreds of calls for participants, interest remained low throughout the fieldwork process. I went through various phases during this lengthy process, including an "inspiring girl author" phase. This is where I must admit that I began inventing activists rather than simply looking for them. By the spring of 2022, I was trying to send more targeted recruitment messages to activists. I noticed many girls who received media attention for their work had written books to empower other girls. I reached out to several of these authors through their websites and publishers. This was fruitless in all but one case.

Samantha, who most often went by Sam, had written a book about gender expression for 4 to 8 year olds. I interpreted this as a political thing to do. When I talked to Sam, she was excited to talk about the book and said she had written it because of her own experience as a gender-non-conforming child but she did not see her work through the same activist lens that I did. For Sam, educating other people, especially young children, about the diversity of gender expression was a commonsense activity. She had considered the topic important but had not considered her writing to be activist work:

> **Hannah** 13:31
>
> Cool, and you know, do you consider like, you know, publishing a book about gender expression, would you file that under like activism or advocacy or, you know, would you consider it something else?
>
> **Sam** 13:43

Um, well, I haven't thought of it in that way before. So I'm not really sure. But I don't really know what else I would call it. So yeah, it is definitely something that I would stand up for, like, in any circumstance, really, if it, if it like, if it presented itself in that way, and it's like something that's really important to me that I think that should be like, advocated for.

Though I had intended to set broad parameters for activism, there were still moments where my notions of the political and what I wanted to consider political did not align with how girls saw their actions. I was left to wonder if I should leave girls with the agency to downplay their work or intervene and smooth over these lacking moments and insist that they are political. Either way, I struggled with how my adult inter-pretation of these girls' work would impinge on how they saw their own lives and work.

Feminist Futures

Whenever I asked more directly about wanting in the interviews, my questions would bring up complex emotions and a tense affect would return. I often asked mothers and daughters how they envisioned a fem-inist future. I usually prefaced this question by saying they did not need to be practical and could be free to speculate wildly about their best possible scenario. Most still prefaced their answers with caveats like "this will never happen" or "this can't really work." Ellie, who lived in a transphobic small town, replied to this question by saying that she would like to see *less* hate crime—not *no* hate crime or a community where gender liberation was possible. Ellie wanted just a reduction in the familiar daily violence. One of the mothers, Eleanor, a sexuality studies professor, cited *Cruel Optimism* (Berlant 2011) directly when she de-scribed how longing for a future you will probably never experience is painful. It is not that these mothers and daughters could not imagine utopian futures but doing so invited further disappointment – especially since the mothers in this study often watched their daughters confront the same social and political issues they had experienced in their own youth.

When Brett and I discussed feminist futures, I asked how she thought the internet would need to change to facilitate liberatory politics, to which she exclaimed, "I'm only 20!" She was right to feel exhausted by the question because adults often ask girls such questions. We ask young people open-ended questions about what they want and then we are stubbornly unsatisfied when we get the wrong answer. When I found myself repeating these prying questions, I questioned what I wanted from this research and how I was re-adhering these girls into this constant matrix of wanting.

Conclusion: What Does the Research/er Want?

Like all research, I know that my study was often left wanting and I was usually torn between ambitious kinds of wants and feelings of inadequacy. I began this project with a desire to return mothers to girls' studies and deep anxieties about imposing anything onto these mothers and daughters. Though I was crit-ical of how mothers have been pushed to the edges of girls' studies, I still absorbed the idea that what I was doing was a bad idea. I operated under the assumption that talking about mother-daughter relationships is risky and I was anxious that I was another adult researcher prying into girls' private lives. I was caught in a daughterly kind of desire where I both wanted to bring things together and maintain a cohesive relation-ship between mothering and girls' studies while also asserting my own insights through this research. I did not want to repeat girls' studies' usual exclusion of mothers because I did not want to, scholastically speak-ing, turn into my mother.

These pair interviews provided unique insight into girls' lives; mother-daughter interviewing should be ex-plored further in girlhood studies. However, despite the richness of these interviews, I am still not entirely

sure why I want mother-daughter relationships to be significant to girls' studies. This paper has charted some of my early thinking around what girls want and how their wantings are constructed in both the field and my dissertation research. There are still other axes of wants in the study and I am left with more questions than answers about what my research says about girls and mother-daughter relationships. Wanting is a central affect of this project, not just because mothering, daughtering, and feminism are all structured around a series of overlapping expectations and wants—What do these family members want from each other? From the world? From feminism?—but because there were times when I did not particularly want to do this research. There were too many emotions, too much to think about, and too many of my own feelings to consider.

Acknowledgements

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"We're less noticeable to people": Centering Tween Girl Activist Citizenship

by Alexe Bernier

Abstract: In recent years, there has been significant attention paid to girls who are engaged in activism. When we look at *who* has been recognized for their activism, however, mainstream exposure to girl activists has primarily included teenagers and youth. Girls of the tweenhood age, for example, are also engaged in activism but their efforts go largely unnoticed or face patronization. Instead of being taken seriously, the activism of many tween girls is: (1) clouded by the constructed inherent innocence of childhood, (2) entangled with the construction of (white) tween girlhood as a time of frivolity and fun, and (3) marginalized due to the adult-centric nature of citizenship in Canada and the United States. As the very structures that would traditionally allow for adults to make their voices heard are not designed for the equitable participation of children, tween girls are required to participate in creative ways. This article, therefore, frames tween girls' activism as citizenship and offers opportunities to both reconsider and validate these varied activist practices as legitimate democratic participation. Tween girls are already shaping their social, cultural, and political worlds, asserting that they belong and deserve to be seen, heard, and taken seriously. The lenses of societal and feminist responses need to be reoriented and refocused to see it.

Keywords: activism; case study; citizenship; innocence; social construction; tween girlhood

Résumé: Ces dernières années, les filles qui font du militantisme ont suscité beaucoup d'attention. Si l'on considère les personnes *que* l'on a reconnues pour leur militantisme, on s'aperçoit que les jeunes filles militantes sont surtout des adolescentes et des jeunes. Les préadolescentes, par exemple, participent elles aussi à des activités de militantisme, mais leurs efforts passent en grande partie inaperçus ou on les traite avec condescendance. Au lieu de le prendre au sérieux, le militantisme de beaucoup de préadolescentes est : (1) éclipsé par l'innocence inhérente à l'enfance, (2) intrinsèquement lié au fait que la préadolescence (blanche) est une période de frivolité et d'amusement, et (3) marginalisé étant donné que la citoyenneté au Canada et aux États-Unis est axée sur les adultes. Puisque les structures qui permettent traditionnellement aux adultes de se faire entendre sont loin d'être faites pour permettre une participation équitable des enfants, les préadolescentes doivent faire preuve d'imagination. Cet article présente donc le militantisme des préadolescentes en tant que citoyennes tout en donnant l'occasion de revoir et de valider ces diverses pratiques de militantisme pour en faire une participation légitime à la vie démocratique. Les préadolescentes façonnent déjà leur monde social, culturel et politique, en affirmant qu'elles appartiennent à la société et qu'elles méritent d'être vues, entendues et prises au sérieux. Les réponses sociétales et féministes doivent être réorientées et recentrées pour le voir.

Mots clés: militantisme; étude de cas; citoyenneté; innocence; construction sociale; préadolescente

Author: Alexe Bernier (she/her) is a PhD Candidate in the School of Social Work at McMaster University. Inspired by her many years of social work practice experience with girls in a community setting, her qualitative and arts-based doctoral research explores the experiences of young girls who are engage in activism, ultimately aiming to better understand how they assert themselves as citizens.

Introduction

There has been a significant increase in the recognition of girl's activism over the past number of years. High profile girl activists, such as Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousufzai, have become household names around the globe, signaling a shift in how we publicly perceive the political power of girls (Taft 2020; Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra 2022). While the activism of certain girls has gained mainstream attention, many girls all over the world are working to make social and environmental change in their communities and beyond without this same widespread public recognition. When we look more closely at which girls have been recognized for their activism, we can see that our mainstream exposure to girl activists has been primarily limited to older girls, such as teenagers and youth, groups which broadly include young people aged up to and sometimes beyond 24 years of age (UNESCO 2021). Greta and Malala, for example, were both 15 years old when they first gained the attention of the world. The activism of younger girls, such as girls of the tweenhood age (8-12 years old) (Cook and Kaiser 2004; Coulter 2014), remains largely invisible.

The invisibility of tween girls' activism from both mainstream media channels and the scholarly literature does not reflect realities. As a former community social worker who worked with girls in gender-specific community programs for nearly five years in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, I was honoured to witness and support tween girls who were vastly diverse in terms of race, class, and ability as they worked to create positive social and environmental change in their communities and beyond. While running an after-school program in 2018, I once watched a 10-year-old girl explain what was meant by the term "racial micro-aggressions" to another small group of girls of the same age, all while sitting in a pile of stuffed animals. She answered their questions and engaged in thoughtful discussion with them, showcasing both the critical analysis and patience required when engaging with those who might have different lived experiences or worldviews. In the summer of 2016, after a difficult conversation in summer camp about gendered stereotypes, a 10-year-old girl went home and had a discussion with her father about how hurtful it was when he told her she "threw like a girl." He vowed to never use that language again. Another 10-year-old girl, in 2019, started an advocacy group at her school to change their school's name after learning that it was named after one of the architects of residential schools (Pimentel 2021). Many years later, following national public outcry after the discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves of Indigenous children who had been forced to attend residential schools (Honderich 2021), their campaign was successful.

Despite the inspiring social and environmental justice work that I saw being undertaken by dozens of young girls throughout the five years that I worked as a community social worker, their work was often patronized if recognized at all by adults. Met with phrases such as, "It's cute that they're so passionate!" and "It's just a phase that they're going through," the activism of the girls that I worked with was frequently positioned as unworthy of serious consideration. It seemed that the emphasis was often placed on the playful, pink-ified characteristics commonly associated with tween girlhood, such as the image of a group of girls sitting in a pile of stuffed animals, and not with the important work that they were doing to influence change in their social, cultural, and political worlds. As I was struck by these discrepancies, I began to

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wonder why this was: what was it about tween girls, specifically, that deems their activism undeserving of attention and respect from adults? As citizens, don't they have the right to be listened to and taken seriously (UNICEF 1989)? How can we better listen to girls when they tell us what they want for their lives and their worlds? It was these experiences and questions that ultimately inspired my doctoral research, during which I explored the experiences of a group of girls aged 8-12 years from the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) of Ontario who engage in social and environmental change work.

Through both my community social work practice and my doctoral research, I have seen, spoken with, and learned that tween girls are engaging in all types and forms of activism to change their worlds. Overshadowed by the characteristics associated with tween girlhood, however, these activist efforts are often not interpreted as legitimate or valid contributions towards broader social and environmental justice endeavours. Adults generally fail to recognize that stereotypical notions of tween girlhood, political awareness, and a desire to work for change can exist in combination. As we dream and work towards more socially just futures, this urgently needs to change.

In thinking through the invisibilization of tween girls' activism, it is essential that we challenge some of the ways that tween girlhood has been constructed and instead move to center the tween girl citizen. For the purposes of this analysis, I focus exclusively on tween girlhood and subsequent understandings of tween girl citizenship as it has been constructed and familiarized in Canada and the United States. In this article, therefore, an extended proceeding from the annual Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes conference presented in May of 2023, I first analyze how one contemporary construction of tween girlhood—specifically for white, middle-upper class tween girls—has been established as a time of innocence, frivolity, and fun. This construction is inherently exclusionary of girls who do not fit within these categorical boxes and who are instead racialized, lower class, disabled, or who experience life at any of these intersections. I then use contemporary citizenship theory and critical childist perspectives to understand and position the activism of tween girls as a form of participation and assertion of their citizenship, ultimately centering tween girls in theoretical debates about citizenship and activism from which they are typically excluded. To further elucidate and anchor these ideas, I share and draw from a case study from my doctoral research featuring an 11-year-old girl activist. It is my hope that presenting a new way of thinking about tween girls' activism enables and encourages us to recognize them as citizens more clearly, hear their voices more loudly, and center their perspectives more intentionally.

Constructed Tween Girlhood: Innocence, Frivolity, and Fun

As with childhood, which means different things to different people over different periods of time (Bernstein 2011; Coulter 2014; Garlen 2019; Lister 2007; Walton 2021), tween girlhood is a construct. While childhood as we know it has been constructed over the past number of centuries, the concept of tween girlhood is relatively new. Although tween girlhood represents a gendered childhood that is further conflated by various other axes of social and identity power, what is particularly unique about the concept of the tween is that it is predicated on specific parameters of age. These age parameters tend to differ based on which literature is referenced. For example, Daniel Cook and Susan Kaiser (2004) and Natalie Coulter (2014) define tween girls as between the ages of 8-12 years, whereas Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2005) write about tween girlhood as encompassing the ages of 9-13 years. These wiggly parameters of tween girlhood may be enough to demonstrate that tween girlhood is not a clearly defined developmental period or natural aspect of a girl's life and is, instead, a construct. Yet, what is interesting about the construction of tween girlhood is the site at which this construction originated. The tween is a direct product of capitalist industry, fulsomely designed and constructed by marketing agencies to sell products to younger-aged girls (Coulter 2014). A brief history of this construction is helpful to illustrate this further.

Although the idea of tween girlhood started to gain traction following the Second World War with the emergence of "teenybopper culture" (Cook and Kaiser 2004, 214), it really materialized as we know it in the 1980s (Coulter 2014). As women and mothers took to the workforce in higher numbers throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the structure of the nuclear family changed (Coulter 2014). Mothers were no longer as available to take care of children in their homes and costs of childcare became more of a concern, resulting in the general trend of families choosing to have fewer children. For many families—particularly white, middle-class families—this also came with greater spending power as they had higher levels of disposable income (Coulter 2014). Marketers and marketing agencies noticed that young people had greater access to their family incomes through the form of allowances or that they had their own jobs to generate disposable incomes of their own. These young people therefore had access to money without the burden of bills or responsibilities; marketing agencies took this as an opportunity to intentionally build upon and exploit gender stereotypes of women as shoppers and apply these pre-existing ideas to their understanding of girls (Coulter 2014). Interestingly, boys were not constructed as consumers in the same way because boys were considered to be users of products, not the purchasers of them (Coulter 2014). Boys were understood to use the products that the girls and women in their lives bought for them. Young girls, therefore, and specifically young, white, middle-upper class girls who represented the status quo, were considered by marketing agencies to be frivolous spenders with a new pool of discretionary income: consumers. It was these conditions that effectively established the concept of tween girlhood that we are familiar with today (Cook and Kaiser 2004; Coulter 2014).

While the concept of tween girlhood was conceptualized and essentially created by marketing agencies, it is also worth noting that it was not constructed in a vacuum. Tween girlhood was constitutively constructed alongside the broader gendered, raced, classed, and able-bodied discourses surrounding childhood that shape our social, cultural, and political worlds, perhaps the most prominent of which is the discourse of childhood innocence (Robinson 2012). Emerging during the Enlightenment era, discourses surrounding childhood—and specifically white, middle-class, Christian, able-bodied childhood—constructed and understood the child to be synonymous with the "sentimental angel-child" (Bernstein 2012, 38) and thus naturally wonderous, wide-eyed, and innocent (Garlen 2019). For girls, who were expected to embody gendered characteristics of femininity such as submissiveness, domesticity, and, ultimately, sexual purity (Bernstein 2011), the innocence associated with girlhood was vastly different than the innocence associated with boyhood. During and following Enlightenment, it became the primary responsibility of adults to help children (especially girls) to maintain this innocence, protecting them from all potential influences that may be interpreted as corruptive (Bernstein 2011; Garlen 2019; Meyer 2007; Robinson 2008; Smith 2011), including exposure to certain knowledge or experiences. There is, therefore, an active relationship between the absence of what is considered to be adult knowledge and constructed childhood innocence, an important piece of the puzzle to consider when thinking about tween girls' activism.

While it is not my intention to monotonize or erase the very real and nuanced experiences of tween girls as a broad and diverse group, it is also true that tween girlhood as an idea has been constructed in a very particular and narrow way. There are therefore important distinctions to be made between tween *girls* and tween girl*hood*, with the former referring to the real lives of real tweenhood-aged girls and the latter referring to the social construction. The construction of tween girlhood as created by marketing agencies primarily included white, middle-upper class girls, which is aligned with the broader colonized, capitalist, white-supremacist, and patriarchal contexts of Canada and the United States. This construction does not reflect the complex realities of tween girls, who are infinitely diverse in race, class, ability, Indigeneity, and sexuality; nonetheless, it affects the ways in which some tween girls are perceived.

As constructed tween girlhood is closely aligned with the dominant social, cultural, and political characteristics commonly associated with childhood innocence, marketing agencies identified this as an opportunity

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to build a new corner of the consumerist marketplace (Coulter 2014). Perhaps coincidentally, the language used to describe childhood innocence, such as wide-eyed wonderment and obliviousness (Bernstein 2011) is synonymous with language often used to describe tween girlhood, such as irresponsibility and carefreeness (Coulter 2014; Taft 2011). Building upon the assertion that tween girlhood is defined by innocence, frivolity, and fun (Coulter 2021), while tying in additional gendered stereotypes of women as shoppers, this particular construction of tween girlhood was created by marketing agencies because they saw financial value in the potential of white, middle-upper class tween girls as consumers (Coulter 2014). Accordingly, tween girlhood has been intricately designed as a consumerist category, created to sell specific products to a specific segment of the consumerist market.

Tween Girlhood and Consumer Citizenship

Natalie Coulter (2014), Anita Harris (2006), and Jessica Taft (2014) have written about the ways in which the tween girl has been constructed as the ideal consumer citizen. This means that the perceived primary social, cultural, and political influence of tween girls is limited to the marketplace and that tween girls are able to sway this marketplace with their spending power (Coulter 2014; Harris 2006). It is acknowledged that because of their marketplace spending, tween girls have a significant impact on market trends, including everything from advertising strategies to which products are sold (Coulter 2014). As "citizens" in this context, this is often considered the extent of their influence. Perceived as generally uninterested in the rest of the world around them, instead consumed with popular music, fashion, and their peer groups, their impact as citizen-subjects has thus been conceptualized in a very limited way. What this constructed version of tween girlhood fails to consider, however, are the many ways that tween girls, in all of their diversity, are defining girlhood themselves beyond these narrow consumerist ideals. As such, their power as citizens has been grossly underestimated. It is thus important to completely rethink our understandings of tween girlhood citizenship and challenge the narrow and limiting ways tween girlhood has been constructed (Harris 2006; Taft 2014). This includes a reimagining of the concept of citizenship itself, an idea that continues to be explored by critical citizenship scholars.

Reimagining Citizenship

Traditional conceptualizations of citizenship include a general understanding that citizenship is related to nationality and nationhood status, indicated by a sense of membership or belonging (Lister 2007). Scholarly debates about citizenship have historically revolved around the concepts of citizenship *rights* and citizenship *responsibilities* (Cohen 2005; Larkins 2014). Citizenship *rights* refer to the civic, social, and political claims awarded to citizens by way of official citizenship legislation, which in democratic societies, for example, includes the right to vote (Cohen 2005; Isin 2008). Citizenship *responsibilities* are what we are expected to do to be considered good citizens, such as actually choosing to vote (Lister 2007). In the mid to late twentieth century, however, critical thinkers and scholars began to note that these citizenship rights and responsibilities are not experienced with universality. In other words, different people experience citizenship rights and responsibilities in different ways, while some people are actively denied citizenship rights and status in the first place. In Canada, for example, colonial policies (namely the *Indian Act*) prohibited Indigenous men from voting in provincial and federal elections until 1920, and Indigenous women were not granted the right to vote until 1960 (Elections Canada 2018); there are examples like this from around the globe and across history. It is because of these inconsistencies that it is important we instead think about a "difference-centered theorization to citizenship" (Lister 2007, 698), recognizing the many different ways that people are granted and experience citizenship.

These critical perspectives on citizenship first emerged with feminist and anti-racist scholars who questioned notions of equitable citizenship for the lives of women, racialized, and Indigenous people (Larkins 2014; Lister 2007; Roche 1999). Such critical analyses ask how citizenship is experienced differently on the basis of gender, race, sexuality, ability, nationhood status, and, more recently, age. To illustrate these nuances, Jeremy Roche (1999) draws from T.H. Marshall's citizenship theorizing to distill citizenship into three realms: the civic, the social, and the political. Roche (1999) writes that an equitable and inclusive citizenship model would sit in balance at the crux of these realms, holding all three in equal weight. To maintain the political dimension of citizenship, which might include the right to vote in democratic electoral process, civic structures must first be in place (such as legislation ensuring liberty to freedom of speech). One must also therefore have social citizenship, including equitable access to power and resources to influence decision making (Roche 1999).

Critical perspectives of citizenship provide opportunities to deconstruct and think about inequitable access to these three realms of citizenship. Indigenous men and women in Canada, for example, did not have access to civic and political dimensions of citizenship until 1920 and 1960 respectively (Elections Canada 2018). While Indigenous people may now have the right to vote, however, colonial legacies and systemic anti-Indigenous racism affect how Indigenous people are currently able to access social aspects of citizenship (Blackburn 2009). Just because legislation may be in place does not mean that it is equitably applicable or experienced. When thinking about the equity of citizenship from a childist perspective, therefore, the realities of children's citizenship become clearer. In Canada and the United States, which are adultist societies that privilege adults and adult knowledge over children and children's knowledge, children have very little access to social capital. Children also do not have access to the political or civic dimensions of citizenship because of age-based legislative limitations. In addition to these age-based legislative limitations, citizenship is also experienced by children differently along varied and intersecting axes of gender, race, class, and ability. Analyzing citizenship from a nuanced and difference-centered perspective therefore creates opportunities to explore how citizenship is heavily influenced by social structures and societal values at large (Lister 2007; Moosa-Mitha 2005).

Expanding on the work of feminist and anti-racist citizenship scholars, Larkins (2014, 8) writes that it is important to take "difference-centered, relational approaches to children's citizenship, that recognize and value children's practices and differences" to adequately understand the unique and sometimes subversive citizenship experiences of children. Within the context of the current analysis of tween girl citizenship, this points to the importance of centering the ways in which tween girls are practicing citizenship differently and outside of or beyond traditional citizenship structures. There is very little written, however, about how diverse childhoods are related to different experiences of citizenship. The following initial analysis about children's citizenship is exclusive of a gender, race, class, or ability, a mere reflection of the current children's citizenship literature. Through first drawing on the literature on children's citizenship, I explicate the various ways in which the construction of childhood affects how children are able to equitably engage as citizens. This includes an analysis of how the construction of childhood is inherently exclusionary, effectively placing children at the margins of adult-centered citizenship structures.

Conceptualizing Children's Citizenship

Reifying discourses about children and children's rights that emerged in the late twentieth century (Smith 2011), the development of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 marked an official declaration of children as rights holders, which was significant in the global movement for children's rights (Taefi 2009). The UNCRC asserts that children should be recognized as independent and capable social, cultural, and political agents in their own right (Cohen 2005; Lister 2007; Smith 2011; Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra 2022; Wall 2022) and recognizes "children's rights to participate, supporting and

being supported by understandings of children as social actors within their families, communities and society at large" (Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra 2022, 792). While the UNCRC has been adopted by almost 200 countries around the globe, it does not account for the ways in which perceptions of children, informed by constructed childhoods, affect whether and how they can actually participate (Tisdall and Ceuvas-Parra 2022). In Canada and the United States, and as discussed throughout this paper, these constructions have very real implications for how children are listened to and whether they are taken seriously, regardless of established international agreements.

Despite the ratification of the UNCRC, and although most children are "assumed to be citizens – they hold passports and except in the rarest of cases receive at least one nationality at birth" (Cohen 2005, 221), children are at the same time denied full citizenship rights. This denial of full citizenship rights, referred to by both Cohen (2005, 222) and Lister (2007, 717) as "semi-citizenship," is rooted in broader ideas that have been constructed around the capacity, rationality, competency, and knowledge of children (Cohen 2005; Larkins 2014; Lister 2007; Percy-Smith 2015; Roche 1999), ultimately informed by pervasive discourses of childhood innocence. To illustrate this point, Robinson (2012, 30) writes:

Children's production of knowledge has been dismissed and disqualified as local and naïve and unsophisticated. Children's knowledge has been subjugated through Western scientific discourses, such as philosophy and psychology, that have given credence to the authenticity of mature adult knowledge and experiences as rational and logical, over the perceived irrationality and naivety of children and young people.

Within the context of citizenship, the construction of childhood as a time of inherent innocence significantly affects whether their knowledge is taken seriously. The ideas that children produce about their social, cultural, and political lives and futures often face paternalism, and children are largely dismissed for their irrationality and lack of grounding in "mature" knowledge and experience. For tween girls who are working to create change in the world around them, this is a significant barrier to their knowledge being taken seriously. In addition to this form of epistemic injustice, however, how children are able to engage as citizens is also limited by the very structures that currently exist for them to do so.

Children's Activism as Citizenship

While the UNCRC has advocated for the recognition of the rights of children, there has been little done to accommodate for the different ways that children might choose and be able to participate socially, culturally, and politically outside of traditional citizenship structures (Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra 2022). Modes of citizenship remain quintessentially adult, meaning that citizenship, as a concept and as a practice, remains largely inaccessible to children (Lister 2007; Thorne 1987). Within Roche's (1999) terms, there are significant gaps in the civic and social aspects of children's citizenship in terms of children's participation. When we think plainly about the rights and responsibilities of children, we can see, for example, that children are not able to conclude legal contracts, their speech is heavily surveilled, and they are not granted autonomy or choice in many aspects of their lives – including over their own bodies (Cohen 2005). Considering participation as a way of claiming citizenship thus enables us to move away from a static definition of citizenship and instead towards one that is rooted in action (Percy-Smith 2015). In this understanding, citizenship is not just a status; it is also a process (Lister 2007; Percy-Smith 2015; Isin 2008 and 2009).

When thinking about citizenship within the terms of participation instead of purely within the terms of rights or responsibilities, we can thus also analyze how we tend to "fit children into political constructions which take adulthood as their starting point, rather than challenging the constructions themselves" (Wall

2022, 793). When we recognize that the structures that we consider to constitute citizenship have been designed by and for adults, we can also recognize that what we consider to be meaningful participation in these structures is similarly constructed. As the traditional structures of citizenship may not allow or account for the participation of children, we can instead challenge what we might consider to be participation in and of itself. When given no alternate choices within traditional citizenship structures, children assert themselves as citizens in ways that may be considered unorthodox when compared to traditional avenues of participation (Larkins 2014; Roche 1999; Tisdall and Cuevas-Parra 2022), essentially participating in ways that adults might not recognize as valid or legitimate. It is hard for us to see how children broadly, and tween girls specifically, are claiming their citizenship rights because it requires us to confront our own preconceived notions of what they can and should do, as well as what does and does not count as a practice of citizenship. Children are instead left to write their own citizenship scripts, participating and asserting their belonging in creative and often invisible ways.

In writing specifically about the activist practices of children, Roche (1999, 479) says, "Children have to start from where they are socially positioned. This means that they have to make their own space in spaces not of their making." Reflective of their diverse social positions, children make these spaces and engage in activism in varied and diverse ways. Children's activism challenges the power dynamics inherent not just in the relationships between adults and children but the power dynamics inherent to traditional citizenship structures that privilege adult participation. Engaging in activism is one way that children can disrupt the power structures that otherwise silence them. As tween girlhood has been constructed in a very particular way that generally serves to patronize and devalue the knowledge and ideas of tween girls, these disruptions represent some of the very few ways that tween girls can assert their belonging and citizenship. Tween girls who engage in activism remind us that they belong, that they are citizens, and that they have a right to be heard.

Anne, Tween Girl Activist: Confronting Barriers of Perception

Anne[1], an 11-year-old girl from Toronto, Canada, is a social and environmental justice activist with whom I had the privilege of speaking during my doctoral research project. One of Anne's parents first got in touch with me in the fall of 2023 after hearing about my doctoral study from a family friend. The intention of my doctoral research (approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board, #6495) was to explore the experiences of young girls who engage in activism. The criteria for participation was that participants must identify as a girl between the ages of 8-12 years old who was working to create social or environmental change. Once I confirmed with Anne's parents through the exchange of emails that Anne fit these criteria, we organized a time to meet over Zoom. During this Zoom call I was able to share information about the study with both Anne and her parents, obtain informed assent from Anne, informed consent from her parents, and conduct a semi-structured qualitative interview with Anne about her experiences of both girlhood and being a girl engaged in activism.

Anne is a white girl and, from the stories she told, is part of a politically active family. She shared with me that she had attended many protests throughout her lifetime, primarily surrounding issues of climate change and in demand of climate action but she was also an advocate for queer and women's rights. Anne had been previously involved in various political campaigns, the most recent being for Toronto's current mayor, and had been granted opportunities to speak to the media as well as to give presentations to classmates at her school about different social and environmental issues. She shared with me that she was primarily motivated by hope for better futures, adamantly stating that "…you need to hold out hope. You need to keep on trying until you get one more person who says yes, and then more, and more, and more."

Anne's motivation of hope for social and environmental change is consistent with what Jessica Taft (2011) found in her exciting ethnographic work about girl activists across North America. In Taft's research, girls asserted that their inclination to provide care for their communities through activism was rooted in their socialization as girls (2011). Instead of framing innocence as a trait that henceforth constructs girlhood as a period of obliviousness and incompetence,

> transforming girlhood's association with thoughtless naivete and innocence to an assertion of girls' inclination towards politicized optimism enables these young activists to place political value on the fairly common image of girls as "dreamy" and hopeful. These claims to emotionality, concern for others, optimism, and hopefulness substantially shape girls' political practice. (Taft 2011, 78)

Framed instead as an unrelenting hope for better futures, traits typically associated with girlhood thus became the very traits that moved them to engage in activism (Taft 2011 and 2014). In Taft's (2011) research, and in what Anne shared with me, hope and care for others, their communities, the land, and the world was what continues to motivate the political action of girls. Hope, therefore, is political and Anne in all of her hopefulness was taking a political stance.

While I was instantly impressed by Anne's clear passion for social and environmental justice, I was also struck by the stories that she shared about how she felt she was generally perceived when engaging in activism. When asked about how her identity as a girl impacted how she was able to create change, she shared frustrations with how she would see the media often paying greater attention to boys who are engaged in activist work:

> I think sometimes it means that we're less noticeable to people…or people try to not notice us, specifically, so like if there was a little boy who wants to support something in this protest…they [the media] might go them to make the views rather than going to me or the other girls at that same event who are doing the same or like…more work.

Anne's explanation for these biases was that media companies have to satisfy their viewers, and their viewer base might have been more open to seeing and hearing young people speak about social and environmental issues if those young people were boys. Despite her active involvement in climate change activism, and the fact that she had been involved in various causes and political organizing since she was "little," she saw that adult journalists would pay more attention to "the boys, and not the other girls who were there too." Her presence in these spaces was disruptive of ideas that typically exist about who is and should be doing social and environmental change work, including the notion that girls are politically disengaged.

As Anne spoke about the gendered biases that she experienced as a girl who was engaged in activism, she also spoke about the limited power that she had to influence change because of her age. She poignantly noted that she faced limitations in her activism because of the lack of "resources that you have and the power [that] you have over people, when you're, like, not an adult…." Through this statement, Anne directly recognized and acknowledged that children have little access to social capital (Roche 1999), pointing to the need to work collaboratively with adults because of the social and political privileges that adults have. Her experiences directly speak to the ways that age and gender, and the intersection of the two, affect how tween girls are (or aren't) taken seriously as activists and engaged citizens.

Although tween girls engage in activism through everyday acts to change their social, cultural, and political worlds, the subversive ways that they work to affect change is often rendered inconsequential with what has been constructed as proper participation in adult-centered citizenship structures. Even when Anne engaged in activist work that is congruent with adult forms of activism, such as her participation in political campaigns and protests, she felt and articulated that her and her ideas were not taken seriously in those

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spaces. In recognition of how girls are thus left to work for change at the margins of traditional participation practices, Taft (2014, 263) encourages us to acknowledge that "re-defining political engagement to include a variety of challenges to power relations outside of formal institutions can draw attention to a greater range of citizenship practices." In a variety of creative and innovative ways, tween girls are already shaping their social, cultural, and political worlds, asserting that they belong and deserve to be seen, heard, and taken seriously. The lenses of societal and feminist responses need to be reoriented and refocused towards the margins in order to see it.

Tween Girls as Activist Citizens of the Now

While activism might be typically thought of in terms of highly public actions such as protests, strikes, petitions, and sit-ins, contemporary scholarly literature states that activism can also include a broad range of revolutionary actions, including community service, small acts in our everyday, and care (Larkins 2014; Lister 2007). For tween girls, this may include advocating for more effective waste reduction in their schools, initiating conversations with their peers about the diversity of gender identities, or standing in solidarity with various communities online. It might include speaking with their peers about racial microaggressions while sitting in a pile of stuffed animals, like the girls I used to work with, and it might include participating in political campaigns, like Anne. Deconstructing preconceived notions of tween girlhood, as well as thinking critically about how and where people can engage in activism, allows us to see the many creative ways that tween girls are participating as citizens in their everyday lives. If we desire to venture towards more socially just futures, we first need to critically analyze how the construction of tween girlhood affects how we understand their activism and claims to citizenship.

Although this particular construction of tween girlhood was created as a consumerist category, tween girls influence their families, peer groups, schools, and communities far beyond the parameters of their consumer citizenship. Like their identities, their interests and passions are broad and diverse, including an interest in various levels of politics and the world around them. Unfortunately, the ways that the tween girl subject has been constructed means that the efforts of tween girls are very rarely taken seriously, if recognized at all. As the recognition of tween girl's contributions are limited to the realm of consumer citizenship, the other ways that they participate and engage as citizens go unseen. It is thus essential to gain a broader understanding of citizenship as a critical concept. Understanding the ways that the diversity of tween girls are pushing the boundaries of what has been constructed for them as idealized tween girlhood will create further opportunities to understand how they are instead defining themselves as citizens through activism.

As the very structures that would traditionally allow for adults to make their perspectives and ideas are not designed for the equitable participation of children, tween girls are required to participate non-traditional in ways and locations. It is not revolutionary, however, to encourage tween girls to attempt to fit within the systems of participation in which adults have determined to be acceptable or the norm (Harris 2006). We instead need to meet and honour them where they are already working to influence change in their peer groups, schools, communities, and beyond. Learning more about and platforming the stories of tween girls who are working to create change may illuminate the many ways that they are actively shaping our communities and beyond. This may require a serious reckoning with the very specific and limited ways in which we perceive and understand tween girlhood, recognizing their diversity, moving beyond their positioning as consumer citizens, and honouring them instead as activist citizens.

It has been said time and time again that our societies are strongest when a diversity of voices and perspectives are considered. While the activist practices of tween girls are pushing us to think about and live in the

world differently, our narrow conceptualizations of girlhood, of citizenship, and of activism deter us from taking their voices and actions seriously. Recognizing and understanding the activism that they are engaged in within the terms of citizenship creates opportunities to validate and legitimize this activism as important and meaningful modes of participation (Lister 2007), an essential part of ensuring that tween girls' ideas are considered in decision-making spaces that are typically prioritize and center adults. Tween girls, through their various activist efforts, are asserting that they are citizens of the now—not just citizens of the future.

Endnotes

1. "Anne" is a pseudonym chosen by the participant. This case study, as well as Anne's direct quotes, were approved for use by both Anne and her parents for this paper.

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Body Modification as Body Art:
Aging, Abjection, and Autothanatology

by Jessica Cameron

Abtract: In this article, I discuss my "anti-aging" body modification practices as body art. The art documents my bodybuilding programs, self-administered neurotoxin (Botox) injections, and skin resurfacing treatments. Susan Pickard (2020) argues that femininity and aging are associated with the abject. She maps the abject and non-abject onto Simone de Beauvoir's distinction between immanence and transcendence. Because "abjection should always be understood as an element of [...] oppression" (Pickard 2020, 159), my art practice could be read as an anti-feminist, ageist attempt to expel the abject. After offering a counter-argument that positions my practice as feminist, I use Kathy Acker's (1993) writing on bodybuilding to offer a third reading. Muscles grow when they are worked until failure. This practice of constantly coming up against the body's limits is a rehearsal for the ultimate failure of the body: death (Acker 1993). If thanatology is the study of death and dying, bodybuilding is autothanatology. My "anti-aging" interventions are similar; they are inevitable failures that cannot stop the aging process. In this way, my practice is a reminder that the body exists in a state of immanence, even while I may attempt to frame my immanence along transcendental terms.

Keywords: abject; aging; ageism; anti-aging; body art; body modification; feminist art; immanence; thanatology; transcendence

Résumé: Dans cet article, je parle de mes pratiques de modification corporelle « anti-vieillissement » comme étant un art corporel. L'art documente mes programmes de culturisme, mes injections de neurotoxine (Botox) autoadministrées et mes traitements de restructuration de la peau. Susan Pickard (2020) prétend que la féminité et le vieillissement sont associés à l'abject. Elle associe l'abject et le non-abject à la distinction faite par Simone de Beauvoir entre l'immanence et la transcendance. Parce que « l'abjection devrait toujours être considérée comme un élément […] d'oppression » (Pickard 2020, 159), ma pratique artistique pourrait être lue comme une tentative antiféministe et âgiste d'expulser l'abject. Après avoir présenté un contre-argument établissant que ma pratique est féministe, je me fonde sur les écrits de Kathy Acker (1993) sur le culturisme pour proposer une troisième lecture. Les muscles se développent lorsqu'on les sollicite jusqu'à l'épuisement. Cette pratique consistant à repousser constamment les limites du corps est une répétition de la défaillance ultime du corps : la mort (Acker 1993). Si la thanatologie est l'étude de la mort et du décès, le culturisme est une autothanatologie. Mes interventions « anti-vieillissement » vont dans le même sens; ce sont des défaillances inévitables qui ne peuvent pas arrêter le processus de vieillissement. Ainsi, ma pratique me rappelle que le corps existe dans un état d'immanence, même si je tente d'encadrer mon immanence selon des termes transcendantaux.

Mots clés: abject; vieillissement; âgisme; anti-vieillissement; art corporel; modification corporelle; art féministe; immanence; thanatologie; transcendance

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Introduction

Madonna introduced Sam Smith and Kim Petras' performance of *Unholy* at the 2023 Grammy Awards. It quickly became apparent, as Madonna herself noted (2023), that what was noteworthy about the event was Madonna's face, not the fact that Kim Petras was the first trans woman to win an award in the Grammy's history. The celebrity gossip magazines and social media commentators were quick to call Madonna and her face "unrecognizable," "scary," and "sad." These criticisms were largely levied against Madonna's decision to alter her appearance to look younger through surgeries and other means. Like many people, I received unsolicited Facebook "news stories" accompanied by unflattering photos of Madonna in the weeks after the award ceremony. As is common, the comment sections were particularly cruel. Commentators referred to her as a "poor old lady" who should have retired years ago. Most interestingly, from my perspective, were the many women in their 50s, 60s, and 70s who posted pictures of themselves to compare to Madonna: "I'm 63 and I've never had plastic surgery or Botox." "I just turned 57, all natural." In response, other commentators complimented these women by telling them, "Your skin looks so youthful" and "OMG, you look like you are in your 40s." And here we have it! Women are rewarded for looking younger than their years and punished for having visible work done. Media scholar Hilde Van den Bulck (2014) explains that celebrity culture worships youth and that celebrities maintain the allure of being "exceptional (super) human beings" through the illusion of agelessness (73). But while cosmetic surgery has become standard for celebrities, anti-aging interventions are quickly bifurcated into those which are "sanctioned" (producing "natural" and youthful effects) and whose which are "desperate" (producing unnatural effects that rupture the perception of youth) (Bulck 2014). Unsurprisingly, choosing not to get work done is not an option. As journalist Belinda Luscombe (2023) wrote in *Time*, "The laws of gravity and biology make it [ageing gracefully] impossible" (n.p.). "It's not as if older female celebrities who don't look as manufactured as Madonna are widely lauded. Nobody is heaping praise on more or less normal-looking women such as Madonna's 60-year old friend Rosie O'Donnell for aging gracefully" (Luscombe 2023, n.p.). You are not allowed to grow old. You are not allowed to get visible work done. You *are* allowed to get older but *only* if you continue to look younger than your chronological age. If you cannot do this, it seems you are expected to "retire" from public life.

Another interesting set of commentary came to light about Madonna's face at the Grammy Awards. The word "shame" appeared repeatedly. Some commentators said that "Madonna should be ashamed of herself" while others said that "it is such a shame because she used to be so beautiful." I will return to the politics of shame later in this paper, but suffice it for now to say that shame operates as a mode of social regulation; it disciplines us into "proper comportment." In this case, the "shame," or the violation of correct decorum, include: a) growing older and b) having had visible work done. This is, of course, not the first time women have been shamed for what are human physical features or bodily processes. Women did not regularly shave their bodies until the 1920s. Rising hemlines combined with Gillette's invention of the disposable razor blade and a desire for increased sales, helped to make hairless legs and armpits a social expectation (Edwards 2015). It is now the case that a woman with hairy legs and armpits is, at best, seen to be making a social statement or, at worse, seen to be distasteful. The shaming of growing older combined with the shaming of having had work done is creating a new social norm. If you do not have exceptional

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genetics, the social imperative seems to be that you get work done in secret. We are creating a future where women will feel compelled to get regular neurotoxin injections (Botox), small facelift surgeries, and other procedures so that results are present but imperceptible. Women who do not comply will be seen to have aged terribly compared to their peers or they will simply be read as having "let themselves go." Aging naturally might even become a signifier of poverty the way untreated rotten teeth are viewed at present. Indeed, we have already begun to live this new future. Celebrities like Jennifer Aniston and Jennifer Lopez have normalized looking like you are in your 30s while in your 50s. And then there is Cher who looks in her 40s while in her 70s! Insofar as getting older is a future that awaits us all, this trend is something that calls for political investigation.

Ageism, the public perception of aging women, and modifications to the aging body are starting points for this paper. Body modification refers to any practice of deliberately modifying the body's appearance. This most commonly refers to piercing, tattooing, scarification, and plastic surgery but is also sometimes used to refer to laser hair removal, circumcision, voluntary amputations, bodybuilding, dieting, and waist training. Body modification has been discussed widely by feminists. Radical feminists take an abolitionist position on the practice. Andrea Dworkin, for instance, reads it as a form of gendered violence particularly when done to adhere more closely to the feminine beauty ideal. Plucking the eyebrows, "fixing" the nose, or wearing a girdle are painful practices that train women to be masochistic and subservient (Dworkin 1974). Most feminists, however, take a more nuanced view. Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo (1989) uses Foucault to examine the social imperative to be thin. While extreme dieting and eating disorders are concerning, they may also be experienced as a form of protest by those engaged in the practice. Similarly, philosopher Francesca Cesarano (2022) critiques the view that even conservative modifications to the female body, such as hymen restoration surgery, are only ever expressions of internalized patriarchy. Because the costs of "non-compliance to social norms" are high, women's adherence to gendered expectations could be read as a "correct appraisal of what […] to pursue in their societal context" (647, 650). Modifications to the female body that present alternative visions of femininity are at times celebrated by feminists. Sociologist Victoria Pitts (2003) notes that amongst some pro-sex feminists active in the bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism (BDSM) community, tattoos, scarification, and piercings are seen as a seditious rejection of hegemonic femininity. For biologist and writer Julia Serano (2007), however, it is important not to position non-normative gender expressions as inherently more subversive than those considered normative. She argues that modifications to the (trans) body to appear more in line with gendered expectations should not be maligned even if pursued under systems of oppositional sexism that compel gender identities to be binary.

While I do not propose to resolve the question of whether body modification can be a feminist practice, this paper will look at modifying the body (specifically my "anti-aging" interventions) in relation to both feminist discussions of body modification and the tradition of feminist body art. Body art refers to a particular mode of creating fine art that makes explicit use of the artist's body. In body art, the artist's body acts like a medium similar to the way paint is a medium in the creation of a painting. As explained by art historian Amelia Jones (1998), body art overlaps with performance art but it is both more narrow and more broad than performance art; it is more narrow than performance art because it must make use of the artist's body in a salient way and it is more broad than performance art because it does not need to be performed for a live audience. Body art can be thought of as an inherently feminist practice because, as Jones points out, it displaces the (white male) Cartesian subject through an enactment of the artist's body "in all of its sexual, racial, and other particularities" (5). This gives historically marginalized artists an opportunity to narrate their embodiment on their own terms. In Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1964), for example, the artist sat on a stage in business attire and invited audience members to cut off pieces of her clothing. A more recent example is Marina Abramovic's *The Artist is Present* (2010) performed during a retrospective of her work at The Museum of Modern Art. Abramovic sat silently for 736.5 hours over the course of two and a

half months while gallery goers lined up to sit across from her. These works are both performance art *and* body art because audience members interacted directly with the specificity of the artists' bodies while the artists' bodies were pushed to their mental and physical limits. Another kind of body art is that which makes deliberate use of the artist's body in the creation of an art object. In *Purple Squirt* (1995), for instance, American artist Keith Boadwee filled his rectum with purple paint, sat at the edge of a canvas spread out on the floor, and ejected the paint from his body onto the canvas. The result was a queered drip painting reminiscent of Jackson Pollock. Another example is a series of prints I made called *44 Year Old Pussy* (2022). In this work, I covered my genitals in blue paint (evocative of Yves Klein) and made 44 body prints (one for every year of my life to date).
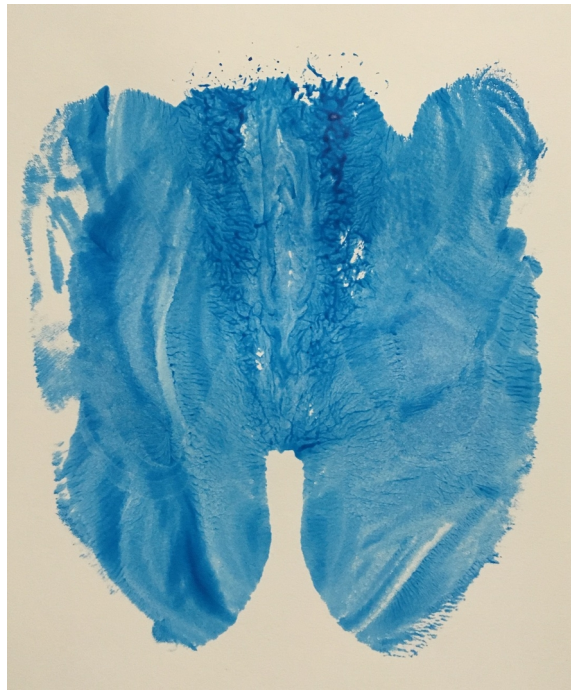
Image 1: *44 Year Old Pussy, 2022* (acrylic print on paper, artist proof, 16"x12").

But, as mentioned, this paper does not look at body modification or body art in isolation; it looks at the use of body modification *as* a body art practice. Body modification can be categorized as contemporary art when it is conceptually driven and framed in artistic discourse. This has historical precedent. The French artist ORLAN provides the most well-known example of an artist doing this type of work. In her piece *The Reincarnation of Sainte-ORLAN* (1990-93), she had a series of plastic surgeries to transform her features to appear more like those from famous works of art. "She asked her surgeons to give her the nose [of] Diana in *Diana the Huntress* (1550) [...] from the School of Fontainebleau; the mouth of Boucher's Europa from *The Rape of Europa* (1732-34); the forehead of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (1503); and the chin of Botticelli's Venus from *The Birth of Venus* (1485-86)" (The Art Story 2022). These surgeries were broadcast live to gallery goers and were punctuated by the artist (under local anesthetic) reading poetry and prose. Another example is Eleanor Antin's piece *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972). In this work, the artist documented a 37-day crash diet where she lost 10 pounds by taking four daily photos from the front, back, and both sides. Nearly 40 years later, Cassil offered a queer reinterpretation of Antin's work by creating *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011-12). In this piece, the assigned female at birth (AFAB) artist's body

becomes increasingly masculinized as they deliberately gain 23 lbs of muscle over 23 weeks through body-building, nutrition, and the use of anabolic steroids.

My current artistic practice, distributed under the name Jesika Joy, continues in this tradition. I document my "anti-aging" body modifications including my bodybuilding programs, self-administered neurotoxin injections, hormone replacement regimes, and skin resurfacing treatments. Sociologist Susan Pickard (2020) argues that femininity and aging are associated with philosopher Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject; the aging female body is considered particularly abject. Using existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, Pickard maps the abject onto the material realm of immanence (the realm of birth, ripening, withering, and decay) and the non-abject onto the idealist realm of transcendence (characterized by a control over temporality). Because "abjection should always be understood as an element of regulation, control and oppression" (Pickard 2020, 159), my art practice as a middle-aged, white, able-bodied, cis woman could be read as an anti-feminist, ageist attempt to expel the abject and deny temporality. After exploring the argument that my work is anti-feminist in some detail, I provide an oppositional reading that positions my work as feminist. These two conflicting readings locate my practice within the unresolved feminist debates regarding the status of body modification. Furthermore, if one refuses to resolve the feminist contradictions of my work, a third reading becomes possible. This is to view my art as autothanatology. Postmodern essayist Kathy Acker (1993) explains that muscles grow when they are worked until failure. This practice of constantly coming up against the body's limits is a kind of rehearsal for the ultimate failure of the body: death (Acker 1993). If thanatology is the study of death and dying, bodybuilding is autothanatology. My "anti-aging" interventions are similar; they involve short term failures (neurotoxins cause facial muscles to fail to contract) and long-term failures (no amount of neurotoxin can permanently stop the facial aging process). In this way, my art practice is a reminder that the body exists in a state of immanence, even while the feminist academic / artist may attempt to frame her immanence within transcendental terms.

Invisibility, Abjection, Immanence, and the Aging Female Body

Feminist media scholar and art theorist Michelle Meagher (2014) argues that older women are subjected to a kind of invisibility. This disrupts the common view in feminist studies of visual culture that the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of women, as articulated by Laura Mulvey, constitutes a primary and totalizing means of women's subjugation (Meagher 2014). Meagher explains that the to-be-looked-at-ness of women is not universal, long lived, or experienced by women as universally oppressive. Furthermore, Mulvey's theory overlooks the cruelty older women experience in *not* being seen. As Meagher writes, being looked at might actually be "an enabling condition of our lives and the primary mode of entrance into intersubjective experiences and encounters with one another" (131). The threat of invisibility extends beyond the lived experiences of aging women to media representations. With a few notable exceptions, the hit show *Frankie and Grace* being one, older adults are rarely seen on television, in movies, or in advertisements. When they are portrayed, those representations tend to be of men or they tend to be negative (Edstrom 2018). One need only watch a few Disney films to observe the ways in which aging women are associated with evil and pitted against younger women (Elnahla 2015, Do Rozario and Waterhouse-Watson 2014). Negative portrayals of older women further extend to fine art. Meagher (2014) points to August Rodin's piece *She Who Was the Helmet Maker's Once-Beautiful Wife* (1885) as a particularly damaging example.

The basis for invisibility and negative portrayals of older women might be found in theories of abjection. Kristeva (1982) defines the abject as that which troubles clearly defined boundaries; the abject "disturbs identity, system, order" (4). It is neither subject nor object, it is neither me nor not-me. The abject can best be defined as an otherness that pervades our lives and troubles our sense of security. But it is not just that we find the abject unsettling, the "abject engenders disgust on account of its ambiguity" (Pickard 2020,

158). Bodily fluids are emblematic of this; they are subject/me (in that they come from me) and they are object/not-me (in that they are no longer a part of me). Women and femininity are associated with the abject because the AFAB body, more so than the AMAB body (assigned male at birth), is said to blur the lines between subject and object, me and not-me. The AFAB body bears the possibility of menstruation, gestation, and lactation; it sometimes leaks blood involuntarily every 28 days, it sometimes grows a parasitic not-me within the me, and it sometimes produces a food from fluids and tissues that were once a part of the subject to be consumed by an external subject/object. For Kristeva, the abjection of bodily fluids is connected to the abjection of death and dying.

> These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (1982, 3).

That the corpse is so sickening provides clues as to why aging is also associated with the abject. Visibly carrying the signs of having grown older blurs the lines between life and death; wrinkles, sagging skin, age spots, rounding spines, grey and thinning hair, remind the living that the border between life and death is one that we must all eventually cross. White Western culture denies this reality by trying to expel the older body from our line of vision so as to hopefully expel it from our consciousness as well.

Beauvoir (1953) distinguishes between the material realm of immanence and the idealist realm of transcendence in her canonical text *The Second Sex*. Immanence is associated with the kinds of unthinking, repetitive labours that have historically fallen to women.

> The domestic labours that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity imprisoned her in repetition and immanence; they were repeated from day to day in an identical form, which was perpetuated almost without change from century to century; they produced nothing new. (Beauvoir 1953, 88)

Here we can think of gestating, birthing, and nursing infants, the raising children, preparing meals, and cleaning homes. These labours need to be done again and again on repeat and (with the exception of children who eventually reach adulthood) women have little to show for their hours, weeks, months, years of work. Transcendence, conversely, is associated with men; it is associated with the kinds of thinking, inventive labours that elevate humans beyond mere existence.

> On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; [...] this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. But man assures the repetition of Life while transcending Life through Existence; by this transcendence he creates values that deprive pure repetition of all value. In the animal, the freedom and variety of male activities are vain because no project is involved. Except for his service to the species, what he does is immaterial. Whereas in serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future. (Beauvoir 1953, 89-90)

Examples of transcendent labours include writing manuscripts, designing buildings, forging constitutions, sculpting statues. These labours may be done again by the same person or by different people but they are not done in the exact same way twice as the very purpose of the endeavour is to create something that has opportunity of being new.

Kristeva's (1982) theory of the abject and Beauvoir's (1953) theory of immanence are related. In fact, as ex-

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plained by Pickard (2020), "Immanence is directly constituted through women's abjection" (158). While transcendence "refers to a control over temporality," immanence "is associated with developmental cycles, blooming, ripening, withering, rotting and decaying" (Pickard 2020, 158). These developmental cycles map roughly onto common stages of a girl's / woman's life from puberty, to adulthood, to maternity, to menopause, to old age, to death—stages of life that tie women to animality, repetitive immanence, and the abject. With the onset of menses, the girl is initiated into the material realm of immanence and her body becomes associated with the abject. This continues into adulthood and is affirmed should she decide to gestate a fetus, birth an infant, or nurse. Aging and menopause are particularly difficult for women based upon how they are often socially constituted in relation to these life stages. While fertility might tie women to immanence and the abject, infertility is worse. The infertile woman is ambiguous; she is female but not by an important standard through which women are defined in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, she has taken on another signification of the abject, that of aging itself. This association of the AFAB body to the abject, specifically the aging female body, is amplified by the fact that the abject and immanence are often depicted from the vantage point of the youthful male (Pickard 2020).

Body Modification / Body Art Practice

I have been situating my "anti-aging" body modifications as body art since 2021. This began while doing an online workshop led by artists Kate Berry and Vanessa Dion Fletcher through the Abrons Arts Center called *Performance Art: The Human Body, Intimacy, and Taboo*. We were asked to prepare a piece for our last day of class. I had been wanting to do a skin treatment anyway so I decided I would document it for the group. Over the course of two days, I inserted a total of 107 PDO (polydioxanone) and PCL (polycapro-lactone) threads into my face and neck. PDO and PCL thread is what is used to suture wounds and incisions during surgery. Older adults have thicker skin around healed stitches that cannot be accounted for by scar tissue alone; physicians found that suture materials encourage collagen synthesis as they dissolve in the skin. The PDO and PCL threads used for "anti-aging" purposes are attached to a thin sterile needle. The needle is inserted into the dermis parallel with the epidermis and when the needle is removed the PDO or PCL thread is left behind in the skin. In my documented performance, I inserted anywhere between 4 and 10 threads at a time and took a still photograph each time with the needles still inserted into the skin. The still images were then edited into a short video called *Beauty Kink: A Meditation on the Obscenity of the Inevitability of Death*. This title refers to the fact that visible signs of aging are treated as shameful obscenities in need of "correction."

Image 2: *Beauty Kink: A Meditation on the Obscenity of the Inevitability of Death*, 2021 (video still, 1:00 min).

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This piece led me to make a series of works documenting a variety of body modification practices. I inject liquid PCL a few times a year. This functions similarly to PDO and PCL threads. The liquid is put into select areas of the face and neck to induce collagen synthesis. I do microneedling of my face, neck, and body approximately once every 6 weeks. Microneedling involves using a pen or roller to create thousands of small puncture wounds in the epidermis and dermis. This controlled injury results in a thickening of the skin when it heals. I do my own neurotoxin injections once every 4 months. I studied facial anatomy and injection techniques during the pandemic. I import the neurotoxin from South Korea and use insulin syringes to inject the drug into select muscles of the face and neck to cause temporary paralysis which lessens the appearance of wrinkles. I have filler injected professionally once every year or two to replace age-related facial fat loss. Areas of the face that are done when "needed" include the forehead, temples, tear troughs, cheeks, and (with moderation) the lips. I do skin resurfacing treatments, such as lasers and chemical peels, every few years. I recently had two professional CO_2 laser treatments done on my face and neck and took a picture each day after the procedure to document the week-long healing process. And I just had my first plastic surgery; I underwent an upper blepharoplasty to remove excess skin of the eyelids that had started to rest on my eyelashes. The final thing I document in my work are my bulking and cutting diets. I alternate between eating in a caloric surplus while weight training (with the intention of putting on muscle mass) and eating in a caloric deficit while weight training (to maintain muscle mass while losing body fat). I take before and after pictures and share how much weight I gained or lost and how many quarter inches I gained or lost from my waist.

Image 3: *Healing From CO2 Laser Resurfacing (Day Two)*, 2022 (digital photograph, dimensions variable).

Image 4: *Before Successfully Gaining 14.5 Pounds, 2022* (digital photograph, dimensions variable).

Image 5. *After Successfully Gaining 14.5 Pounds, 2023* (digital photograph, dimensions variable).

Reading of Body Modification / Body Art Practice as Anti-Feminist

These body modification practices can be read as anti-feminist. If read through Dworkin (1974), they become a capitulation to male dominance. If read through Cesarano's (2022) more nuanced position, they become a careful calculation of how best to navigate one's social context. Either way, modifying the AFAB cannot be divorced from the patriarchal environment within which it is practiced. Here, I will read my work as a middle-aged, white, able-bodied, cis woman, as a postfeminist, ageist attempt to expel the abject. According to Rosalind Gill (2007), postfeminism can be defined as representations that entangle feminist and anti-feminist themes. Postfeminism emphasizes empowerment and choice but what is portrayed as empowering is narrow and is often tied to choosing to be sexually attractive along conventionally defined terms. For Gill, postfeminism "represents a shift in the way that power operates: from an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing, narcissistic gaze" (151). Objectification becomes freely chosen by active agents and it requires constant monitoring. According to this definition, my body modification practices are certainly postfeminist. These procedures come on the heels of constant self-surveillance: when I notice my crow's feet coming back, it is time for more neurotoxin; when I notice a crepiness of the skin on my neck, it is time to microneedle; when I notice my tummy is starting to bulge over my pants, it is time to end my bulk and start a cut. To argue that I am simply exercising bodily autonomy overlooks the relentless ageist messaging women receive to look younger. Or, as Gill asks, if "women are just pleasing themselves," why is "the resulting valued 'look' so similar"? (154).

This self-policing, postfeminist tendency seen in my body art work can also be theorized through Judith Butler's (1997) understanding of subjection. Subjection refers to the process by which one becomes a subject through the workings of discourse and the ways that subjects internalize social constructions. Applied to questions of gender and age, this would be the ways that we become subjects through the internalization of discourses that constitute gender and age as they intersect with race, sexuality, and ability. "Subjection," Butler writes, "consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency" (2). We exist as social agents through labels and identities that have been imposed on us and that ground our social intelligibility. An interesting implication of this, for Butler, is that we develop affective attachments to the discourses through which we enter sociality. Applied to the question of why feminist women sometimes engage in "anti-aging" practices, this might have to do with the emotional investments that middle-aged and older women have in belonging to the category of woman itself. Put another way, if being a woman has been discursively linked to youth, even feminist women might feel the need to create the illusion of youth in order to, in the words of Shania Twain, "feel like a woman." For Beauvoir, as described by Pickard, this can be explained by the ways that "woman," by definition, "refers to the subject who has become a subject through making herself an object" (161). Menopause and aging, for Beauvoir, offer women the opportunity to stop existing as an object to themselves and to move from a life of immanence to a life of transcendence. But, as Pickard (2020) notes, "Instead of seizing the opportunity for liberation, [many women] may suffer a crisis of self-reproach and a desire for retaining the non-abject youthful self through aesthetic and other practices" (161). If woman only exists as woman insofar as she remains an object to herself, this makes sense. Or as Butler (1997) might conclude, we would "rather exist in subordination than not exist" (7).

When read as postfeminist subjection, I have to ask myself what kind of future I am creating through my body modification / body art practice. Feminists have long been fighting against the constraints of unrealistic beauty ideals. Could it be that I am undermining this struggle in my art work? It would seem that the feminist thing to do would be to find a different way of being a middle-aged woman, a way that does not involve the crisis of self-reproach described by Pickard (2020). Shannon Bell (2010) does this in her book *Fast Feminism*.

> One of my political commitments [...] is to queer the old female body, to fuck with the signs of aging while presenting them. Gesture, movement, style and body composition meet and meld with age spots, knee wrinkles and sagging upper-arm undercarriage. It doesn't matter how many years one has worked out, or how long and how hard each time, time will get you. Perhaps that is why time is my most worthy and best-endowed seducer. (21)

Here, Bell is engaged in a project of resignification. Instead of erasing the aging AFAB body or participating in its desexualization, she renders it highly visible and foregrounds its sexual agency. Indeed, because gender, as it intersects with age, is performative, it can be performed differently. Using the metaphor of theatre, Butler (1988) explains that we might not be able to choose the gendered scripts that we have been given but we do have some leeway in terms of how we read them. We "are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance" but the gendered and aged body "*enacts interpretations* within the confines of already existing directives" (Butler 1988, 526, my emphasis).

Reading of Body Modification / Body Art Practice as Feminist

My body modification / body art practice can also be read as feminist. If read according to pro-sex feminists active in the BDSM community, as discussed by Pitts (2003), my work could be seen as a rejection of hegemonic femininity in that any and all modifications are made explicit. Indeed, here, I will explore the idea that altering the body to adhere to hegemonic beauty ideals need not be read as a postfeminist mark of one's attachment to the restrictive discourses through which one has come into sociality *when* those alterations are deliberately made public. Artist Nina Arsenault provides an example. Arsenault is a trans woman who wrote about the $200,000 worth of surgeries she had to feminize her face and body in her one-woman play *The Silicone Diaries*. Judith Rudakoff (2012) explains that Arsenault changed her external appearance to better match her feminine self but that she did so "*unreasonably* by embodying extreme and even unreal representations of Western beauty" (3). Arsenault has modelled herself after women like Pamela Anderson who, Arsenault argues, is a "caricature of a woman" which makes Arsenault "an imitation of an imitation of an idea of a woman" (White 2016, 175, quoting Arsenault). Arsenault is thin with large breasts, hips, and lips; she is what many would consider to be the feminine ideal. Shannon Bell (2012) writes that "she is beauty," the "perfect female given-to-be-seen" (95). While feminists like Dworkin might argue that Arsenault's project is anti-feminist in chasing unrealistic beauty standards that cater to the male gaze, Bell disagrees. Using Jacques Lacan's concept of the *objet a*, Bell argues that Arsenault's work is feminist precisely because it discloses the process involved in becoming the feminine beauty ideal. By deconstructing the binaries of real / fake and authenticity / artifice (Rudakoff 2012), Arsenault exposes the fake and artifice present in all constructions of femininity. She deconstructs hegemonic beauty ideals and, in so doing, queers male gaze. While my body modification / body art practice does not go to the same lengths as Arsenault's, I too reveal the suffering involved in trying to adhere to unrealistic beauty ideals and, in so doing, hopefully demystify expectations of "aging gracefully."

Another way my body modification / body art practice can be read as feminist is in how it confronts shame. As I mentioned earlier, women are both shamed for growing older and shamed for having work done to appear as if they have not aged. Femmegimp scholar Loree Erickson (2014) explains that "shame is not so much a psychological state of individuals [...] but [...] a socially based harm which oppressed groups are subject to in particular ways" (Erickson 2014, 155, quoting Abby Wilkerson). In this way, shame operates as a strategy of stratification. If guilt says you have done something wrong, shame says you *are* wrong for not living up to social standards that could never include you; you are not male enough, you are not young enough, you are not white enough; you are not straight enough, and so on. This points to one of the most insidious aspects of shame: it requires an internalization of social hierarchies and oppress-

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ive ideals. "Shame is a panoptical device used to urge bodies toward assimilation and normalcy" (Erickson 2014, 157). We learn to police ourselves. But what if instead of self-regulation, we rejected exclusionary social standards? This is what Erickson does in her film *Want*. The film intersperses discussions of ableism with images of the author engaged in explicit sex acts. In doing so, Erickson disarms the shame that would tell her that disabled bodies are not sexy and that disabled people are not allowed to be sexual. As she explains, "Rather than hide away, deny, and ignore those very sites of the deepest shame, we must not only embrace them and learn from them, we need to *flaunt* them" (155).

The practice of "flaunting it" has been integral to body art since it came onto the art scene in the 1960s. Because it is the oppressed who are associated with the abject (Pickard 2020), it is women, older adults, people of colour, trans folks, and disabled people who are told to feel shame on account of their embodiment. As such, body artists from oppressed groups have embraced the abject as part of their art practice. Rina Arya (2014) explains this history in her article *Taking Apart the Body: Abjection and Body Art*. "Abjection became a tool of social critique in which marginalized groups could articulate their concerns as a way of empowering their minority status" (5). Artists, Arya continues, "turned to the very site of repulsion and stigmatization that they embodied – their gender, sexuality, race, disability – [in order to destabilize] Western notions of otherness" (7). They did this by highlighting their bodily specificity, by deliberately blurring the lines between subject and object, by incorporating abject materials into their work, and by engaging in sadomasochistic activities (Arya 2014). We can see these techniques employed in my own art practice. I highlight the specificity of my middle-aged, white, able-bodied, cis female embodiment (it is my body that is on display). I am both the subject and the object of my practice (my own body becomes the object of my interventions). My imagery often shows abject materials in the form of bodily fluids (puncture wounds bleed, abraded skin scabs, occasionally infected lesions puss). And I take on the role of both sadist and masochist (my self-administered and professional treatments are, no doubt, painful). By flaunting my body modification practices and making them into art, I refuse the shame that would have me either deny my middle-aged body or the fact that I am taking measures to minimize the appearance of that aging.

Reading of Body Modification / Body Art Practice as Autothanatology

The fact that my art practice, and body modification more generally, can be read as both anti-feminist and as feminist points to a third reading. If we argue that body modification is definitively anti-feminist, we risk attributing false consciousness to women who engage in such practices (Cesarano (2022). If we argue that body modification is definitively feminist, we risk forwarding a postfeminist argument that does not take seriously the manner in which women are disciplined to take on, what Gill (2007) would call, a "self-policing, narcissistic gaze" (151). While reading my art practice in a binary fashion does not illuminate the ultimate meaning of the text, the fact that it can be read both ways implies that the work might itself be politically ambivalent. This is, in my analysis, the same political ambivalence that can be seen in the work of ORLAN, Antin, and Cassil, discussed earlier. All three artists situate their practice in relation to feminist art and speak to how the gendered body is socially received while simultaneously enacting a kind of violence against the body by way of plastic surgery, extreme dieting, or anabolic steroid use. Cindy Sherman and Suzy Lake's later work could also be called politically ambivalent. Both artists create imagery that directly addresses questions of aging and femininity in distinctly feminist ways but, as Meagher (2014) points out, some of these works, such as Sherman's series *Untiled* (2008) and Lake's *Forever Young* (2000), "reproduce the ageist structure of the look" (141). Martha Wilson's later work also addresses questions of aging and femininity. Like Sherman and Lake, Wilson has been engaged in practices of self-representation over the course of her multi-decade career (Meagher 2014). And, like Sherman and Lake, this permits the artist to explore "the shifting relationship to visibility that attends aging" (106). But unlike Sherman and Lake, Wilson produces "images that embody the passing of time" (141). In *Beauty + Beastly* (1974/2009), for example, the artist juxtaposes two self-portraits, one from 1974 when she is young and one from 2009 when

she is older. In looking at the work, we cannot miss that this is the same person but we also cannot miss that 35 years span the two photographs. As Meagher explains, "What we see is not an old woman and a young woman, but a young body that will become old and an old body that was once young" (140-1). This, to my mind, represents a feminist practice of autothanatology; Wilson simultaneously marks that human bodies exist in finite time while reflecting on how this universal condition is interpreted differently according to how one is gendered. I do not claim that my body art is as successful as Wilson's self-portraits, but I would like to move on from the unresolvable question of whether or not my work is feminist to read it, similarly, as a practice of authothanatology.

In her well-known piece, "Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body," Kathy Acker (1993) struggles to articulate her bodybuilding practice in verbal language. "The general law behind bodybuilding is that muscle, if broken down in a controlled fashion and then provided with the proper growth factors such as nutrients and rest, will grow back larger than before" (22). Breaking the muscle down requires working the target muscle close to failure. But this is a meticulous process and the practitioner must execute great care so as not to injure themselves. As such, bodybuilders spend their time in the gym meditatively counting weights, reps, sets, and breaths. Language is reduced to a few verbs, nouns, and grunts. This is why Acker calls bodybuilding a "*language of the body*," one that offers a potentially different kind of cognition based in the specificity of the body as it exists in the moment (23). The body is different each time the bodybuilder steps into the gym; the body is "controlled by change and by chance" (Acker 1993, 26). It is in this confrontation with the body that Acker gets to something else of significance. Because the failures of bodybuilding are situated in the materiality of the body, it is a reminder that the body is forever moving towards its ultimate failure, "towards death" (Acker 1993, 23). In this way, bodybuilding is thanatology applied to the self.

Acker's (1993) analysis of bodybuilding provides a model through which I can analyze my own "anti-aging" interventions. My body modifications constantly bring me up against the limitations of the body and its ultimate failures. On a micro level, the purpose of neurotoxin is to cause facial muscles to *fail* to contract. On a macro level, all "anti-aging" interventions are inevitable *failures*; no amount of neurotoxin, hormone replacement regimes, skin resurfacing treatments, bodybuilding programs, or plastic surgeries can stop the external or internal manifestations of aging. And, as in the case of bodybuilding, the body never responds the same way to the same stimulus. It is always about this particular body, having these particular healing responses, at this particular point in time. Sometimes a muscle that usually requires 2 units of neurotoxin requires four. Sometimes an injection point will develop an unexpected hematoma. Documenting this process becomes a public meditation on my private experience of slowly moving towards the end of my life.

If my body modification / body art practice can be considered autothanatology, then it necessarily aligns with the realm of immanence. This is paradoxical. On the one hand, my practice embraces the materiality of the body and its impermanence; it accepts the body's embeddedness in developmental cycles and rejects the lie that temporality can somehow be controlled. On the other, my practice is situated within the thinking, inventive labours of the idealist realm. To my mind, this is where the feminist credentials of my project are located, not only in question of how we read "anti-aging" body modifications, not only in the question of whether or not we have made these modifications adequately public so as to be deconstructed, and not only in the question of whether or not they adequately eschew the shame that would have us modify our bodies in private. What is feminist is the deconstruction of the immanence / transcendence dualism itself. My body modification / body art practice embraces immanence along transcendental terms and as such my immanence becomes tied to the project of "transcending Life through Existence" (Beauvoir 1953, 89). Life is not simply reproduced but new values are created as I shape the future, even if those values might sometimes be conflicted. This is also a rejection of Cartesian dualism.

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> In our culture, we simultaneously fetishize and disdain the athlete, a worker in the body. For we still live under the sign of Descartes. This sign is also the sign of patriarchy. As long as we continue to regard the body, that which is subject to change, chance, and death, as disgusting and inimical, so long shall we continue to regard our own selves as dangerous others. (Acker 1993, 27)

Acker's writing here indicates that deconstructing the division between immanence and transcendence also becomes a means of disempowering the tyranny of the abject and its attempts to oppress and solicit self-regulation. Embracing the body, its rhythms, and materiality helps us accept mortality as something that is not relegated to certain Others; mortality is an equalizing universality.

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The Bar Butch in the Attic: Lesbian Hauntings in Jane Rule's "In the Attic of the House"

by Emma Wood

Abstract: In an analysis of Jane Rule's "In the Attic of the House" from her 1981 anthology *Outlander*, this article examines how Rule uses both the figure of the lesbian and the figure of the ghost to demonstrate the complex, temporal relationship between two lesbian generations in Canada in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Rule's "In the Attic of the House" follows an older butch lesbian, Alice, as she is haunted by both the unseen apparition of her dead, once closeted, femme lover and by the presence of younger lesbian feminists in the main floor of the house who begin to consume and rewrite Alice's queer past. In analyzing three types of social hauntings within this short story, this article draws on both Avery Gordon's theories of hauntology and Heather Love's queer theory of "feeling backwards" to imagine how lesbian-feminists in 1970s-80s Canada conducted a "backward" haunting of femme-butch lesbian elders, hailing from the culture of the lesbian working-class bar. By drawing parallels between Rule's short fiction and the real, historical events of lesbian communities in Canada, this article seeks to recenter the erasures (i.e., the ghostings) and the (in)visibilities of lesbian existence and embodiment in Canada. This paper ultimately analyzes how Rule as author calls upon her readers to consider and contemplate the historical tensions and intimacies between butch-femme elders of lesbian bar culture and the emerging lesbian-feminist collectives in the early 1980s.

Keywords: Canadian literature; Gothic; hauntology; Jane Rule; lesbian bar; lesbian-feminism; lesbian studies

Résumé: Dans une analyse de la nouvelle « In the Attic of the House » de Jane Rule, paru dans son anthologie *Outlander* en 1981, cet article étudie comment elle utilise la figure de la lesbienne et celle du fantôme pour démontrer la relation temporelle complexe entre deux générations de lesbiennes au Canada à la fin des années 1970 et au début des années 1980. Dans « In the Attic of the House » de Mme Rule, Alice, une lesbienne masculine d'un certain âge, est hantée par l'apparition invisible de sa défunte amante, longtemps inavouée, et par la présence de jeunes lesbiennes féministes au rez-de-chaussée de la maison, qui se mettent à consumer et à réécrire le passé queer d'Alice. Pour analyser ces trois types de hantises sociales dans cette nouvelle, cet article s'appuie sur les théories de la hantologie d'Avery Gordon et sur la théorie queer de Heather Love « Feeling Backward » pour imaginer comment les lesbiennes féministes vivant au Canada dans les années 1970-1980 ont fait subir une hantise « inversée » aux aînées lesbiennes féminines et masculines, issues de la culture des bars de la classe ouvrière lesbienne. En établissant des parallèles entre la nouvelle de Mme Rule et les événements historiques réels vécus par les communautés lesbiennes au Canada, cet article tente de revenir sur les effacements (c.-à-d. les fantômes) et les (in)visibilités de l'existence et de la représentation des lesbiennes au Canada. Finalement, l'article analyse la façon dont Mme Rule, en tant qu'auteure, pousse ses lecteurs à réfléchir aux tensions historiques et à l'intimité entre les aînées masculines et féminines de la culture des bars de lesbiennes et les groupes de lesbiennes féministes qui ont émergé au début des années 1980.

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J ane Rule begins her short story "In the Attic of the House" (1981) by outlining a tense dichotomy between two lesbian generations in Canada. For instance, she writes that Alice, the main character, "hadn't joined women's liberation; she had only rented it the main floor of her house" (95). Here, Rule uses the setting of Alice's house as an architectural, symbolic representation of a shifting lesbian landscape in 1970s and 1980s Canada. The story follows Alice, an older butch lesbian who, in order to make ends meet, moves up to the attic of her house and rents out her main floor to a group of lesbian-feminists, Bett, Trudy, Jill, and Angel. As Alice gets to know the lesbian-feminists, she is also haunted by the ghost of Harriet, her closeted lover who died by suicide in the same house.

This paper will begin with this rift, or divide, between Alice and Harriet, who come from the era of bar lesbians of the 1940s and '50s, and the lesbian-feminists of the 1970s and early '80s. Drawing on both Avery Gordon's theories of hauntology and Heather Love's queer theory of "feeling backwards," this article discuss three kinds of hauntings within Rule's short story: the more apparent haunting of Alice by the ghost of her dead lover Harriet; a kind of living haunting wherein Alice—as a queer mad woman in the attic—haunts the lesbian-feminists; and, finally, a complicated, backward haunting whereby the young, lively lesbian-feminists of the ground-floor haunt the dwindling Alice. Within these hauntings, I will trace how, in contrasting lesbian-feminists with bar lesbians, Rule's story reflects both a progressivist narrative wherein the lesbian-feminists understand themselves as proudly out, and a regressive narrative wherein unwanted feelings of closetedness can emerge for Alice. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how, in perhaps refusing to simplify the relationship between Alice and the lesbian-feminists, Rule offers possible intergenerational intimacies for the fictional women within this story. Thus, in drawing Rule's fictional warnings, this paper will contemplate how we can re-examine and understand these complex and messy histories of lesbian life in bar culture without reproducing erasures and hauntings.

Before analyzing Rule's short story, I first briefly outline the theoretical and historical frameworks I will draw on within this paper to contextualize the relationship between Alice, Harriet, and the lesbian-feminists. First introduced by Terry Castle in *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993), I begin by highlighting the often erased or tragic figure of the apparitional lesbian as a way to examine the initial haunting of Alice by the ghost of Harriet. I then turn towards both queer hauntological frameworks from Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* ([1997] 2008) and Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards* (2007) in order to examine both the "living" haunting, wherein the lesbian-feminists are haunted by Alice's almost ghostly presence from the attic, and the backwards haunting, wherein the lesbian-feminists haunt Alice as well.

The first ghost in Rule's story comes in the form of Alice's lover of more than thirty years, Harriet, who died by suicide in Alice's bathtub. Initially, Harriet appears as the stereotypical representation of the appar-

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itional lesbian; that is, she is spoken about but never truly seen. In defining the history of the apparitional lesbian, author Terry Castle explains how "to try to write the literary history of lesbianism is to confront, from the start, something ghostly: an impalpability, a misting over, an evaporation, or 'whiting out' of possibility" (1993, 28). In this sense, to write or speak about lesbianism before a more modern period in Western culture is to only speak about ghosts or purposeful, heterosexist erasures. We can see this "whiting out" or erasure of Harriet in Rule's story. For instance, Alice, at least when sober, attempts to never "speak Harriet's name" (Rule 1981, 97). Furthermore, Alice refuses to recognize her relationship with Harriet, or even Harriet's death, to the men she has worked with for decades. When Bett asks why she refuses to "come out" at work, Alice states, "What has a woman bleeding to death in my bathtub got to do with who I am?" (Rule 1981, 101). Unlike the lesbian-feminists, Alice does not associate her sexual identity, or sexual relationship, with either her personal or professional identity. Castle defines this unspeakability or refusal to speak of lesbianism or lesbian desire as "a kind of love that, by definition, cannot exist" (1993, 30-31). Emerging in this perceived context of "unspeakability," Harriet and Alice first meet in a beer parlor and Alice remembers Harriet as such: "Harriet had her own money. She was a legal secretary. Alice remembered the first time she ever saw Harriet in the beer parlor wearing a prim gray suit, looking obviously out of place" (Rule 1981, 98). In opposition to Alice's short haircut and androgynous Safeway workers' uniform, Harriet's more femme-perceived secretary's outfit looks out of place in the male-dominated—and butch-affiliated—working-class bar. Alice and Harriet's story is reminiscent of the histories and experiences of many working-class lesbians in 1940s and 1950s North America. As Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy outline in their ethno-historical work on lesbian bars in Buffalo, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993), bars were central to finding lovers and to building a "lesbian-consciousness." They write, "Bars were the only possible place for working-class lesbians to congregate outside of private homes. They were generally unwelcome in most social settings. Open spaces like parks or beaches, commonly used by gay men, were too exposed for women to express interest in other women without constant male surveillance and harassment" (30). These bars, either with a "woman-only" section or occupied by both men and women, were one of the only meeting-places for queer women in urban spaces. Beginning in the 1990s, however, some queer scholars noted both the empowerment and community found within these bars while also highlighting the commercialization, substance use, and abuse that often went hand-in-hand with this existence (Duder 2010; Faderman 1991). This is the backdrop for Alice and Harriet's long-term relationship.

In both their intimate and sexual encounters in the thirty years of living together, Harriet would often portray herself as the victim and Alice as the aggressor; for instance, Harriet would often say to Alice, "You took advantage. I'd been jilted" (Rule 1981, 98). Rule, in a stereotypical and darker misrepresentation, could perhaps here be framing Alice and Harriet's relationship as the dynamic of a femme pleasure-receiver and a cold stone butch provider. In carrying on this stereotypical perspective, Harriet would often associate Alice's behaviour and sexual desires with male, heterosexual desire. With almost "no protest" (Rule 1981, 98) to Alice's sexual advances, Harriet would simply state, "You're as bad as a boy, Al, you really are" (Rule 1981, 98). This seeming dysfunction, however, was not solely a consensual and teasing relationality. It was often violent as, after the first ten years of their relationship, Harriet would refuse to go to bed with Alice, especially when Alice would come home drunk from the beer parlor. Alice would not even keep alcohol in their house so that Alice could use "drink as an excuse to escape Harriet" (Rule 1981, 103). In this sense, Alice laments how she and Harriet had a toxic and complex relationship in that Harriet suffered from depression and internalized lesbophobia while Alice was aggressive and perhaps violent towards Harriet. For example, Rule writes: "Never in the last twenty years had Alice and Harriet so much as touched, though they slept in the same bed," and Alice would come home sometimes "drunk and mean, sometimes threatening rape, sometimes in a jeering moral rage" (Rule 1981, 98). This toxic relationship and the brutal way in which Harriet died is the context in which Harriet's ghost emerges.

Before the lesbian-feminists moved in, Harriet would often haunt Alice in the same state in which she died —"blood-filled" and lying in Alice's bathtub (Rule 1981, 100). However, once the lesbian-feminists occupy the ground-floor, Harriet begins to haunt Alice in her dreams. These dreams were less visibly horrific than the "blood-filled" ones but they still managed to fill Alice with a sense of dread because Harriet would emerge more as a holy figure than a tragic one. Rule writes, "That night Harriet came to [Alice] in a dream, not blood-filled as all the others had been but full of light. 'I can still forgive you,' she said. 'For what?' Alice cried, waking. 'What did I ever do but love you, tell me that!'" (Rule 1981,100). Similarly, in three different instances in the story, Alice, in her own internal ruminations, followed the murmuring of Harriet's name with the statement, "Rest her goddamned soul," which is perhaps both a blessing and a curse of Harriet's actions while she was alive and her behaviours as a ghost (Rule 1981, 95). The changing, spectral states of Harriet's ghosts, and the way in which Alice experiences both hatred and deep love for Harriet thirty years on, demonstrates the complexity and multi-layered nature of their enduring relationship. While there was external homophobia, internal shame, and sometimes relational violence, they still lived with each other for many years and found some form of connection or relationality within one another's bodies and desires that they could not find, nor wanted to find, with men or within a heteronormative context. Nevertheless, as demonstrated above, Harriet is seen as the unresolved matter of Alice's life. This is evident when Harriet appears to Alice as almost an angelic figure and states that she can still provide forgiveness or redemption for Alice, as if Alice has committed injustices or perhaps "perversions" in loving women and in loving Harriet (Rule 100). In this sense, Harriet is haunting Alice until she is meaningfully recognized.

Here, I am reading Harriet's ghost through the theories of Avery Gordon's text *Ghostly Matters.* In this text, Gordon writes how ghosts from the past will appear almost as a symptom of a social haunting because something, usually an unresolved historical trauma, is calling out to be heard, resolved, or recognized (2008, 15). Similarly, I theorize Harriet's ghost's appearance as a calling out to be heard or addressed by Alice. As Alice says, "The trouble with ghosts […] is that they're only good for replays. You can't break any new ground" (Rule 1981, 100). Here, Rule invokes the very hauntological or apparitional history that many lesbian discourses theorize from, such as Castle's ghostly lesbian. Harriet's ghost appears because of a complexity of love, haunting, and loss, and because of Alice's inability to confront her grief for her secret lover. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed explains how "when lesbian grief is not recognized, because lesbian relationships are not recognized, then you become nonrelatives. You become unrelated; you become not. You are alone in your grief. You are left waiting" (2017, 219). If we apply this idea to Rule's story, we can infer that the haunting of Alice by Harriet occurs in part because their relationship is unrecognized by heterosexist society but also because the complexity and messiness of their relationship is unresolved and perhaps unseen by younger, queer generations. There is a kind of forever waiting or longing when a loss, specifically a queer loss, is unrecognized.

As I will demonstrate below through the concept of a backward haunting, Rule perhaps invokes the ghost of Harriet to express both Alice's loss and a loss of intergenerational recognition between the bar lesbians and the lesbian-feminists in the house. This becomes evident when Harriet no longer haunts Alice once the lesbian-feminists take over the main floor. Once Alice moves from the ground floor to the attic, Alice wonders if Harriet is now haunting the newly arrived lesbian-feminists. This is where Rule introduces her readers to the powerful divide between Alice and Harriet as bar lesbians and the lesbian-feminists of a younger generation. Here, the attic interrupts Harriet's haunting, or perhaps Harriet's need to be addressed, as the lesbian-feminists move in and begin to take over. Rule explains how this generational shift impacts Alice:

To be alone in the attic was a luxury Alice could hardly believe. It had been her resigned expectation that Harriet, whose soul had obviously not been at rest, would move up the stairs with her. She had not. If she

haunted the tenants as she had haunted Alice, they didn't say so. The first time Trudy and Jill took a bath together probably exorcised the ghost from that room, Harriet obviously wouldn't have any more vegetarian fare in the dining room than Alice did. And for what probably went on in the various beds, one night of that could finally have sent Harriet to hell where she belonged. (Rule 1981, 99-100)

This is where the haunting begins to shift from Harriet's ghost towards the living spectre of Alice in the attic of the house. As framed by Alice above, the lesbian-feminists come to represent everything that Harriet, and perhaps Alice herself, internally resented or attempted to actively resist in their lives, that is, a seemingly "out and proud" lifestyle of lesbianism. Here, Harriet's own shame about her sexuality and desires emerges as Alice imagines the exorcise or final death of Harriet's ghost at the sight of lesbian sex, the stereotype of the vegan lesbian-feminists or the unashamed way in which these lesbians loved and desired each other in a collective living space. Thus, Harriet's ghost is no longer the most pressing haunting in the story. As Alice moves to the attic and the ghosts are further complicated, Rule's story draws our attention to a need, ongoing today nearly fifty years after Rule's story was published, to attempt negotiations of the tension between generations of lesbians rather than working to erase valuable pasts, no matter how complicated or tense they may seem.

Alice makes her feelings on the lesbian-feminists and the women's liberation movement clearly known when she first introduces them: "Alice hadn't joined women's liberation," Rule writes, "she had only rented it the main floor of her house" (1981, 95). Although an economic choice, Alice is still displaced by this younger generation of lesbian-feminists. Alice continues to define these women as such: "Bett, the giant postie; Trudy and Jill, who worked at the women's garage without a grease mark under their fingernails; Angel, who was unemployed; young, all of them, incredibly young, killing her with kindness" (Rule 1981, 95). In the first paragraph of her short story, Rule situates Alice as a half-living, half-dead character as the lesbian-feminists take over and begin to "kill her," albeit with kindness. This kindness will eventually develop, at least in the eyes of Alice, as a kind of pity and misplaced sympathy. However, Alice begins her haunting of the lesbian-feminists simply through her persistent presence and perhaps her inability to die. Alice's occupation of the attic could be seen as synonym for the closet; however, instead of the colonial Western literary tradition of the mad woman in the attic, it is the bar butch firmly in the closet. Alice is self-aware of her "aging" position, as she conceives of herself as "one of the ones too mean to die" (Rule 1981, 95). In this sense, Alice is well aware of her presence being a "nuisance" for the lesbian-feminists. Furthermore, she also knows that she, as a lesbian of a "different time," does not belong in the ground floor of the women's liberation. When Bett, the one lesbian-feminist who is often kind to and understanding of Alice, asks Alice if she minds being moved to the attic of the house, Alice responds, "Mind? Living on top of it is a lot better than living in the middle of it ever was. I don't think I was meant for the ground floor" (Rule 1981, 96). Rule configures Alice's haunting, or Alice's own queer manifestation of the mad woman in the attic, through this tension between the ground floor of the lesbian-feminists and the attic of the lesbian bar elders. This tension is reflected in the context in which Rule is writing. For example, in *The House That Jill Built* (1995), Canadian historian Becki L. Ross contextualizes the organization of 1970s LOOT (The Lesbian Organization of Toronto) within past lesbian generations in Canada. She writes, "In the 1970s, […] new constituencies of lesbian feminists […] scorned practices of 'passing' in straight society, sustaining closeted lesbian relationship in suburbia, and relying on what they felt was seedy, 'apolitical,' and 'regressive' butch/femme bar life" (1995, 15). In this sense, Alice's haunting, filled with spectres of the past bar life, appears as an obstacle to the lesbian-feminists' liberation from both heterosexism and the negative stereotypes of bar culture.

At this point in the short story, Alice's haunting of the lesbian-feminists from the attic is somewhat counteracted by the third haunting in the story or, as I argue, the backward haunting committed by the lesbian-feminists against Alice. Although I will return to Alice's haunting near the end of this article, I introduce

the backwards haunting here in order to demonstrate how Rule, in portraying both Alice's haunting of the lesbian-feminists and the lesbian-feminists haunting of Alice, may be offering a wider re-centring of lesbian generational and communal complexities. As I will argue, perhaps Alice's living haunting of the lesbian-feminists is also a symptom of a larger haunting of the unresolved or perhaps unheard complex narratives and real lived experiences of past lesbian generations, specifically ones that may not fit into a modern or contemporary understanding of queerness or lesbianism. While Alice sees the lesbian-feminists as the younger generation encroaching on her space, the lesbian-feminists begin to see Alice as less of an active spectre and more as a pitiful, naïve subject of the past. This attitude of the lesbian-feminists is reflected within the historical context of Rule's writing as well. For example, Lillian Faderman, in her expansive collected anthology of lesbian literature *Chloe Plus Olivia* (1994), defines the lesbian-feminists of the 1970s and early 1980s as the "lesbians of earlier generations" and defines the bar lesbians of the 1940s and 50s as the lesbian-feminists' "predecessors" (550). In an introduction to a 1994 edition Rule's "In the Attic of the House," Faderman outlines the context of these lesbian generational erasures or apathies in which Rule is writing. She writes that

> lesbians of earlier generations considered their predecessors as unevolved products of a dark age [...] They were critical of lesbian lives that had been played out in gay bars, where evils such as alcoholism had been encouraged, or in hiding, which had made lesbians fearful and full of self-loathing. Lesbian feminists saw the earlier lesbian society as having been a product of male chauvinism and homophobia, and they were determined to change it. (Faderman 1994, 550)

Therefore, in some predominantly white lesbian-feminist movements of the 1970s, the bar butch/femme figure seemed to embody the shame, the negative, and the closetedness while the lesbian-feminist championed the positive and the proudly out. This divide thus created a vacuum of dispossession and refusal between these lesbian communities wherein lesbian-feminists refuse or rewrite the past of working-class, lesbian bar existences. Drawing on Faderman's context then, Alice represents both the "regressive butch/femme bar life" (Ross 1995,15) and "evils" of a lesbian "dark age" (Faderman 1994, 550) that the lesbian-feminists wish to change or re-define in order to conceive of a more "positive" or feminist appropriate historical heritage within lesbian communities. This attempt to redefine the historical experiences of bar lesbians is demonstrated in a heated discussion between Alice and Angel, another of the lesbian-feminists. After inquiring about Alice's relationship with Harriet, Angel states, "We're looking for role models [...] anybody who lived with anybody for thirty years...." (Rule 1981, 99). Alice, however, interrupts Angel by saying, "Thirty years is longer than reality, you know that? A lifetime guarantee on a watch is only twenty. Nothing should last longer than that. Harriet should have killed herself ten years earlier, rest her goddamned soul. I always told her she'd get to hell long before I did" (Rule 1981, 99). While Alice defiantly resists Angel's attempt to romanticize her relationship with Harriet, this piece of dialogue nevertheless signifies the lesbian-feminists' attempt to redefine Alice's own history so that they, as Angel states, may have inactive—even dead—role models to think of and look back on fondly. Throughout the short story, the lesbian-feminists are attempting to mold Alice into an acceptable and simple identity that they can claim for their own narratives for lesbian futures. Furthermore, the lesbian-feminists do not wish to sit or live with the tension that is Alice's embodiment of queerness and her identity as lesbian. Driven by a kind of simplification, the lesbian-feminists turn backward only to haunt Alice, to resolve her complexity, and then turn away towards the future without connection or grounding within the past. This backward effect is explored by Heather Love in *Feeling Backwards*. She writes that "contemporary queers," or, for this paper, lesbian-feminists, find themselves "in the odd situation of 'looking forward' while [they] are feeling backward" (Love 2017, 27). Specifically, lesbian-feminists thought that "social negativity" clung "to those who lived before the common era of gay liberation—the abject multitude against whose experience [they] define [their] own liberation" (10). With their vision of a seemingly liberatory women-orientated future, lesbian-feminists find themselves looking forward while they are still feeling the effects of, what they as-

sume as, "negative stereotypes" of pre-gay liberation queer culture (Ross 1995,15).

In applying Love's theories to Rule's story, the lesbian-feminists often criticize and judge Alice for what they deem the "social negativities" attached to Alice's lesbian and queer experiences. First, they understand Alice to be too "male-identified." In reflecting on the cleanliness of Alice's attic, Bett says, "Trudy says you're so male-identified that you can't take care of yourself" (Rule 1981, 103). However, in simplifying Alice's gender expression as too "male-identified," the lesbian-feminists erase both the butch experience and the working-class experience that was common-place in bar culture. They erase Alice's own connections with men, both as a butch woman and as a working-class woman. For example, Alice narrates how she "knew lots of men, was more comfortable with them than with women at the beer parlor or in the employees' lounge at Safeway, where she worked. As a group, she needed them far more than she needed women" (Rule 1981, 96). For the lesbian-feminists, gender fluidity and association with men meant male-identification and not a trans or non-binary or butch understanding of gender, sexuality, and desire. In common lesbian-feminist practice, femme expression was seen as appeasing the heterosexual male gaze while butch appearance was seen as being too male-identified and thus misogynistic. In *Female Masculinity* (2018)*,* queer theorist Jack Halberstam also outlines this tension between bar butches with the lesbian-feminist dykes of the 1970s and beyond. Halberstam writes how "some women rejected butch-femme and its forms of sexual role playing as a gross mimicry of heterosexuality" (121). In this rejection, however, lesbian-feminists "pathologiz[ed] the only visible signifier of queer dyke desire," and thus "further erased an elaborate and carefully scripted language of desire that butch and femme dykes had produced in response to dominant culture's attempts to wipe them out" (Halberstam 2018, 121). Therefore, the lesbian-feminists, in labelling Alice as "male-identified," limit Alice's mobile "lesbian masculinity" to the idea of a white male body (Halberstam 1998, 15); they do not attempt to live with gender divergence or undoing of gender roles within the subversive and sometimes liberating space of the bar. Furthermore, they often associate Alice's destructive behaviour with her association with the bar. Alice's frequent drinking and smoking is most likely a coping mechanism to deal with the loss of Harriet; however, the lesbian-feminists often connect her drinking with her history and time spent in the bar. When Alice asks why they sit at home on a Saturday night, Trudy responds, "We don't drink; the bars aren't our scene" (Rule 1981, 96). As this divide between bar-going and non-bar-going lesbians demonstrates, the lesbian-feminists often present as morally superior or more progressive compared to Alice. This backward feeling is made most evident in the lesbian-feminists' approach to sexuality and their understanding of what it means to be an "out" and politically active lesbian.

In the text, Alice laments how the lesbian-feminists encourage her to be "open" with her body or at least what they deem to be "open" about sexuality and desire. For example, Rule writes of Trudy as "full of sudden sympathy and instruction about coming to terms with your own body, as if she were about to invent sex" (1981, 97). For Alice, there is an implication here in Trudy's sympathetic and condescending tone that Alice's understanding of her own desires and her embodiment of her sexuality, especially in her relationship with Harriet, was somehow "wrong" or not liberated enough. This attitude carries forward when the lesbian-feminists encourage Alice to officially "come out" because they believe that, in coming out, Alice can finally move on from her negative and ghostly histories. At their encouragement, Alice responds, "Come out? […] Of where? This is my house after all. You're just renting the main floor. Come out? To whom? Everyone I know is dead" (Rule 1981, 97). Once again, in the eyes of the lesbian-feminists, Alice is positioned as the spectre, or as the dying lesbian, who is too tragic to fully be who she is, to come out, and to live "authentically" because everyone she knows in now dead and therefore incapable of understanding Alice truly and wholly. At the time Rule was writing this short story, "coming out" was an essential step towards living an authentic, lesbian-feminist life. As Becki L. Ross explains, "Sex wasn't something to be sequestered in bar culture and private, closeted relationships; it became an integral feature of [lesbian-feminist] political identity" (1995, 114). The closet was no proverbial space for an out and proud lesbian-femin-

ist and, in order to actualize this out vision of separatism and women-identity, lesbian feminists needed to sever the connection or association of modern, public, and out lesbians with the past stereotypes of the bar-going femme or butch lesbian. Essentially, in the perspective of the lesbian-feminists, coming out is the only way Alice can fully be herself. Their idea of "coming out," however, does not attempt to understand the complexities between visibilities and invisibilities in certain historical lesbian communities, nor the original ways in which bar lesbians explored their desires and cemented communal ties. Take, for example, Alice's resistance to the lesbian-feminists' attempt to modify her love story with Harriet. When the lesbian-feminists press Alice once again to "come out" by asking Alice if she was "in love with Harriet," Alice responds, "In love? […] Christ! I lived with her for thirty years" (Rule 1981, 98). For Alice, choosing between staying closeted or coming out was both an impossibility and an inconceivability; there was essentially no such thing as "coming out." Although they never "came out" as a gay couple, what could be more "visible" than living with only one woman, unmarried, for more than thirty years? As the lesbian-feminists attempt to change Alice's past while Alice's resentment of the lesbian-feminists grows, Alice's inability to "fully come out" and to shake off those supposed negative stereotypes of the past almost leads to the death of both Alice and the lesbian-feminists. This is the moment in the story where Alice's living haunting of the lesbian-feminists and the backward haunting collide.

This near-death experience happens when, after a particularly unsettling haunting of Harriet in her dreams, Alice accidentally sets fire to the attic from a lit cigarette. The lesbian-feminists, concerned for both their own safety and for Alice's, insist that Alice address the haunting of Harriet by speaking of her and, essentially, "coming out" to them. In other words, if Alice recognizes Harriet's ghosts and her own spectres of the bar culture, Alice's haunting of the lesbian-feminists will also come to an end. For example, Jill, the garage worker, says to Alice, "Al, if we can't talk about [Harriet], we're all going to have move out […] because we don't want to be burned to death in our sleep" (Rule 1981, 103). To this plea, Alice responds, "Move out? […] This is my house. I'm the landlady. You're the tenants" (Rule 1981, 103). Here, Alice attempts to re-centre her position as the landlady, not as the mad dyke in the attic, even as the power shifts from the older generation towards the younger generation. Alice continues to state, "You can't make conditions for me in my own house" (Rule 1981, 103). Similar to Harriet's ghost, Alice appears here as a tragic figure too haunted by the past to move on and "come out" or to even die. However, Alice's haunting may be more complex than that. While Alice's haunting represents Alice's own resentments of the lesbian-feminists, it also represents the larger, looming absent presence of bar lesbians that is calling out for an authentic recognition from the lesbian-feminists.

For example, in her article "Feminism and its Ghosts," Victoria Hersford writes, "To have a haunted relationship to the past is precisely to engage with what has been resisted, feared, or actively forgotten about that past" (Hersford 2005, 234). In this sense, in their haunted relationship with Alice and the bar culture, the lesbian-feminists are perhaps "actively forgetting" or attempting to change that haunted past by asking Alice to "come out" or to recognize her relationship with Harriet through their own contemporary frameworks. In doing this erasure, the lesbian-feminists are not allowing for or making space for the (im)possible ways in which Alice and Harriet loved each other or held love for each other. In the text, Alice reminds the lesbian-feminists that they did not truly know her relationship with Harriet, or even Harriet for that matter. Although macabre in its message, Alice screams to the lesbian-feminists, "What do you know about it? What could you know? Harriet, rest her goddamned soul, lived in mortal sin with me. She killed herself for me. It's not to pity! Get out" (Rule 1981, 105). While recognizing the often silent and silenced pain of Harriet within this story, Rule, in this excerpt, also reminds her reader that there was love between Harriet and Alice, even if it was dysfunctional. This is something that the lesbian-feminists, in their backward haunting of Alice, often forget about Alice as a person and also as a queer elder. In this sense, Alice's living haunting from the attic appears in order to readdress this one-dimensional history of lesbian bar elders and ancestors held by the younger lesbian generations.

In my reading, Rule positions Alice as a ghost—or as the mad woman in the attic—because she is drawing our attention to a larger, unrecognized history of the bar lesbians and the dynamic and original ways in which they sought desire and community. In his text *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, queer theorist Jack Halberstam defines this queer, temporal relationality as a way of looking "to the way older generations of [queer] people lived and survived in the realms of the inauthentic" (Halberstam 2018, 82). Drawing on Halberstam here, perhaps Rule's short story is attempting to demonstrate the judgement and privilege of the younger generations while also expressing the inauthentic and messy ways in which past lesbian generations existed. In one final example from the text, Rule briefly transforms Alice from the tragic spectre, haunted by an even more tragic dead lover, towards an image of a radical lesbian elder. When one of the lesbian-feminists, Jill, asks Alice about her short haircut, another lesbian-feminist, Trudy, chimes in and reflects on Alice's haircut as "sort of male chauvinist […] as if you wanted to come on very heavy" (Rule 1981, 97). To this, Alice responds sardonically, "I don't come on […] I broke the switch" (Rule 1981, 97). Similar to the way power shifted when the lesbian-feminists took over the ground floor, Alice has now, for a brief moment, shifted the power in her favour. In this excerpt, Rule demonstrates to her readers the impact that bar lesbians had on the heteronormative landscape – they redefined the rules. Similar to the way Alice breaks the light-switch, bar lesbians broke through boundaries of societal etiquette, gender roles, and sexual desires. Rule, while using the ghostly trope of the apparitional lesbian, also manages to subvert the temporal and generational power dynamics of the traditional haunting. For example, as I have demonstrated above, we see three simultaneous hauntings in Rule's story. Alice is haunted by the apparition of her dead lover Harriet; Alice herself becomes the ghost in the attic; and, finally, Alice is haunted by the presence of the younger lesbian-feminists on the main floor of the house who begin to consume and rewrite Alice's queer past. However, in playing with the role of the ghost, Rule questions who is truly haunting whom and, also, who holds the power between these lesbian generations. Therefore, Rule, in part, is asking her readers to not simply erase the lives of the bar lesbians or categorize them as tragic existences in a homophobic world but to hold temporal spaces and intimacies for their complex experiences. These complex experiences included internalized homophobia and shame but it also included expressions of shared sexuality, desire, and companionship. Love defines this more intimate, temporal relationship as "living with" injury and not "fixing it" (Love 2017, 43). I argue, then, that Rule attempts to ponder this "living with" within her short story. For example, the story asks, what does it mean to sit with this tension between lesbian generations instead of turning away, absolving, or changing the narrative for more positive purposes?

Rule's short story does not simply and unequivocally support bar lesbians while reducing lesbian-feminists to a harassing stereotype. Instead, Rule's story reminds her readers that bar lesbians were and are complex people who searched for lesbian love, community, and kin. In understanding these experiences of bar lesbians, younger queer communities can begin to recognize and grapple with that enduring experience of erasure that lesbian, queer, trans, and non-binary communities know all too well. We may begin to think more actively about how we can, as Love states, allow "ourselves to be haunted" and to identify with the damages and shames of the past and to not turn away from them (Love 2017, 43). We must remember, however, that this "not-turning-away" (Love 2017, 19) does not necessarily mean an acceptance or wholehearted embrace of past queer dynamics and exclusions as we continue to unlearn and decenter the racism(s) and classism(s) of past and present white queer communities. As Alice and Harriet demonstrate, the experiences—both good and bad—of the 1950s bar lesbians can still mirror the lesbian experiences and existences of today. Additionally, the pride of the lesbian-feminists, as well as the damage provided by lesbian-feminist movements towards bar cultures, are also a part of our tense queer existence.

In a letter to Rick Bébout describing her experience in the 1950s and '60s, Rule writes that there were lesbians "who created their own social world with other lesbians, but most of us accepted our isolation, disdained a socially erotic world as you say you first did, and the bar scene, which I didn't know existed,

would have repelled me" (Rule 566-7). Although Rule's Alice is a bar lesbian, Rule herself did not associate —perhaps as middle-class university-goer—with the bar; however, instead of disassociating Rule from her main character, this letter further demonstrates the connection that multi-generational lesbians can find within the tension and complexities of lesbian history. The hauntings of Alice and the remnants of Rule as author haunting this short story provide a possible framework to begin this work of allowing ourselves to be haunted by our pasts and to begin to build a relationship that is founded within this tension wherein we can listen, challenge, and further complicate yet not simply erase. This story, much like a social haunting, is calling out for redress: an intimate kind of redress and recognition of complex lesbian or queer ways of life and being in the past, present, and possible futures.

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Reflections from "Revisioning Feminist Engagements with Madness": Borderline, Futurity, and Debility

by Erin Tichenor

Abstract: This commentary builds on my presentation in the panel "Revisioning Feminist Engagements with Madness" at the 2023 Women's, Gender, and Social Justice annual conference. In doing so, this piece grapples with several debates surrounding the stigmatized psychiatric label of "borderline personality disorder (BPD)." While feminists have long called for the diagnosis to be removed or replaced, Mad-affirmative scholars are reconceptualizing borderline as a cluster of insightful experiences and psychocentric activists are trying to destigmatize and raise awareness about "BPD." The latter two efforts are very different from each other, yet both seem to be located in white, globally elite spaces. This piece suggests that we can learn from other reclamation movements that, co-opted by the colonial state and neoliberal market, have mainly benefited elites, and thus cautions against any attempt to universally reclaim, reject, or reconceptualize borderline. That is, rather than unpacking what borderline really *is* or *should mean*, this piece asks what borderline *does,* for whom, in which contexts, and towards what ends. Drawing from Gilles Deleuze's ethological method and Jasbir Puar's work on debility and capacity, this article acknowledges the sociopolitical patterns of borderline, as well as the broader systems we might be serving in our seemingly progressive discourses.

Keywords: borderline personality disorder; debility; ethology; futurity; Mad Studies; reclamation

Résumé : Ce commentaire fait suite à ma présentation au sein du groupe « Revisioning Feminist Engagements with Madness » lors de la conférence annuelle Women's, Gender, and Social Justice de 2023. Ainsi, cet article aborde les nombreux débats concernant l'étiquette psychiatrique stigmatisée du « trouble de la personnalité limite (TPL) ». Alors que les féministes demandent depuis longtemps que l'on élimine ou remplace le diagnostic, les spécialistes de la folie conceptualisent de nouveau le trouble de la personnalité limite comme un ensemble d'expériences révélatrices et les militants pour le psychocentrisme tentent de déstigmatiser le « TPL » et de sensibiliser les gens à ce trouble. Ces deux derniers efforts sont très différents l'un de l'autre, mais ils semblent tous deux appartenir à des milieux blancs de l'élite mondiale. Cet article indique que nous pouvons tirer des leçons d'autres mouvements de revendication qui, cooptés par l'État colonial et le marché néolibéral, ont principalement profité aux élites, et met donc en garde contre toute tentative visant à revendiquer, à rejeter ou à conceptualiser de nouveau de manière universelle le trouble de la personnalité limite. Autrement dit, plutôt que de décortiquer ce que le trouble de la personnalité limite signifie ou *devrait signifier*, cet article cherche à savoir ce que ce trouble *fait*, pour qui, dans quels contextes et à quelles fins. Inspiré de la méthode éthologique de Gilles Deleuze et des travaux de Jasbir Puar sur la débilité et la capacité, cet article tient compte des schémas sociopolitiques du trouble de la personnalité limite, ainsi que de l'ensemble des systèmes que nous pourrions servir dans nos discours apparemment progressistes.

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Introduction

What does taking back the future mean if the state has never imagined a future for you? In her astute critique of neoliberal rights-based discourses, transnational queer theorist and disability scholar Jasbir Puar (2017) cogently writes that neoliberal states "discriminate which bodies are vested with futurity, or more accurately, they cultivate (some/certain) bodies that can be vested with futurity" (17). Reclamation movements (e.g., queer, disability, or Mad pride) have importantly shifted discourses about difference, reclaimed futures, and pushed the state to grant rights. However, people have been incorporated along lines of racial, citizenship, class, and gender advantage into colonial states and neoliberal markets that rely on the mass disablement—or debilitation—of specific populations (Puar 2007, 2017; Ferguson 2018). Rights assume futurity, assume capacity, and assume the state—all things that are systematically denied to structurally vulnerable populations. Puar (2017) asks, "What happens when 'we' get what 'we' want" (xvii)? In other words, "What happens when the disavowed and perverse are not denied nationhood but become emblematic of it" (Ben-Moshe 2018)? The nation that grants rights and professes its progressive exceptionalism is the same nation that debilitates populations through the endemic violence of racial capitalism and settler colonialism. What do rights-based movements do, how are they co-opted, whose futures are we reclaiming, and on whose backs?

This commentary piece is a reflection on feminist engagements with Madness, the topic of Redikopp et al.'s (2023) panel at the Women's, Gender and Social Justice conference, where I presented on the contested and gendered psychiatric diagnosis of "borderline personality disorder (BPD)." Guided by Redikopp's (2018) writing and the feedback she has given on my graduate work, I differentiate between the stigmatizing psychiatric construction of "BPD," and borderline, which can be a liberating and non-pathologizing "identification with, or subjectivity of being/having borderline" (78). Borderline offers a unique lens through which to explore the relationship between Madness and intersectional feminism, particularly given movements to destigmatize 'BPD.' As such, this commentary interrogates neoliberal reclamation, futurity, and structural violence, in the context of borderline and 'BPD.'

Four years ago, I first encountered the pervasive stigmatization of borderline (traits and "PD") while being trained as a frontline social services worker. Two years later, I was provisionally diagnosed this "diagnosis-that-must-not-be-named" (Cannon and Gould 2022; Johnson 2015), and have since been grappling with "BPD's" social patterns, discourses about trauma, and the implications of reclamation and destigmatization. Like other psychiatric labels, "BPD" seems to be a swift mechanism of social control for some (e.g., intersectional "others" deemed pathological, criminal, or otherwise deviant), and can be a nuanced pathway to care, or even a neoliberal identity for others (H 2018; search "bpd baddies" online). As an affluent,

white, cisgender woman, there is great difference in how I have navigated the psychiatric system, and how "BPD" was deployed *against* transgender, Indigenous, and racialized women at the housing organization where I worked. Simultaneously, my social media feed has been full of white therapists and patients raising awareness about "BPD" as a trauma-related pathology and advocating for people to get properly diagnosed and treated—with some building platforms around a "BPD" identity. While these are important moves, they obscure the vast critiques of the diagnosis, the harms of the psychiatric system, and non-pathologizing or affirming perspectives of borderline (Johnson 2021; LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume 2013; Mulder and Tyrer 2023; Lewis 2023; Redikopp 2018; Shaw and Proctor 2005). Following several Mad scholars, this commentary thus explores how we might affirm borderline subjectivities *and* respond to distress with greater socio-political nuance (Eromosele 2020; Gorman 2013; Tam 2013; White and Pike 2013).

What Can Borderline Do?

While twentieth-century Mad activism made important moves towards valuing emotional, psychological, and neurodiversity, "BPD" was largely left in the hands of mainstream (white, elite) feminists (LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume 2013; Johnson 2015). Feminists have long denounced the diagnosis due to its misogynistic origins, gendered deployment, and maltreatment by clinicians and society (Becker 1997; Shaw and Proctor 2005; Ussher 2013; Wirth-Cauchon 2001). More recently, borderline scholars have offered more nuanced accounts, reminding that the diagnosis can be uniquely resonant and relieving, and that borderline affects can be valuable and insightful: ethically, politically and onto-epistemologically (Johnson 2021; Lester 2013; Lewis 2023; Redikopp 2018). Still, reclaiming borderline or "BPD" without a socio-political analysis of how emotional distress and psychiatric labels move disparately around the world can reinforce the futurity of acceptable (globally elite) borderlines: "The future is already here, but it is unevenly distributed" (Puar 2017, 86; see also Redikopp 2021).

Borderline's movements as a reassuring categorization, institutionally-imposed iatrogenic diagnosis, a valued way of knowing and/or a form of neurodiversity necessitates a paradigmatic intervention that understands that the concept is contextual, as are its material and physical consequences. The ontological work of process philosopher Gilles Deleuze ([1970]1988) and critical race theorists such as Mel Chen (2012) and Jasbir Puar ([2012]2020) help us to reconceptualize borderline as an intersectional and fluctuating concept, as opposed to a fixed, pre-existent diagnostic truth. Recognizing concepts and identities as "events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects" draws attention to the changing nature *and* effects of "BPD" and borderline across different contexts (Puar [2012]2020, 411). This shift also pushes us to ask not what borderline or "BPD" essentially are but *ethological* questions about what they do, for whom, in which contexts, and towards what ends. Conducting an ethology (Deleuze [1970]1988), or asking what a concept *does*, could unsettle how we understand, use, avoid and deploy what are often described as fixed, agreed-upon, and a-contextual psychiatric labels (see Buchanan 1997; Duff 2014; Fox and Alldred 2021; Novak 2021; Reyes 2017). While "BPD" may be a unique concept in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) and other classification systems, being diagnosed and identifying with that diagnosis is modulated by access to healthcare, the internet, racial and economic privilege, and so on. Ethology is also a useful tool for exploring what borderline affects and worldviews do or might do beyond pathologizing discourses about 'BPD.' For example, the DSM diagnostic criteria of an "unstable sense of self," counters constraining logics embedded in Western mandates that one *should* be a "stable, sovereign, and entirely self-governed entity" (Lajoie 2019, 559). Francesca Lewis (2023) reminds that this borderline perception may disrupt European humanist and neoliberal onto-epistemologies that have undermined a variety of ontological and cosmological perspectives, causing harm to many people—borderline and otherwise (Redikopp, 2018; Smith [1999] 2021; Wynter 1984). This analysis could be repeated for each diagnostic criteria.

Debility-Capacity-Borderline

Increasingly, (some) people diagnosed with "BPD" are granted better access to treatment and greater compassion through "BPD's" etiological relationship with childhood trauma (Emotions Matter 2016; Yuan et al. 2023). These growing psychocentric *and* Mad-affirmative emphases on childhood trauma, awareness, identification with 'BPD,' and affirmation of borderline traits, however, all seem to be located in elite spaces that often neglect analysis of how racial capitalism, empire, and settler colonialism traumatize and create psychological distress – including distress that is pathologized as "BPD" (Gunuratnam 2021, 1826; Redikopp and Smith 2022). Focusing on rights, inclusion, and access for people diagnosed with "BPD" in colonial and imperial nations like the US and Canada uplifts the psychiatric industrial complex and fuels these nations' narratives about their "exceptional" provision of mental healthcare—even as they actively debilitate populations—psychologically and physically—for profit and control: "Capitalism, war, forced migration, settler colonial occupation ... are the generators of much of the world's disability, yet contribute unruly source material for rights discourses that propagate visibility, empowerment, identification, and pride" (Puar 2017, 65; see Beresford and Rose 2023). At the same time, what does it do to imply that various types of trauma *cause* 'BPD?' Should borderline be prevented? Or, as narrative practitioner Tiffany Sostar suggested to me while discussing my graduate work, should we prevent the trauma and distress caused by the invalidation of borderline (and other non-normative) experiences *and,* as well as the trauma and distress caused by structural oppression? We can de-pathologize neuro and physical diversity from European humanist conceptualizations of the self, while preventing widespread corporate and state violence (Meekosha 2011).

I thus want to foreground Puar's (2017) work on debility-capacity-disability (repurposed as debility-capacity-borderline) in order to untangle the relationship between affirming borderline, responding to distress, ending violence, and the limits of neoliberal analytics for 'BPD.' For Puar, disability, like 'BPD,' is often made legible through official diagnosis, state recognition, and rights. *Debility* highlights the endemic nature of physical, psychological, and socio-economic impairment that is naturalized to specific populations by the neoliberal state (Livingston 2005; see Mohamed 2020). As health sociologist Gunaratnam (2021) reminds, "Wide ranging injuries inflicted by settler colonialism are not accorded recognition or rights as debilitating conditions" (1846). Further to Puar's (2017) analysis is that debilitation is a built-in mechanism of the neoliberal, colonial state, which both make specific populations "available for injury" (218) (extracting their labour) *and* targets them for injury in order to "produce, sustain and profit out of disability" (Meekosha 2011, 668). Populations made "available for injury" are those whom the state never intends to incorporate with rights but whose debilitation is pre-calculated into the upkeep of empire. If rights are granted, they are for the profitability of humanitarian aid interventions, the medical industrial complex, and/or returning to workplaces that reenact physical and psychological violence (Puar 2017, 152). In the context of borderline, *psychological debilitation* is perpetuated by the same Euro-American powers that grant rights to elite populations *and* whose financial power relies on the continuous traumatizing and rehabilitation of subjugated populations (Government of South Africa 2023, 35; Giacaman 2018).

Capacitation, in contrast to debility, increases the possibilities of "what a body can, could, or should do" (Puar 2017, xv). For "BPD," this could look like neoliberal rights-based incorporation, corporate co-option of "BPD" pride, or increases in diagnosis and treatment. The problem is not capacitation but who is capacitated, who is debilitated, and who is made to undergo repeated cycles of debilitation and capacitation, where the neoliberal state "repurposes illness and disability for profit" (Gunaratnam 2021, 1847). Structural violence creates mental distress, leading to both over- or under-treatment of people based on specific calculations of extraction, profit, and disposability (Puar 2009). Debility and capacity are modulated across populations, meaning that the "BPD" label and borderline can both debilitate and capacitate;

they are both shaped by "assemblages of capacity and debility, modulated across historical times, geopolitical space, institutional mandates, and discursive regimes" (Puar 2017, xiv).

The debility-capacity-borderline triad helps us analyze what the "BPD" label and borderline do, for whom, in which contexts, and towards what ends. Borderline does not have to be doomed to the trope of the "crazy ex-girlfriend" but affirming borderline also cannot be separated from preventing the imperial psychological debilitation of certain populations—many of whom never get diagnosed or only do so for corporate benefit. I thus conclude with a curiosity about what it might do to not only affirm borderline outside of the psychiatric frame of "BPD" (Redikopp 2018) but to make sense of borderline as an *intolerance of domination over bodies, minds, and communities*. This necessitates that borderline is an insightful, useful—and sometimes distressing—cluster of affects, as well as a *socio-political force*, as Tim Barlott has helped me articulate, that can be mobilized against psychiatric violence, settler colonialism, racial capitalism, Euro-American empire, and other debilitating systems (see also Barlott and Turcotte 2022). These arguments have implications for how we discuss prevention, how we respond to borderline affects and worldviews, how and whether clinicians engage the borderline concept with patients, and for how borderlines, particularly elite "BPD" activists, might mobilize against debilitation and respond to neo-colonial calls in global mental health agendas (Beresford and Rose 2023; Eromosele 2020; Meekosha 2011; Mills 2013; Puar 2017). People who identify with or who have been identified as borderline deserve to be asked "What are your affects and worldviews doing?" rather than be immediately pathologized. Elite borderlines like myself deserve to imagine our futures in ways that many of us will have struggled with throughout our lives. Yet, we must not forget that "to claim unfettered access to futurity is already predicated upon the genocide or slow death of others" (Puar 2017, 149).

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"I'm not discriminating against you, but…": Navigating Fertility Assistance as a Fat, Single Woman

by Kelsey Ioannoni

Abstract: In this paper, I use an autoethnographic approach to explore the fertility processes I underwent and the difficulties I had in accessing fertility services in an effort to get pregnant as a fat single mother by choice. Here, I outline my experiences at two different fertility clinics, one of which denied me care based on my fatness. I reflect on the difficulties of accessing fertility services as a fat woman, and indeed how fat women are viewed as risky bodies to be deterred from motherhood. I conclude this paper by situating the joyous delivery of my son against the backdrop of being "high risk."

Keywords: artificial insemination; fatphobia; motherhood; fat mothering; single mother by choice

Résumé: Dans cet article, j'adopte une approche auto-ethnographique pour explorer les processus de fertilité que j'ai subis et les difficultés que j'ai rencontrées pour obtenir des services de fertilité dans le but de tomber enceinte alors que j'étais une mère obèse célibataire par choix. Je décris ici mes expériences dans deux cliniques de fertilité, dont l'une m'a refusé des soins en raison de ma corpulence. Je réfléchis aux difficultés d'accès aux services de fertilité pour les femmes grosses, et au fait qu'on les considère comme des corps à risque qu'il faut dissuader d'être mères. Je conclus cet article en soulignant que le merveilleux accouchement de mon fils s'est bien déroulé malgré le fait qu'il était à « risque élevé ».

Mots clés : insémination artificielle; grossophobie, maternité; mères grosses; mères célibataires par choix

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Introduction

I'm lying on the gynaecological exam table with my feet in the stirrups, having a sonohysterogram performed so that the reproductive endocrinologist could see inside my uterus. This test is a regular part of the process leading up to artificial insemination. As the doctor is doing the exam, he says to me, "I took an oath to do no harm, helping you get pregnant could cause harm to you and to your child."

Growing up, some people dream of their weddings; I dreamt of being a mother. As a high-school student, I would joke with my friends that if I had the resources and the maturity, I would reject post-secondary school altogether and embrace full-time motherhood. It did not matter that I was both single and 17; I aspired to be a mother. Despite this strong desire for motherhood, I did not have confidence in myself or my body and instead pursued something I knew I was good at: academics. While I went on to complete my Bachelor and Master of Arts after high school, and as I was nearing the completion of my PhD in Sociology, my yearning for motherhood only increased. This desire became further complicated by my emerging career as an academic, my lack of a romantic partner, and, most relevant to this chapter, my size. At 5'3" and about 360 pounds pre-pregnancy, my body is categorized as "morbidly obese" by the medical establishment—a categorization I find both problematic and rude. Yet, my weight is a barrier I have smashed against repeatedly throughout the process of pursuing fertility treatment to become a "single mother by choice," or, as I prefer to call it, a solo parent.

Exploring the "Single Mother by Choice"

The term "single mother by choice" refers to women (or people who have been assigned female at birth) who chose motherhood without having a partner (Ajandi 2011, 421; Bock 2000, 64; Jadva et al. 2009, 175). This can be accomplished through adoption, donor insemination (using a known donor or an anonymous donor), or using in vitro fertilization (IVF) (Kelly 2012, 67).

When discussing my decision to become a single mother by using a sperm donor to get pregnant, I avoid the often-used term "single mother by choice" (SMBC) and instead use "solo parent." Personally and politically, I find the term SMBC to be problematic. Bock (2000) discusses how the appropriation of the term "single mother by choice" acts as a tool to position certain women at the top of the hierarchy of single parents (64). The use of the term "choice" separates SMBCs from those who were not "responsible" or did not make the choice to be single themselves (Bock 2000, 64). Employing a discourse of choice allows SMBCs to distinguish themselves from stereotypes of the single mother – one who is dependent on social assistance, often racialized, seen as morally unfit, and scapegoated for ills of society (such as increasing crime rates) (Ajandi 2011, 411; Bock 2000, 63; Hayford and Guzzo 2015, 72). The SMBC takes up "choice" as a way of saying, "I am not one of them," and effectively othering single mothers who are single mothers by "chance" and not by "choice."

Research indicates that the typical SMBC is in her mid-to-late 30s or early 40s, is professional, highly educated, financially secure with a well-paying job, and often white (Hayford and Guzzo 2015, 70; Kelly 2012, 78; Jadva et al., 2009, 182; Weissenberg, Landau, and Madgar 2007, 2789). I do not fit the typical understanding of an SMBC. While I am a highly educated white woman, at the time of writing I am a 28-year-old graduate student and I live with two roommates. I teach on contract at multiple post-secondary schools and I desperately wish I could describe my financial situation as secure, instead of incredibly pre-

carious. Nonetheless, I was committed to becoming a mother and successfully got pregnant shortly after my 28th birthday.

Permission to be Pregnant?

The decision to get pregnant as a single woman was not one I made in haste. After ending a long-term re-lationship, I spent time analyzing what I wanted for my future. Did I want to get back into dating? Did I want to take a break? Ultimately, what I wanted was to become a mother and I did not particularly care if I had a partner to accompany me on that journey. But you cannot just suddenly decide to use fertility ser-vices to get pregnant and start immediately, at least not in my experience. It took about a year of planning and referrals before I actually became pregnant: my doctor needed to refer me to an OBGYN, who then needed to refer me to a fertility clinic, and the wait times for each appointment were long. My OBGYN at the time referred me to one of Toronto's largest fertility centres, which scheduled my consultation appoint-ment for five months later. This process was moving significantly slower than I wanted. In my ideal scen-ario, I would have been pregnant before that first appointment at the fertility clinic. In what follows, I re-flect on my experiences at Clinic #1 and Clinic #2 as a fat mother-to-be.

Clinic #1

A colleague of mine mentioned a smaller clinic she had attended just outside Toronto and how the wait time was significantly shorter. I decided to explore that clinic while leaving my appointment on the books in Toronto. Here, I hit my first set of challenges based on my weight. Prior to this appointment, my doctor and my OBGYN were both supportive of my interest in getting pregnant. While we did discuss the realit-ies of how I might experience pregnancy at my size, neither doctor thought that my size should be a bar-rier to getting pregnant. This was absolutely not the opinion of the fertility doctor I saw at the first clinic outside Toronto, and he made that abundantly clear.

At the onset of my first appointment, I informed the doctor that I am a PhD student who studies weight-based discrimination in healthcare and that, despite my weight, I am moving forward with getting preg-nant and recognize that pregnancy may be challenging. It was quite clear from the start that we did not see eye to eye on this matter. First, from this appointment onward, he prefaced almost every statement with, "I am not discriminating against you, but…." He also told me his job as a doctor is to "first do no harm" and that getting me pregnant could be harmful both to me and my potential future child.

The argument the fertility doctor was making is not one that is foreign to motherhood scholars or fat stud-ies scholars, since fat pregnant bodies are often categorized as "risky" bodies (Friedman 2014, 31; Parker and Pausé 2018, 126). This draws on narratives of fat women, and subsequently fat mothers, as lazy, inact-ive (Friedman 2014, 28), and likely to produce an "obese" child (Parker and Pausé 2018, 128). I actively pushed back against this notion of risk and the idea that I was ignorant to the realities of "obese" preg-nancy. This doctor insisted that I needed to see a high-risk pregnancy specialist in order to get approval to become pregnant. I was not interested in pursuing this. I communicated extensively via email with the clinic about my decisions. In response to the expectation that I would first need permission from the high-risk group, I indicated that:

> I'm not interested in attending a pre-pregnancy group or facilitating my care out of [Hospital outside of the GTA]. Aside from insemination, I will be managing my care with my OBGYN in Toronto and out of her affiliated hospital.

My OBGYN made the referral to [fertility doctor] for an IUI [intrauterine insemination] which, in my

understanding, should indicate her acknowledgement that she will be dealing with my pregnancy, even though it is high risk.

What is most frustrating with this situation is that I am not asking for permission to get pregnant, and I feel that [fertility doctor] has me jumping through these hoops in order to obtain somebody's permission or allowance for me to have a pregnancy .… I came to the clinic for assistance in getting pregnant because I don't have a partner whose sperm I will use. What I am looking for at the clinic is access to sperm from a donor bank and a doctor to facilitate the IUI. Access and assistance, not permission. (K. Ioannoni, personal communication, April 2, 2019).

The fertility doctor, via his nurse, again disagreed with my perspective, arguing that:
> We are not wanting you to receive permission for pregnancy we are asking the pre-pregnancy clinic to assess risk of pregnancy with morbid obesity and associated complications. This is routine assessment of risk that is conducted for all of my patients .… Our suggestion would be to strongly be seen by high risk per-pregnancy [sic]. At this time, we do not feel comfortable to proceed without assessment of risk for your pregnancy for risk of gestational diabetes, pregnancy induced hypertension, large baby, C-section and increased maternal mortality. We would absolutely be happy to continue to assess your fertility status in the event we get the assessment from [Hospital outside of the GTA] and you are fully aware of your risks and ready to proceed. He [the fertility doctor] would not like to proceed blindly (K. Ioannoni, personal communication, April 3, 2019).

This discussion went on for multiple days. Not only did my frustration stem from the fatphobia I felt from the fertility doctor, but also because he was having me complete all the pre-insemination requirements (called cycle monitoring) without committing to following through with insemination once the monitoring was complete. Cycle monitoring aims to establish when you are going to ovulate to pinpoint the best time for insemination, and it involves frequent transvaginal ultrasounds and blood draws (every 2-3 days following the start of menstruation). After a month of cycle monitoring, you can typically move forward with an IUI.

At this stage he [the fertility doctor] agrees that the diagnostic cycle is complete and doesn't need further cycling for you until we get *clearance* (emphasis added) to move forward. I [nurse] know you are wanting that clearance to come from the OBGYN however [fertility doctor] has let me know he really would like to have the pre-pregnancy group follow up prior to moving forward (K. Ioannoni, personal communication, April 10, 2019)

Continually fighting with the fertility clinic was exhausting. I was prepared to have to advocate for myself, as doing so is not a new experience for me, but I underestimated the mental toll it would take. I also underestimated the time commitment; going to a clinic outside my city multiple times a week, without having confirmation of moving forward, was draining. Regardless, I continued to register my exasperation and frustration with the clinic via email:
> I want to re-express that I understand the need for "clearance" from anyone else. [Fertility doctor] has explained the risks to me, my OBGYN has explained the risks to me, I understand that getting pregnant while morbidly obese is risky. I am not interested in having to hear this again from another doctor or trying to get another person to give me permission to get pregnant. I should be able to make a decision about my own reproductive health without continual attempts to scare me out of said decision, under the guise of being "fully informed." … It's disheartening and exhausting to have to continue to fight to get assistance in getting pregnant. If I were to get pregnant without an IUI, I wouldn't be denied health care

in caring for me during pregnancy, despite my weight. (K. Ioannoni, personal communication, April 10, 2019).

This communication was followed up with an unsolicited and unanticipated angry phone call by the fertility doctor who stressed to me that this was not about power and control but about not doing harm. In this, he interrupted me any time I tried to speak and expressed his frustration that I would not accept that it is dangerous to get pregnant at my size. Ultimately, I ended my affiliation with the clinic and decided instead to go through with my appointment at the Toronto clinic.

Clinic #2

By the time I made the decision to leave the first clinic, I was nearing the date of my appointment at the Toronto fertility clinic. At this point, I was incredibly anxious at the prospect of repeating the same experience. The first appointment was early in the morning and I grabbed Starbucks coffee to bring to the appointment with me. I remember waiting in line and being apprehensive of carrying Starbucks into my appointment. I tweeted out my anxiety:

> I have an important doctors appt today. Got here early, decided to grab Starbucks. Had a serious internal debate over what to get and what wouldn't look too much like a fat persons drink, as if I would further out myself in my appointment. (Kelsey_x, May 17, 2019).

Regardless of my concern about potential fatphobia from the doctor, the appointment was completely different from the first clinic I attended. The doctor I saw was still apprehensive about pregnancy at my size but approached the discussion from the perspective of "when you get pregnant" as opposed to the mentality of "if I chose to get you pregnant" that was prevalent in my previous experience. My weight was still actively discussed and still hindered the options available to me in terms of reproductive assistance but this new experience was one where the doctor treated me with respect, autonomy, and agency.

While the experience was moving forward in a much better fashion, my weight still functioned as a barrier against my available choices. Friedman (2014) highlights how the options available for reproductive assistance are limited for fat women and how many fat women are disqualified from such assistance (37). This was definitely the case for me.

There are three main ways to get pregnant using fertility assistance: a) a medicated IUI, where sperm is inserted into the uterus, timed with ovulation; b) an unmedicated IUI; c) and IVF, where eggs are retrieved from a person with eggs, inseminated, and re-inserted into the uterus. Immediately, the doctor told me that because my body mass index (BMI) was higher than 40, I could not do IVF. IVF is done in a way that requires anaesthesia and they cannot perform this procedure on women who exceed a certain BMI at the clinic. He also indicated that he would not be comfortable doing a medicated IUI, as medication acts to increase the number of potential follicles that could become embryos, increasing the possibility of becoming pregnant with multiples (twins, triplets). He did agree, however, that we could pursue an unmedicated IUI and re-evaluate the potential of a medicated IUI in the future if I were having difficulty getting pregnant. Thus, again, the cycle monitoring process began.

Similar to the doctor at the first fertility clinic, this doctor wanted me to consult with a high-risk pregnancy doctor about the realities of obese pregnancy. In contrast, though, this was not prescriptive. He was clear that it was a consultation, not a method of approval or permission. He wanted me to consult with the high risk OBGYN specifically because he hoped I would consider switching to her for my care. I begrudgingly agreed to meet the specialist.

The high-risk OBGYN is located at one of Toronto's biggest hospitals and works in the Special Pregnancy Program. Specifically, as part of this program, she runs a weekly clinic for obese pregnant women. When I met her, I expressed my displeasure at having to talk to another doctor about the "risk" of being obese and pregnant. After reviewing my medical history, she indicated that there was no reason that a healthy 28-year-old woman like myself should not get pregnant. *Healthy*—not a word I was used to hearing in association with my body. Instead of spending the consultation appointment warning me of the risks associated with obese pregnancy, she asked about my concerns and fears about being pregnant, listened to my worries about how fat pregnant bodies are dealt with, and walked me through how my care would look if I were in her clinic. Our appointment ended with her giving me a tour of the pre-natal Special Pregnancy Program and letting me know that she hoped to see me back there as a pregnant woman soon. Needless to say, while I did not have a problem with the original OBGYN I was referred to, I quickly switched to the care of the high-risk specialist.

Insemination

Upon the completion of this appointment and my cycle monitoring, I was cleared to pick a donor and start the process of an IUI. I was officially on the standard protocol of IUIs, no longer fighting for permission to get pregnant. The doctor warned me multiple times that most IUIs do not work the first time and that it was possible that my weight may impact how successful an IUI attempt might be. None of these warnings mattered though; I got pregnant on my first try in August of 2019. The doctor, while very supportive, was quite surprised with how quickly it happened. My mother, on the other hand, was not. Apparently, I come from a line of very fertile women.

The standard procedure following a successful IUI is to stay with the fertility clinic for the first ten weeks of pregnancy before "graduating" and moving care to an OBGYN. While I experienced all the joys the first trimester has to offer, medically, my pregnancy was progressing as expected, with no complications. When I hit the ten-week mark, my fertility doctor congratulated me, thanked me for convincing him to do my IUI, and told me not to stop advocating for myself. It was both nice to hear and frustrating to think about what would happen if I had not had the energy to advocate for myself. Nonetheless, this experience was a fundamental shift from the first clinic and I was proud to "graduate" and move on to the OBGYN.

Designation: High Risk

After graduating from the fertility clinic, I was referred to the Special Pregnancy Program Here, I saw my OBGYN at least once a month, sometimes twice a month. I had frequent ultrasounds and bloodwork and had access to many other support services such as peri-natal mental health and a social worker who helped me create my birth plan. My weight and my blood pressure were taken at every appointment, yet my weight was never reported to me (unless I asked) nor was I ever told to lose weight. As someone who has had continuous negative experiences in the healthcare system, where doctors would focus solely on weight loss as a solution to any problem I was having, this was a drastically different experience. The equipment in the Special Pregnancy Program accommodates large bodies, from the chairs to the exam beds and the blood pressure cuffs—a rare occurrence! I did not feel uncomfortable at the clinic even once throughout my pregnancy; I never felt judged because of my weight, which is often the case in healthcare environments. In fact, being a part of this clinic meant that I was around fat pregnant women every time I had an appointment My body felt normalized in this space.

Labour: A C-section during COVID-19

My son was born at the end of April 2020 via Caesarean-section (C-section) and in the middle of the global COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 was certainly the hot topic in the hospital, whether it was the lack of personal protective equipment or the constant chatter among the staff about the uncertainty of the disease. However, the impact of COVID-19 on my pregnancy and delivery were minimal. Unlike mothers giving birth later in the pandemic, I did not have to wear a mask during my labour. I was allowed to have one support person in the room during my labour and C-section but I was not allowed to have visitors during my stay in the hospital. I was discharged about 48 hours after my surgery. It was an odd experience to not have my support system around, especially as a solo parent. I anticipated having both my parents there and having friends in the waiting room; however, because of COVID-19, it was not safe to even have them visit post-discharge. This resulted in quite an isolating experience.

I categorically did not want to have a C-section. I knew the risks for C-section were higher at my size, both in terms of the chances of needing one and the risks associated with major abdominal surgery. Having a C-section at my size was scary for a lot of reasons. I had read many anecdotal stories and saw references to studies about how morbidly obese women recover poorly from C-sections and the likelihood of infection at the incision site was increased. Who would take care of my son or me? How would I dress myself? How would I clean myself? I was very scared. My doctor agreed to induce me three days before my due date and let me labour with the understanding that we would book a C-section for two days later in the event that my labour did not progress. When I was admitted to the hospital I was 3 cm dilated. Despite multiple induction attempts, 48 hours later I was still 3 cm dilated and it was time for a C-section.

The average C-section, according to the Cleveland Clinic, is about 45 minutes. My C-section took place in a specialized operating room for "obese" women, with 21 dedicated medical personnel (including multiple OBGYNs, fellows, and anaesthesiologists) and took 2.5 hours. The risks for general anaesthesia were too high based on my BMI, so I had an epidural and was awake for the procedure. They used a specialized technique specifically for "obese" women called a "transverse supra-pannus incision" (Sagi and Maxwell 2017, 271) where instead of cutting at the bikini line which would fall under my "apron" or hanging belly (medically known as abdominal pannus), they cut right under my belly button. Despite how terrifying this was, I was in awe of the skill and care of my team. I was well taken care of.

Conclusion

When I set out to write this piece, I thought that I would be writing extensively about what it is like to be pregnant and fat. As I got into the details of my experience, I realized that my pregnancy was quite boring, for a lack of a better term. The interesting and complicated part of my experience came from the intersection of choosing to be a single mother and being a fat—or, as the medical industry continues to tell me, "morbidly obese"—woman. The reality is that my pregnancy was fairly textbook, aside from my "high risk" designation.

Contrary to all the concerns laid out by the doctor at the first clinic, harm was not done to my child or me by my choosing to become pregnant. My blood pressure was normal, I put on a total of about 15 pounds, I did not have gestational diabetes, and my baby was born a happy and healthy 8 pounds 4 ounces. Despite having needed a C-section, I was not pressured to choose one. Instead, my wishes to try and have a vaginal birth were respected until that was no longer a safe option. Reflecting on my experience of being pregnant, I find it ironic that this journey has not always been positive but my experience with the Special Pregnancy Program has been my best healthcare experience, by far.

Having the opportunity to share my fertility journey, challenges and all, at the 2023 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences was such a rewarding experience. Seeing the theme of Congress 2023, "Reckonings and Re-Imaginings," I was hopeful that I would find a space to speak about my fertility journey and the impact of anti-fat bias and fatphobia on maternal possibility. As a sociologist, I was excited to see that the Canadian Sociological Association was hosting a series of panels on Feminist Sociology and Reproductive Lives, Bodies, and Politics." The series of panels on sociology and reproduction provided the space for me to speak about fat reproduction but also the time to reflect with other scholars in the field on how we can dismantle the oppression and discrimination faced by pregnant people of all different yet intersecting social locations.

The reproductive lives of fat women and the way their bodies are treated in healthcare spaces are fraught with anti-fat bias. In this paper I reckon with the discriminatory treatment I experienced in my initial foray into reproductive assistance and I re-imagine a future where fat pregnant people have access to the specialized, supportive care I received in the Special Pregnancy Program, without jumping through hoops or having to be "in the know" about such programs. The standard of care for pregnant people should not differ based on body size and fat futures must be acknowledged, not discouraged.

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Gendered Emotional Labour in Academia: Not Receiving but Expected to Give

by Galina Scolnic and Jennifer Halliday

Abstract: The authors share their reflections in the aftermath of the roundtable *Emotional Labour in Academia* that took place during the Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF) 2023 conference. Although each participant at the roundtable had a unique positionality, they had experiences to share as women in academia who desire to do their work well without exhausting themselves in the process. This paper does not restate all that was said during the roundtable event but shares what we have learned collectively and individually and further expresses the authors' desire for more discussion on similar topics wherein we learn with and from each other about how to foster spaces of care and solidarity with one another.

Keywords: classed labour; emotional labour; gendered labour; racialized labour; women in academia

Résumé : Les auteures font part de leurs réflexions à la suite de la table ronde *Emotional Labour in Academia* qui a eu lieu lors de la conférence Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF) de 2023. Bien que chaque participante à la table ronde ait une situation unique, elles avaient toutes des expériences à transmettre en tant que femmes du milieu universitaire qui veulent bien faire leur travail sans s'épuiser à la tâche. Cet article ne reprend pas tout ce les participantes à la table ronde ont dit, mais expose ce que nous avons appris collectivement et individuellement, et exprime le souhait des auteures de voir se tenir d'autres discussions sur des sujets semblables, dans lesquelles nous apprendrions de chacun comment créer des espaces où l'on fait preuve de bienveillance et de solidarité les uns envers les autres.

Mots clés : travail selon la classe; travail émotionnel; travail selon le genre; travail racialisé; femmes dans le milieu universitaire

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Galina Scolnic is a sessional instructor at the University of Windsor. She teaches Women's Studies, Sociology, and Philosophy. Her work explores the ways in which class, gender, place of birth, and religion direct one's life within the matrix of societal expectations. Specifically, she explores the lived realities of the marginalized within a patriarchal capitalist society. Dr. Scolnic writes for academic as well as literary journals with the intention of reaching a wider audience.

Jennifer Halliday is a PhD Candidate at the University of Windsor. She has an interdisciplinary educational background, specializing in archaeology, physical anthropology, criminology, and sociology, and her research reflects this diversity by examining complex social issues through a multifaceted lens and integrating diverse theoretical perspectives. Specifically, her research interests lie primarily in ethics, human rights,

and incorporating multiple ontologies and epistemologies in policy, but she also explores topics related to animal and environmental welfare and the intersections of environmental racism and physical anthropology.

Introduction

Academia glorifies intellectual and mental labour yet offers little-to-no recognition of the emotional labour that supports these feats. This emotional labour is, in part, based on a value of "professionalism" —notably, a professionalism that is based on the expectations of white, upper-class men. To be professional, one must be stoic. That is, one must often be distant or detached, even-tempered, resilient, and strong in the face of adversity.

In this paper we aim to share our reflections in the aftermath of the roundtable *Emotional Labour in Academia* that took place during the Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF) 2023 conference. The five participants shared their lived experiences of emotional labour in the classroom, office hours with students and colleagues, at the administrative level, and as teaching/graduate assistants for full-time professors. While each one of us has a unique positionality, some of our identifiers intersect: we are all women in academia who desire to do our work well without exhausting ourselves in the process. However, we also hail from different geographical locations, are part of various social classes, and are perceived differently due to race, religion, migration status, body/mental health, and so on.

At the roundtable, we sat down in a circle, including three audience participants, and proceeded to answer the following questions:

1. In what areas of academic work do you feel the need (or pressure) to perform emotional labour?

2. Please reflect on the type of emotional labour that is expected of you given your positionality as it pertains to gender, race, sex, class, and so on?

3. How do you care for your own mental health when demands of emotional labour run high?

It is not our intention here to restate all that was said during the roundtable event. However, we would like to take this opportunity to share what we have learned collectively and individually and to express our desire for further discussion on similar topics wherein we learn with and from each other about how to foster spaces of care and solidarity. To that end, here, Galina shares her reflections as it pertains to emotional labour in the classroom as a new instructor in Women's Studies and Jennifer shares her reflections as a PhD Candidate navigating the expectations of graduate students.

Galina's Reflections

My positionality mainly manifests itself through gender and class. Precisely because I am a working-class woman, I understand the world the way I do. By this I mean that by 'transgressing' my birth station, I have come to reside in spaces where I am never at home, where I do not know the mores and rules of conduct, nor do they make sense to me. I question everything. Academia is neither working-class nor genderized for women. From undergraduate all the way to my PhD, and as a new instructor, I have never met an-

other working-class migrant woman in my field. The consolidation of knowledge, historically, has served the interests of the ruling class in the service of capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism to the detriment of racialized, poor, and non-western folks. Women and Gender Studies classes are of course geared towards women's self-emancipation but rarely towards working-class women. Given that knowledge itself has historically been class-based, that which one knows from one's own lived experiences is rarely acknowledged unless supported by citations.

I am also an immigrant. There is no day that I leave the safety of my apartment wherein someone does not remind me that I am a foreigner by asking the cliché question, "Where are you from"" often coupled with the truism, "Because you have an accent." Depending on my day, this makes me feel tired, indifferent, or enraged at people's entitlement towards another person's lived experiences.

With students, I volunteer my positionality at the beginning of the semester in an attempt to minimize their curiosity about me and to help them concentrate on the learning process. When I teach, young people come to me with personal questions as if I have the answer, and I turned towards my colleagues at the roundtable to learn about and share tools for addressing students' problems. However, my openness about who I am seems to work in such a way that students feel comfortable sharing who they are with me and asking questions about personal and academic dilemmas they may have. "Are you sure you should be telling me this?" is the question that pops into my head when students share personal information with me.

At the roundtable, my peers taught me certain tools such as sharing with one another (as we were doing), recognizing that emotional labour is a structural issue, learning about the resources already offered by the institution such as counselling, and care practices towards others as well as oneself. However, what I questioned in the aftermath of that roundtable was whether I was inviting this kind of work. Did I not volunteer my migration experience? Most students who approach me are migrants themselves, international as well as naturalized students, often racialized, trying to figure out a new country, institution, language, and a culture often very different from where they hail. Is this my job and does the university have the tools to support these students?

As seen from Jennifer's experiences below, there is a vast gap between emotional labour expectations one experiences as a graduate student and as a new instructor. Precisely because of our classed and gendered positionalities we are dismissed by the institution when we express our needs as graduate students. However, once we start teaching, we feel the pressure to be there for our students in ways that we were not supported ourselves. Finding a middle road, wherein one feels both supportive and not drained would be ideal.

A Year After the Roundtable

While I have been fortunate to have good mentors during my graduate preparation, I am beginning to learn, on my own, that mentoring is a humbling experience. Students coming to me with their troubles is an honour I do not invite nor deserve and the reasons they find me a safe person to confide in are, frankly, not important. In teaching others, I continue learning and understanding that it is going to be a life-long journey. Each student who passes through my classes with a world of experiences of their own challenges, encourages, and emboldens me. I am very proud of my origins and I have never dreamed of achieving the social status bestowed upon someone teaching in a western university. Shame and guilt often accompany me when I converse with working-class folks who know the same as, if not more than, me just by living it. My task, then, is not to uphold some ideal my students shall strive towards. On the contrary, I aim to con-

tinue to articulate my lived experiences of class, migration, and gender in order to theorize from the ground up so no one can say, in the words of Zora Neale Hurston, that I was silent about my pain. Racialized, classed, gendered, and non-conforming students need to be encouraged to continue to develop a language of their own and fight the hegemonic forces of a world that was not made for them, that refuses to contain them.

That which was terrifying to me a year ago stemmed from the misconception that I must lead, be an example, or act as if I know. I cannot claim that I am not afraid now, or that I am always open to students approaching me with their dilemmas. The roundtable we held in 2023 definitely clarified structural ways of dealing with these events. However, remembering my origins, how working-class peoples collaborate not only because of class interests but out of need for survival, how women share with each other to endure and outlive patriarchy, and how I am here, despite everything, this renewed my desire to continue learning with and from my students who are doing the same as me: articulating their lived experiences.

Jennifer's Reflections

My positionality is that of a woman, working-class graduate student with mental health issues. I discuss emotional labour in academia from the perspectives of mental illness and neurodivergence, drawing on my own experiences navigating academia. Mental health issues predispose one to emotional dysregulation and this often makes the performance of emotional labour more difficult.

I feel the pressure to perform emotional labour in my interactions with colleagues, advisors, and administration, as well as in managing workloads and deadlines and with the pressure to have abundant extra-curricular projects and publications. In particular, I feel as though academia expects everyone to be comfortable and proficient with public speaking. This is a particularly difficult task for me, as it is undoubtedly for many, many other scholars who may or may not struggle with their mental health.

This kind of "professionalism," more often than not, requires keeping silent about emotional distress and pretending you are okay when you are not. To loosely quote Disney's *Frozen*, it requires one to conceal, not feel. But humans, in general, can only conceal for so long before they crack and people who struggle with their mental health often have significantly lower thresholds for how long they can maintain that necessary stoicism (Murray et al. 2007). Masking our true feelings can also deepen the exhaustion we feel when reaching our limits.

Yet, failure to maintain professionalism can also be triggering and can lead one to feelings of shame, alienation, incompetence, and inadequacy. Given that professionalism often requires masking our true feelings and that the job itself lends little time or space to make mental health and wellness a priority, failing to adequately perform can also lead others, especially those in positions of power, to perceive us as incompetent or "not ready." These negative feelings can begin to affect one's ability to do not just the emotional labour but also the job itself, further exacerbating negative feelings and adding perceptions of laziness, lack of intelligence, and irresponsibility.

This is particularly difficult when a person's mental health declines to the point that they start believing that their colleagues, supervisors, administrators have negative perceptions about them – with or without any evidence. These perceptions can be really difficult to navigate, especially when one does not have the self-awareness to recognize it or has yet to realize they might be suffering from a mental health condition.

These perceptions, whether grounded in evidence or not, can also grow into tension between the indi-

vidual and their colleagues, advisors, and peers. Keeping silent, staying stoic, maintaining professionalism, and concealing not feeling, often means that there is no explanation when you cannot keep it up.

My desire to succeed in my role as a PhD Candidate and overcome my struggles more often than not allows me to push through and do the hard things anyway. Sometimes, though, the responsible thing to do is listen to that anxious voice that is trying to protect me and take a break from academic work. Unfortunately, the current academic system, and its system of accommodations, make that nearly impossible.

In my experience, when life happens and mental health declines to the point that accommodation is needed, the types of accommodations available are mostly applicable to common symptoms of common conditions; these are not always helpful. Unique accommodations can be made with proper documentation but when the accommodation one needs conflicts with the very nature of a course delivery or goes even further to conflict with the PhD *program* requirements themselves, the system breaks. This creates tricky administrative hurdles that add stress to an emotional beaker that is already overflowing and mental health that is already crumbling.

I have experienced instances where my mental health overwhelms me during important oral examinations and I cannot maintain the mask so I start to cry. I have had to struggle with social anxiety that threatens me with a panic attack when I need to attend office hours for additional help or feel the need to explain emotional breakdowns. In these instances, I have had professors who firmly believe in academic stoicism and mental health stigmas, creating tension through feelings of awkwardness, distrust, and invalidation that makes me feel unsafe and unaccepted, further compounding the difficulty of performing the required emotional labour. I have also, fortunately, had professors who provide a safe space for me and work with me to accommodate my needs despite the complicated administrative hurdles and the extra emotional labour it undoubtedly caused them. I thank those professors and administrators for all their help over the last few years, for without it I may not have made it this far.

Ultimately, I have shown that the emotional labour requirements of academia can sometimes be exponentially more troublesome for a graduate student with a mental health condition. This is not to say that neurotypical students do not also face emotional labour challenges that seem insurmountable. Rather, it is to say that the academy is a place where people who are predisposed to have a lower tolerance for emotional labour and who are more susceptible to burnout are often required to mask themselves and, consequently, do even more emotional labour than others in order to succeed.

Acknowledgements

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Relational Practices in Arts-Based Research: A Roundtable Reflection on the Fostering Dialogues Project

by Celeste Pang, Brittany A.E. Jakubiec, and Melanie Schambach

Abstract: *Fostering Dialogues* was an arts-based action research project that brought together LGBTQ+ older adults and homecare personal support workers in a virtual arts and dialogue program to explore presents and futures of community-based care. In this Research Note the artist and researcher team reflect on the researcher-artist relationship and arts-based collaboration, touching on topics including community engagement, horizontal decision-making, and the power of images to affect change.

Keywords: arts-based methods; care; community-engaged research; LGBTQ+

Résumé: *Fostering Dialogues* est un projet d'action et de recherche axé sur les arts qui regroupe des personnes âgées LGBTQ+ et des préposés aux soins à domicile dans le cadre d'un programme virtuel d'art et de dialogue afin d'explorer le présent et l'avenir des soins communautaires. Dans cette note de recherche, l'équipe composée d'artistes et de chercheurs se penche sur la relation entre ces derniers et sur la collaboration artistique, en abordant des sujets comme la participation de la collectivité, la prise de décision horizontale et le pouvoir des images pour susciter le changement.

Mots clés: méthodes axées sur les arts; soins; recherche effectuée auprès des collectivités; LGBTQ+

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How can researchers engage in ethical relationships with artist collaborators? What ways of relating can the process of arts-based action research inspire?

'In this roundtable group interview, we reflect on the researcher-artist relationship and co-creation experience in the *Fostering Dialogues* project. *Fostering Dialogues* was a community-based, arts-based action research project that brought together LGBTQ+ older adults and homecare personal support workers (PSWs) from Ontario in a virtual 12-week arts and dialogue program. This program explored themes of

home, care, and futures of community-based care through facilitated conversations, art-making, and co-creation of a digital mural.

A main goal of the *Fostering Dialogues* project was to learn about how arts-based action research can help to create connections among LGBTQ+ older adults and homecare PSWs—as multiply marginalized groups in society and within care systems—to creatively reckon with present situations and to imagine what could be otherwise. Arts-based action research allows for artmaking to play a primary role in knowledge co-creation, at the same time that art is a source of data representation (Kunt 2020). To date, we have launched an online exhibit of the collective digital mural that participants created (see Figure 1) (Fostering Dialogues project participants 2023), published an open-access report (Pang, Jakubiec, and Schambach 2023), shared findings with two collaborator groups, and presented preliminary reflections on our process and impact of arts-based action research methods at the Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF) 2023 conference.

Figure 1. *Imagining Futures of Care* by Fostering Dialogues project participants. To view on and download from the interactive website see: https://egale.ca/egale-in-action/fostering-dialogues-arts-based-research-project/

For this Research Note, we wanted to hit pause and reflect further on this process by bringing the artist and researcher team back together to discuss the artist-researcher relationship and arts-based co-creation. The interviewees are Melanie Schambach, an artivist and community-based creator with over two decades experience facilitating social arts projects and participatory paintings; Brittany Jakubiec, co-researcher and Director of Research at Egale Canada; and Celeste Pang, co-researcher and current professor in women's and gender studies at Mount Royal University. The guiding interview questions were inspired by questions we have been asked by the public, including at the WGSRF conference, and were ultimately agreed upon by the *Fostering Dialogues* group. The discussion was held online over Zoom, recorded, and later transcribed and edited by the authors.

Ultimately, the questions and responses are intended as a reference document for others considering ethics and practice in arts-based action research. We touch on issues such as the value of arts-based research in meaningfully engaging community, horizontal decision-making, respect and acknowledgement in the researcher-artist relationship, the movement from intent to impact, and the power of images to affect change.

Melanie: *Celeste, Brittany, what was the inspiration behind this project?*

Celeste: One of the foundational ideas was simply to get a group of LGBTQ+ older adults together with PSWs. Through research and conversations I had heard in community, I had observed that there is often a significant disconnect between PSWs and LGBTQ+ older adults. Many LGBTQ+ older adults may have fears or concerns about receiving homecare. But sometimes those fears or concerns can get displaced onto PSWs, as individuals or as a group, in ways that can be racist or tinged with assumptions about where they come from. On the flipside, there's also a need to make LGBTQ+ histories and people more present in homecare. So, the idea was to bring folks together to have a dialogue, to get to know one another, and to explore and challenge the underlying assumptions that they may have.

Brittany: Because one of the main goals was building bridges between these two groups of participants, it was important to take a different type of approach to our methodology. Early on it really became clear that arts-based research could play that role in creating a space where folks could share their experiences and build connections with each other. Arts-based methodologies allows participants to explore more sensitive topics through artmaking rather than relying on words alone, and it also allows people to feel a sense of ownership and empowerment in the research process, as well as in the outcome of the research.

B: *A question for Melanie: What did you think when we approached you about the idea and potential collaboration? What made it seem feasible, interesting, or a project that you would decide to take on?*

M: I gravitate towards finding ways to turn paintings into action. In these paintings, there are stories, insight, and content that have the potential to affect policy. But decision-makers and those who affect policy need to have these images translated into a more tangible language. When I saw the opportunity to work with you in this way, I thought this [participatory painting] process could contribute to a more systemic level of change.

On a community level, while collaborating with settlement organizations, I've seen a need to get different immigrant communities to be more aware of the long legacies of homophobic attitudes. Parallel to this, I've seen a lack of cultural sensitivity in the queer spaces through my community organizing work. It is important to me that everyone reflects on service and inclusion, going beyond being informed and following protocols, and look deeper into ourselves and our assumptions from this place of love and care. How do we create dialogues to see the gaps and amend bridges? I believe art has a powerful way of opening up the emotional self and connecting people, allowing them to step into the courage it takes to have in-depth conversations.

M: *From your perspective, what made it doable? How did you pull those strings behind the curtains to make this happen and to find funding for it?*

B: We were lucky to get one-year funding from the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR) through a Catalyst Grant for community-led research on LGBTQIA/2S wellness. Through that funding, we were able to set aside a good amount to bring you on, Melanie, and to have you be meaningfully in-

volved in decision-making and shaping the project. We also had support from VHA Home Healthcare [a non-profit home healthcare agency based in Ontario]. The lovely folks there helped to spread the word to their PSWs about the project and to brainstorm ideas about how to move the project forward after the funding period. The other part that made the project doable was the participants; they were really committed to the process and ready to take that ride with us, which I think made it doable within a tight timeframe.

C: Absolutely. Linked to that, I think, was the ability that we had to explore. While it was a tight timeframe, we did not feel squeezed to immediately figure out how everything was going to be. From the grant-writing stage onwards, we started out with these key themes of home, care, and futures of community-based care. And within those three broad buckets, we could really start working with you, Melanie, and begin that process of creating. From decisions to alternate between arts and dialogue-focused sessions, to putting together a "run of show" guide for each session, we were able to create so much space for participants to drive where the project would go. I think ultimately that's what made it doable, and so enjoyable to do.

C: *And, Melanie, how would you describe the artist-researcher collaboration at the outset of this project and as a whole? What did it look like, feel like, for you? And how was it similar or different from other collaborations you've been part of in the past?*

M: There is insight in the stories that are told and the stories that are drawn. But I find it even more interesting and exciting to look into what happens with the stories *in relation* to one another. The participatory process offers architecture and structure where the insights happen relationally. Underneath the stories, quotes, and images, there is wisdom about what is happening among people.

The sessions are designed with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Activities are chosen intentionally in hopes that participants can be themselves as much as possible. The creative process can bring up a lot of fears, such as fear of uncertainty, fear of failure, and fear of not being perfect. But when we co-create a space encouraging positive affirmations and support, we face those fears together and turn them into a transformational experience. This allows the more complex human to show up, where we don't have to leave half of ourselves outside the Zoom meeting.

Also, *image* is a powerful universal language. Our cognitive brain can be a little bit delayed when our imagination kicks in and considers images. So, image-making is like opening a door to a field of ideas that we've never really thought about. When we step into the world of imagination, we learn as we react to the process. Images also leave space for ambiguity. Sometimes they hold ideas that are unresolved or that carry hidden answers or expressions of the subconscious mind.

C: *Thank you. And in terms of collaboration with community organizations, is there any insight you'd share about what hasn't gone well?*

M: Something I've learned a lot about in this research is the ethics around horizontal collaboration. As an artivist, I felt understood, seen, and valued throughout, from the way we made decisions to checking on different ways of acknowledgment.

Looking back two decades, I've had to consciously work on being invisible as a leader because it is important for people to understand that everyone is an artist. The Western understanding of the arts is founded on professionalizing the arts and creating a division between artists and non-artists. When I come in with a

community-based or social arts approach, it's important to reframe power and create a horizontal field to regenerate the sense that everyone is an artist. In this context, my invisibility is key.

Unfortunately, working on being invisible—I'm using the word invisible just for lack of other words—has had some negative impacts on past collaborations, like organizations collecting and misusing funds or partners claiming authorship and discrediting my work. There was one instance where a group of professors wrote a journal article taking full credit for a process I designed and facilitated. This process has been created by the lives and stories of diverse communities that are often misheard or misrepresented.

I've been conflicted about knowing when to come to the front and ask to be acknowledged as an artivist. If I claim authorship, is that going to jeopardize the importance of reframing the idea that everyone is an artist? I didn't have the answer until *Fostering Dialogues.* Between us, we've had this shared understanding that the process of creating that horizontal playing field was a vital element for research. Not only among participants but in everything we were doing. I felt valued and validated throughout the process. I feel hopeful for me and all the social artists who have struggled to make work that is ethical.

C: *Brittany, building on Melanie's reflections, did you want to add anything from a research perspective about the ethics of doing this kind of community engaged work, especially with LGBTQ+ folks?*

B: To the question of ethics, Celeste and I have chatted about this in relation to this project but also outside of this project, thinking about how we do community-based research as an organization and as individuals and the values that we bring to the type of work that we do. This project allowed us to stretch those muscles and really come into our understanding of what it can look like to do community-based and community-engaged research. I think the piece that a lot of people could take away is around horizontal decision-making and bringing more people to the table to make decisions collaboratively, and to see value in doing that. In research, depending on who is the researcher, who is the funder, and timelines, there can be this desire to make decisions quickly but without everyone's voice and perspective to weigh things out carefully.

In this project, an intention that was set early on was that you, Melanie, were an equal voice at the table. And once we got the funding, we would decide what the project looked like together. You were always there with us. You were a social artist but you were also a co-researcher. In so many ways you helped make the decisions that shaped how the project went. You helped us create the sandbox for folks to play within. And then participants as well, creating the spaces for participants to have a say in what the project looked like, what the outcomes were, what the directions were. That took us doing a lot of deep listening and checking in together but also reflecting on the conversations we had with participants and sometimes deciding to pivot.

B: *A question for Melanie: What do you think went especially well? And would you change anything?*

M: The relational practice that we had as organizers was really balanced, from the ability to react to the process being as fluid as possible to having well-founded intentions. Plans are so often rooted in a budget and not really rooted in the intentions, right? We were able to stay true to our intentions the whole way through and be flexible for the rest to take shape and morph.

Something that I'm always craving to be improved, not just in *Fostering Dialogues*, is what happens to the participants after the project ends. Will relationships remain once the project is not part of the equation?

What bridges do we need to build so that participants can continue that work in their workplace and their communities? If we were a seed, who is watering it after we are gone?

M: *From a research perspective, what else do you think you went especially well? What other things do you feel we could still work on?*

C: Can I first make a followup comment to what you just said, Melanie? It's about this conundrum. The challenge of knowing how you can keep in touch with participants, show up for participants if they reach out, that's also a researcher challenge. As an anthropologist, it's very common in our work and accepted in the discipline that you spend a lot of time with people. As a researcher, you participate in or get to know about their daily lives and you can become friends. It's kind-of understood that a longer-term relationship can be okay. Whereas in other disciplines, the norm is often for researcher and participant contact to be very limited in scope and in time. So, it's a shared conundrum.

In this project, participants can keep in touch with us, they can contact us if they have ideas about what they want to do next or seek support for something we can help with. At the same time, there was that distance created by being online. For example, one of our participants was hospitalized during the process and didn't continue to the end of the sessions. And despite trying to get in touch, we don't know how he's doing. We don't know why he didn't come back. While there were a lot of upsides to doing this project online, this format also shaped how we could and couldn't follow-up with participants in some ways.

B: I was reflecting on the time during which we ran the project and that we had only a year to do it. We were deep in it and it felt like enough time to finish what we had set out to within the grant and the project outline. But in terms of getting the word out about what this project was, what our recommendations are, and having people engage with the art and the report, it's that piece where if we had had more time, we could have done a lot more.

You also asked what went well. For me, seeing the change not only in individuals during the project but also seeing collective changes: understanding each other as well as the self. I still remember some of those big narrative arcs that participants went through during the process. I think what I learned from that is the beauty of holding that much space, of having eight sessions together, the gift of time really allowed people to settle in, to find that creative voice again, to develop rapport and trust with each other, and start to share things about their lives and about their journeys and experiences. I think that was really special.

C: *As a final question for all of us: What would you say to other people considering arts-based action research or embarking on a similar project (in addition to everything we've mentioned already)?*

M: Writing grant applications is an art in itself. It is something I shy away from. I think you two have something interesting to share about this. I was surprised when reviewers acknowledged this work as a decolonial practice. Can you speak more about the process of grant-writing and knowing when not to hold back?

C: I would say maybe that we're in a climate where we can be very explicit about the impact of our work. Often grant-writing is so strategic, right? But it was significant that the grant reviewers recognized that and articulated their acknowledgement.

B: Arts-based work has inherent participatory aspects to it. We were all coming to the table with something of value, adding something to the dynamic of the project. And in the research world, researchers

hold a lot of power, including decision-making power depending on how a project is framed. If you're going to pursue arts-based research, make sure you're not trying to fit it into models of research that are hierarchical, that is, where the researcher holds all the power.

C: And building on that, art is not just an illustration. It can be taken seriously. It's not a statistic, it's an image. And that has meaning and that has power. It's not just there to illustrate a different type of fact or a different piece of evidence.

M: Yes. It is important to understand the different intentions: the process of creating images with others versus the final production. The process is about the depth of engagement of the participants and the quality of connection, while the intent of the final image is to have a strong impact on a wider audience. The process and the final production are both equally important. The art is in not letting one overwrite the other.

B: This project was about dreaming and bringing together two groups of people impacted by the same systems to imagine new futures of community-based care through collective art making. From our shared experiences in this project, it is clear that there is great value in engaging community in arts-based research. We encourage others to explore how arts-based research can be part of "taking back the future."

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The Feminist XResistance Project: Reflections and Commentary

by Galit Ariel, Aparajita Bhandari, Sarah York-Bertram, and Kacie G. Hopkins

Abstract: On May 31, 2023, we showcased the Feminist XResistance project at the Women and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF) conference under the apt thematic "Take Back the Future." The project started on July 9, 2022, when a group of international, interdisciplinary, early career feminist scholars convened on Zoom for the Feminist Digital Methods (FDM) Drop-in Virtual Lab hosted by York University's Centre for Feminist Research (CFR). The drop-in took place two weeks after the United States Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion and became a digital space to express our fears and anger over rising gender essentialist fascism, worries about the future, and to imagine feminist digital methods for resistance. In this reflection and commentary, we share our observations and processes for the Feminist XResistance project, starting with our first exploratory workshop, our co-creative analysis and outputs, the development of our AR installation, and, finally, our conclusions and insights.

Keywords: activism; augmented reality; digital methods; embodied resistance; embodiment; extended reality; feminism; feminist community; feminist resistance; interdisciplinary; research-creation

Résumé: Le 31 mai 2023, nous avons présenté le projet féministe XResistance lors de la conférence Women and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF) qui avait pour thématique « Take Back the Future » (Se réapproprier l'avenir). Le projet a débuté le 9 juillet 2022, lorsqu'un groupe de spécialistes féministes internationaux issus de différentes disciplines et en début de carrière, s'est réuni sur Zoom dans le cadre du Feminist Digital Methods (FDM) Drop-in Virtual Lab organisé par le Centre de recherches féministes (CFR) de l'Université York. La rencontre a eu lieu deux semaines après que la Cour suprême des États-Unis a renversé le droit constitutionnel à l'avortement et est devenue un espace numérique dans lequel nous avons pu exprimer nos craintes et notre colère face à la montée du fascisme essentialiste fondé sur le genre, nos inquiétudes quant à l'avenir, et imaginer des méthodes numériques féministes de résistance. Dans cette réflexion et ce commentaire, nous communiquons nos observations et processus dans le cadre du projet féministe XResistance, en commençant par notre premier atelier exploratoire, notre analyse cocréative et nos réalisations, la création de notre installation de réalité augmentée et, enfin, nos conclusions et réflexions.

Mots clés: militantisme; réalité augmentée; méthodes numériques; résistance personnifiée; personnification; réalité étendue; féminisme; communauté féministe; résistance féministe; interdisciplinaire; recherche-création.

Authors:

Kacie G. Hopkins (she/her) is a PhD Candidate with expertise in community economies, feminist social enterprises, and geographies of rural women's handmade crafts and creativity. She studies in the Communication and Cultural Studies program at York University and Toronto Metropolitan Universities. She is also a storyteller, creative writer, artist/ textile designer, and social entrepreneur. She is a member of global research networks such as: The Community Economies Research Network, Rural Women's Studies Association, Women, Gender and Social Justice, and Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation. Outside of her PhD studies she is active in the social enterprise, Wildflower Enterprises at WildflowerConnection.-com, that she and her twin sister founded to connect rural women through crafting, design, and empowerment services. She is an advocate for ethical trading of fashion and continues to write on ethical fair trade practices, specifically decolonizing the fair trade field through ethical and decolonial storytelling and marketing and advocating against toxic charity structures. Further she is a survivor advocate and worked with the YWCA, National Sexual Violence Resource Centre, and Pennsylvania Coalitions Against Rape and Domestic Violence. She is passionate about lifting survivor voices and working on survivor centered and trauma informed pedagogies and approaches to social change.

Sarah York-Bertram (she/they) is a historian, a qualitative researcher, a recent graduate of York University's Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies doctoral program, and is currently an H. Sanford Riley Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Winnipeg. Their postdoctoral research is a history of emotions examining the affective basis of judgments and narratives surrounding sexual commerce during Canada's westward expansion in the nineteenth century and western Canadian colonial worldmaking in the twentieth century. Sarah has sixteen years experience in intersectional, transnational, and community-based feminist research and twelve years experience in queer and feminist digital methods. She is a member of York University's Centre for Feminist Research's Feminist Digital Methods Research Cluster. Sarah is a settler born in Treaty 6 territory and the Homeland of the Métis in what is currently called Saskatchewan. Currently, Sarah lives in St. Catharines, Ontario which is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. St. Catharines is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Agreement.

Aparajita Bhandari is an assistant professor of Critical Digital Studies at the University Waterloo's Department of English Language and Literature. She previously completed her SSHRC-funded doctoral research in the Department of Communication at Cornell University where she was a member of the Social Media Lab. Aparajita's current work sits at the nexus of critical internet studies and feminist media studies engaging in critical examinations of social media platforms with a focus on understanding instantiations of everyday or mundane online experiences as potential sites of resistance against hegemonic power. Her interdisciplinary research has been published in top-tier journals such as *New Media & Society, Social Media + Society, Communication, Culture and Critique,* and *Big Data and Society*.

Galit Ariel is an award-winning researcher, author, and new media artist exploring the wild and imaginative side of bleeding-edge technologies. Galit is a creative technologist and PhD candidate at York University, where her "Biodigital Being(s)" research-creation project explores how embodied technologies, culture, and politics forge new body fictions. She is part of the Feminist Digital Methods Research Cluster, a graduate research fellow in York's Sensorium Centre for Digital Arts and Technology, and the recipient of the OGS Scholarship and the Susan Mann Dissertation Excellence Scholarship. Galit authored the book *Augmenting Alice: The Future of Identity, Experience and Reality* (BIS Publishing); her critical writing appeared as articles and book chapters in *Humanity-in-between and Beyond* (Springer Nature Volume on Posthumanism), *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, *Global Perspectives* (University

of California Press), DAMN *Magazine*, *Wired*, and more. Galit's creative work spans across location-based Augmented Reality art, subversive animation, speculative interactions, and art curation. Her work was presented as public art installations in international film & animation festivals and academic conferences, including the Dutch Design Week (EU), Opera Beyond (FI), Digital Arts Resource Center (CA), TED (US), The European Union (FI), the Humanities Congress (CA), HASTAC (US), and the International Symposium of Electronic Arts (Australia).

O n July 9th, 2022, the feeling in the Feminist Digital Methods (FDM) Drop-in Virtual Lab was grim. It was two weeks after the United States Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion. What had been intended as a time focused on FDM shifted to sharing fear, pain, anger, and worry about the future and the present. It was during that drop-in when the foundations were established for the Feminist XResistance Project as we looked for ways to face rising gender essentialist fascism and to imagine feminist digital methods for resistance. The outcome became a location-based XR project —providing an immersive space that centres critical representations and typically marginalized voices to cultivate revolutionary and experimental digital space to counter white, cis-male, patriarchal hegemony.

The project, which is a thread in York University's Centre for Feminist Research's FDM Research Cluster (FDMRC), is stewarded by four early-career and interdisciplinary feminist digital methods practitioners, Galit Ariel, Sarah York-Bertram, Kacie G. Hopkins, and Aparajita Bhandari. Project lead, Galit Ariel, is a TechnoFuturist, author, and creative with award-winning work in location-based Augmented Reality (AR) art, subversive animation, alternative interactions, and art curation. Ariel is a PhD candidate at York University. Sarah York-Bertram is a historian and PhD candidate at York University with sixteen years experience in feminist research and twelve years experience in queer, feminist, and transnational digital methods. Kacie G. Hopkins is a textile artist and PhD candidate at York University who uses an intersectional feminist lens to study rural community economies organized by women. Hopkins' training in anti-violence, sexual violence prevention education, community organizing, and trauma-informed facilitation aided our participatory workshop and content analysis. Aparajita Bhandari, whose work sits at the nexus of critical internet studies, critical data studies, and digital culture, examines everyday online experiences as potential sites of resistance against hegemonic power. Bhandari recently completed her PhD at Cornell University and is an assistant professor of Critical Digital Studies at the University Waterloo's Department of English. The Feminist XResistance Project integrated the input of over twenty contributors. In the spring of 2023, it was presented at the Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF) conference, under the apt thematic "Take Back the Future," and the Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) conference in New York City.

As Legacy Russell writes in *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (2020), the crafting of self online can be "an exploration of future self" (00 Introduction) It can also be a way to find "family and faith in the future" by "shaping personal visions of a self that could be truly empowered in being self-defined." As we write this commentary, provincial governments in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Ontario are leveraging "parental rights" discourses to end gender-affirming policies in public schools and third-party sex education (Ibrahim 2023; Latimer and Sciarpelleti 2023). Though we are cognizant of the legacies of abuse in colonial education systems, we also see how these arguments concerning "parental rights" and sex education support fascistic logics that are in the same vein as the *Dobbs* decision, which struck down *Roe*. Speaking from the context of East Africa in conversation with Tigist Hussen, Sheena Magenya argues that queer and gender-non-conforming people "find a space online where you can be out, as anonymously or safely as possible" (2022, 71) This, according to Magenya, is "some kind of freedom" that "must be protected." As

young people in Canada lose access to gender-affirming education, it is highly likely they will turn to digital spaces for safer self-expression and to find community.

Yet, as Russell (2020) suggests, the online is not a wholly separate space from the offline. For those with access, the route between online and offline is a loop. The evidence for such a loop rapidly mounted during the time this project was undertaken. The *Dobbs* decision enabled charges against a mother and her teenage daughter for an illegal abortion after Facebook acquiesced to a warrant from police in Norfolk, Nebraska, requesting the mother and daughter's private messages (Kaste 2022). As technology journalist Sam Biddle reports, Big Tech has mobilized against abortion care and targeted activists (2022a; 2022b). Biddle found that the US Marshals Service received regular alerts from Twitter/X's "official partner," Dataminr, about the precise time and location of abortion rights demonstrations (2023). In the Canadian context, access to abortion care depends on region (Kaposy 2010; Schummers and Norman 2019) and comprehensive reproductive justice remains inaccessible, particularly for Indigenous, Black, and disabled communities (Paynter 2022).

To engage with these themes and to respond to gender essentialist and technologically mediated fascism, we turned to speculative, relational, qualitative, embodied, and critical trans-fem(me)inist methods for research creation. The FDMRC's open access values informs our post-academic approach which challenges what is considered an academic output, breaks down boundaries between research and technology, and engages in critical dialogic relationship with media and its tools (Bucchi 2009). Critical trans-fem(me)inities grapples with desire as a generative force for imagining futures and examines femininity unhinged from "woman" (Duggan and McHugh 1996; Cowan 2012; Cheng 2021; Dahl 2012). As an interdisciplinary group, we leveraged our different viewpoints and attended to such frictions as:

- the gap between our desired experiences and actual embodied experiences in digital worlds;

- open access values and concerns over safety within digital spaces;

- strategic essentialism in movements to resist gendered and racialized oppression, anti-universalism (Spivak 2003; Hemmings 2011; Arora 2019), and pluriversal thinking (Escobar 2018).

Taking direction from Arora (2019) to strive for "provocative generalizability" over universalization (371), we engaged Scheer's (2012) theorization of emotions as historically and contextually specific and Howe's (2022) explanation of sensory studies, which "treats the senses and sensations as both object of study and means of inquiry" (3). In this reflection and commentary, we share our observations and processes for the Feminist XResistance project, starting with our first exploratory workshop, our co-creative analysis and outputs, the development of our AR installation, and, finally, our conclusions and insights.

Process: Co-Creation in a Speculative and Exploratory Workshop

Our first workshop, titled *Embodied XResistance*, occurred Friday February 24, 2023, at York University's Sensorium Centre for Digital Arts and Technology with both in person and online participants. We were all affiliated with an academic institution and had a shared language to articulate and address themes of digital agency and concerns over safety. The goal of the workshop was articulated as follows: "During this workshop participants will articulate frictions related to their embodied representation and a speculative/aspirational/alternative embodied representation they would like to have in immersive and digital spaces." In *Glitch Feminism* (2020), Russell argues that "*Glitch Is Cosmic*: We practice the future in the now, testing out alternatives of being. We openly, honestly consider together how to be strategically visible,

when visibility is radically necessary" (p. 146, emphasis original). This futuristic vision and experimentation informed our goals for the workshop.

A consent form and link to the FDMRC community guidelines were sent ahead of time to participants via email to ensure transparency and allow participants to hold us accountable for any discrepancies. A community Spotify playlist was sent to people ahead of time to allow them to add song requests which helped create a shared sense of contribution prior to entering the workshop.

The in-person space was set up with several creation stations which held numerous crafting tools including paints, papers, magazines, fabrics etc. Participants were invited to engage with these creative tools throughout the session. Online participants used word processors and Canva to digitally craft along with their fellow participants.

The workshop started with a discussion of the "code of conduct" as a tone-setting practice to establish a shared sense of safety and accountability from the get-go. The discussion of the code of conduct then gave way to an opening activity designed to help build community and trust and break the ice: a recitation of Maya Angelou's poem "Life Doesn't Frighten Me" accompanied by paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat. These two activities coupled with the playing of music from the shared Spotify playlist as participants entered and got set up cultivated a casual and open atmosphere to start the session before moving into discussion of potentially difficult topics around online conflict and danger.

The focus of the workshop was to centre participant's lived experiences whilst using social media platforms and their emotions arising from such experiences. Thus, emphasis was placed on the qualitative, subjective, plural, complex, and potentially contradictory feelings of those in the room rather than on creating a universal or generalizable understanding of the issues. Workshop design choices centred participants' feelings and experiences. A large sheet of paper ran through the centre of the table and participants were invited to write and doodle any direct discussion responses or other thoughts that came to mind during the session using markers we provided.

Figure 1: Code of Conduct—Workshop Slide Deck

Online participants' contributions in the chat were also included. Additionally, a "self-care" station was set up within the room with headphones, plants, and printouts of breathing exercises. This served as a space where people could go to check in with themselves and take space away from the rest of the group. Online participants were encouraged to take breaks as needed, with their camera and mic on or off.

To get participants thinking about their digital selves and experiences, we created a break-up letter template allowing participants to "break up" with the platform/digital identity/avatar that no longer served us. This writing exercise enabled us to create a vulnerable space to assert agency. The writing exercise was followed by a debrief which offered the opportunity to trace similarities and divergences in online experiences.

A key component of the workshop was the co-creation of artistic responses to the following prompts: 1) What does it feel like to be a female, non-binary, nongender, cisgender, etc. body in a digital space? OR 2) Show us what it feels like to be a female, non-binary, nongender, cisgender, etc. body in a digital space? In person participants used the "analog" crafting supplies (magazines, paints, glitter, fabrics, etc.) that were made available to collage or otherwise create responses to their experiences and our discussion, whereas online participants used digital collaging tools such as Canva.

Figure 2: Sharing Sesh—Workshop Slide Deck

Creative Analysis

In the process of our work together, we met weekly on Zoom for both work and informal chats leading up to the workshop and following it. Our conversations consisted of the project as well as supporting each other through our graduate studies. We also used Mural during our chats to make notes and conceptualize our ideas. After collecting and documenting workshop outputs, including recordings, transcripts, and creative contributions, we identified and analyzed explicit and implicit themes and frictions expressed by the

participants. What surfaced and quickly became evident is that digital space holds unresolved white-cis-hetero-patriarchal and exclusionary politics. Be it casual or professional digital platforms and spaces, fem(me)inine identities and representations are often met with hostility, intimidation, and discriminatory interactions. Despite the premise that digital spaceforges an inclusive and empowering space, abusive interactions and incidents were shared by all participants. Such experiences are not a "marginal" or "repository" part but a core quality of our digital experiences.

For participants, digital platforms are intimidating and lonely spaces that represent past and future trauma. For those with fem(me)inine experience or identity, entering digital spaces requires emotional and practical "gearing up," anticipating conflict arising from expressing an opinion or just "existing" in a digital space. Participants described this as influencing their decision to alter and/or conceal their fem(me)inine digital representation, their tone, or how they use their voice. Participants shared that they conduct extensive editing and fact-checking practices before engaging with digital correspondence and commentary. Sadly, they often choose to minimize or avoid digital interactions altogether. Even when interacting, their digital experience is exhausting, challenging, and lonely.

Confronted by these insights, we decided to make code bias and fem(me)inine code visible. Ruha Benjamin (2019) writes that "codes operate within powerful systems of meaning that render some things visible, others invisible, and create a vast array of distortions and dangers" (117). The critical fem(me)ininities subfield challenges the silencing and invisibilization of fem(me)inine experience and identity (Cheng 2021). One way it does so is through what Duggan and McHugh (1996) theorize as "Fem(me) science," which is interested in "science for desire" (156). Through these critical frameworks for analysis, we identified four frictions to explore and express in an AR Feminist XResistance installation:

- The digital gaze and politics of visibility

- Agency and voice in digital spaces

- Online body objectification

- Connection and community

Creative Development

Research shows that white cis-male experience of immersive computing is favoured, systemically supported, and technologically imbricated (Stanney, Fidopiastis and Foster 2020; Lopez et al. 2019). The Feminist XResistance project subverts these norms. The creative output we developed following our workshop includes three location-based AR installations with visual and sonic elements. Our approach to developing these elements includes representations of multiplicity and singularity, drawing from Escobar's (2018) frameworks of pluriversal thinking and pluriversal design. The pluriverse creates a space for many worlds inside our world. Pluriversal thinking challenges the notion of a single universal subject or experience and rejects the colonial project of world-flattening through generalization. Instead, we embraced radical differences and multiplicity to revise the world ahead. We used the workshop outputs as jumping-off point and:

- Co-authored, co-edited, and co-recorded written and voice-performed statements for each installation. The writing and editing process drew on phrases and expressions from the workshop. The outcome was delivered as a poetic yet evocative statement that expresses fem(me)inine digital experiences and resistance;

- Executed multi-sensory creative outputs (interactive, visual, sonic) that allow for multilayered experience for viewers of the AR installation;

- Utilized AR as a technique and delivery platform to reintroduce and reconnect physical and digital spaces and experiences. The AR installation can be viewed via a mobile app and various devices (smartphones or tablets), allowing for broad participation and viewing without using Immersive Tech specialized devices (such as headsets or dedicated immersive spaces and facilities);

- Utilized embodiment, bodies, and body parts, as core visual AR elements. These elements were created to reflect themes of embodiment from the workshop (like eyes, mouth, shoulders, and breasts) and as a thematic statement aiming to recompose, reclaim, and recognize fem(me)inine/ fem(me)inist embodiment, spaces, and agencies.

Bringing together the installation, voice-over statements, and AR body parts, we highlight the tension between embodiment and disconnection. Often, the experience of online danger is visceral and physically evocative. Participants spoke of needing to disconnect and section off parts of themselves to protect themselves in digital spaces. Thus, different body parts are separated in the AR installation. This visual, together with the sentiments expressed in voice-over statements, reflects desire to holistically come together to be our whole selves across digital and offline spaces.

Installations

On November 18th, 2023, we invited participants to experience the Augmented Reality (AR) installation as a walk-and-talk activation in downtown Toronto. Participants had the opportunity to share and reflect on similar lived-experiences, events, and frictions they endured on digital spaces. The route of the installations was (poetically) selected to be in front of the Meta, LinkedIn, and Twitter/X headquarters to assert fem(me)inist digital agency and resistance.

Figure 3: Under Their Eyes AR Installation—Downtown Toronto

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Under their Eyes explores the concept of gaze and the politics of visibility (Mirzoeff 2011) in relation to fem(me)inine experience and the technologically enabled patriarchal gaze in the "hyper" society of spectacle (Debord 1983). The AR installation animates an eyeball tornado that spawns from the ground, gradually surrounding the viewer and placing them in "the eye of the storm" (pun intended). The installation's sonic element reads:

I'm so tired of the constant cringe of watching others, of the lingering anxiety of being seen. What used to be a pleasurable act, of showing up and curating my online presence, feeling really connected to people, friends, colleagues, became an inescapable subscription to the relentless digital gaze. Now I am surrounded by invisible eyeballs that follow my every move, that reject or approve my actions, urging me to engage, consume, subscribe, be relevant, participate. Hungry eyeballs that keep demanding I'll perform for them. I am tired of dancing to the tune of invisible audiences. I am so tired of the digital gaze, the gaze I can't escape. The gaze that devours me and is always hungry for more. I have nothing left to give the gaze. All I can do is gaze back.

Figure 4: November 18, 2023, Under Their Eyes AR Installation Activation—Downtown Toronto

Possessed addresses online body objectification and harassment stemming from digital patriarchy and the non-consensual pornification of digital spaces. The installation aims to explode the false madonna/whore binary, centre consent and safe(r) digital space practices, and support each other/resist together when we are targets. The visual component animates an array of breasts, "raining down" on the viewer's environment, deflating and flattening as they hit the ground. The sonic element voices out:

My body doesn't feel my own online. It is everyone else's to comment on, mock, and objectify. Being harassed in real life is bad, but online, I have no control—it's just so easy, so mundane, so frequent, so immediate, one click—and you're harassed. Your digital body is just 'there' as an open invite to be advanced on, commented on, digitally grabbed, edited and pinched. Where are these body freedoms that digital space promised us? Or was it the freedom to abuse others' bodies they were talking about?

Figure 5: Possessed AR Installation—Downtown Toronto

Figure 6: Hush AR Installation—Downtown Toronto

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Hush represents and responds to the silencing of fem(me)inine voices, experiences, and perspectives. It explores the unfortunate outcome of self-editing, code-switching, or choosing to remain silent, or to opt-out of digital spaces altogether. The AR animation is of a mouth-shaped cloud that is slowly decimated by the wind, until wholly wiped out. The sonic statement voices:

> I end up hiding my gender online, I avoid audible interactions and edit my tone of voice when posting—wiping out any "femme" emotions and backing everything up with fact-checking before I post anything. I'm told "the internet gives a voice to the voiceless," but in the rare cases my voice is *actually* heard—it instantly drowns in hissy fits of male egos, keyboard rulers and professional trolls. Dismissing, correcting me, suggesting I should join their echo chamber or shut up. The static noise of consensus is deafening. Listen to my silence—it's the only defiance I have left.

Conclusions and Insight

This project has helped build a community of practice around feminist digital methods with contributors across Canada and the United States. We facilitated enough safety to come together to share our experience and to imagine and build an immersive space. Through our exploratory workshop we confirmed that digital spaces have unresolved white-cis-hetero-patriarchal politics of exclusion that shape our experiences and alienate us from our bodies and from each other. The emergent themes from the workshop showed us that we experience similar patterns of white-cis-hetero-patriarchal control in digital spaces. Naming these politics, tracing similar patterns of experience, and co-creating artistic and immersive resistance helped us express, reimagine, and repossess our digital and physical presence in the face of techno-patriarchal hegemonies. Our observations and processes for the Feminist XResistance project consisted of connecting our exploratory workshop, our co-creative analysis, and our outputs into the development of our AR installation experience. This allowed us to understand our shared experiences of our current digital selves to begin to create meaning to the future feminist digital spaces that we will all embody. For instance, our outcomes from our workshop included noting the emotions of participants. Our final AR installations, *Under Their Eyes, Possessed, and Hush,* are representations of the sentiment and experiences that we, the authors, and our workshop participants share. As we reach broader audiences and grow our community of practice with the aim of collaborative and defiant co-creation, we hope to foster new dialogues, agentic assertions, and imaginings.

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Feminist Things Rooted in Grief

by Kacie G. Hopkins

Photo Courtesy of Kacie G. Hopkins, 2024

I sat my grandmother's graduation picture by the cardboard end of a lace spool.

504.

The number written on the cardboard. What does 504 mean? I will never know, but I can imagine and create a story. Behind the 504 cardboard sits my grandmother's basketball uniform, only the shirt. The colours are purple and white for the Panthers. I thought I had given away all my purple and white years ago when I left that small town and said I was never going back. But behold the vintage basketball uniform sits amongst my lace and scraps of fabric in my office in the city. The number on the uniform is 12. Why number 12? I will never know. My grandmother has passed on and no one really knows this story. Was this jersey even hers? I was told it was. But no one will really know. But I can imagine and create a story. I can see young grandma running with confidence down the basketball court in the same gym where I had summer camp. I knew as a child I shared this place with her. I imagined and created a story.

Dropping down over the basketball uniform, 504 cardboard, and grandma's picture lay satin ties from my wedding gown. This long cream coloured satin tie strapped me into my flowy lace gown on that sunny summer day at the river. Grandma was only there in spirit.

My feminist things (Ahmed 2017) are not intentionally chosen by me. Ahmed states that the feminist survival toolkit "contains my personal stuff, what I have accumulated overtime; things I know I need to do and have around me to keep going on" (236). Through this conversation she created the feminist killjoy survival kit, which features feminist things. Her killjoy survival kit is organized around the phrase, "feminism needs feminists to survive" (236). She states that the killjoy survival kit can be seen as a neoliberal agenda when seen as a self-care kit. Ahmed uses hooks' scholarship as an inspiration for "Item 2" of the feminist killjoy survival kit. She states,

> bell hooks describes how she surrounded herself with precious objects, feminist objects, so that they are the first things she sees when she wakes up. Think of that: a feminist horizon around you, the warmth of memories, feminism as memory making. Feminism too leaves things behind. (Ahmed 2017, 241; hooks 1988)

The things that sit on my shelf have fallen there accidentally. They are the "feminist horizon" that is around me right now. They are a story that I can imagine and fictionally write. They help me understand that class is centered amongst my feminist things and connect to hooks' passion that feminism is for everybody (2014). My feminist things are filled with questions and memories that reach worlds beyond myself and my grandmother. My things are filled with grief from a thousand stories that no one will really ever know. But we can imagine and create a story. My feminist things hold worlds of women together and were touched by the hands of women from around the world, the remote hills, city factories, gymnasiums. Where did the satin come from? No one knows. Who sewed the uniform? No one knows. Whose hands wrote the 504? No one will know. What really happened to grandma? No one will ever know. Who won the Panther's basketball game in 1945? No one knows.

Finding the answer costs money. Money, that we don't have. Money that we will never have. We will never know. Our things tell stories. Our things tell the stories we want to remember. Our things tell our story. Our things connect us to the world. Our things allow us to write stories with curiosity. Our memories help us in our search for belonging amongst our feminist things (hooks 2008).

Things, Capitalism, Grief, Capitalism, Control, Grief, Capitalism: Controlled by the Cycle

The stone costs money
We dig for pennies in your home
They go toward the stone
The words cost money
We set goals and save for the next year
Your name costs money
Your name given to you by your mother costs money
Who gets the money
We will never know
The stone costs money

I visit
The stone with no name
There are bulbs in the ground
The season is not ready for
Yellow
Pink
Purple
But
You
Bring the colors
Your name not forgotten
My heart is red, my eyes green and brown
Your colors shine on me

Anger
The stone
I want to throw it down
You were more than a stone
The sickness
I wanted to save you from it
You were more than the sickness
The medicine
I want to flush it down
Did you have to take the medicines?
The windows
They were never yours to look out of
I want to break them with the stone

A home
A doctor
A healthy meal
A visit from us
It all costs money
Isolation
Death

Years ago, I wept
Alone by the washing machine
Washing the gloves, vintage gloves, that I told you about during our last conversation
Black or white I asked over the phone?
I could hear your voice tremble as you said Black.
Years ago, four granddaughters
Enjoyed pizza in your home
Amongst the mountains
In your living room
Years ago, four granddaughters moved you and your stuff from the mountains to the hills
We said our goodbyes
And on the rainy night years ago
Two granddaughters drove you through the mountains to the hills
To your next home
A house with women your age
But years ago, you cried
And the granddaughters cried
As they left you in this strange home on the rainy night
Years ago
We wept.
Today we remember you with random things.

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future forgetting fragments

by Alanna Veitch

from the song, I pluck out memories of
the before   displaced by
a mother's *need* to
escape—in the dance;
in   her three daughters
she raised
from the crack that became
a hallowed chest
of dreams and nightmares
and   mostly realities

Her mother only loved her
more because   her father was
indifferent
indifferent indifference
an apathetic body to the womb
for, how does one care without car(ry)ing?

She loved
large
perhaps too much so
it undid the I that was she, as she
lay folded up into him
removed of herself
to become
us   and   no one more

A ghost now
haunts the corners
of her mouth   opening
slipping out
into dreams of a
respectable body
but what respect could a woman be given
for blowing apart the house

that held her hostage?
a house that she took part in building
       and erasing
to   no longer see her-
self in it

Lines erased lay
            still, visible
the she she was became
a ghost
of the past that now
she must forget
    must forge a path – any!
into the future

Forget the fragments
that pain you
just   forget

fragments in relation

Relation never came up. It came
before,
a long wake-
ing of bodies and subjectivities[1]

But,   relation never came up
nothing to anchor the telling to
not knowing
           the fragments pressing together
lacunae[2] making   gaps of
power and
silence

but

What survives out of relation?
What memories take action to service who?[2]
Who will wake to substantiate the void?
What language
        should we use?

Relation never came up
a silence of the care work holding
together the fragments
of stories,   w/resting in the shadows[1,2]

Endnotes

1. Glissant (1997); Sharpe (2016); Siebers (2017); Titchkosky (2007): Relation bears significantly on how words come together—in the poem, in the way bodies are made and remade, in the change of emotion. Relation is aesthetic, a part of the revolutionary thrust forward out of the past that keeps one mourning and w/resting in the shadows.

2. Jayawardane (2022); Morrison (2021); Shildrick (2005); Simpson (2007); Troeung (2022): In the shadows awaits that which is left unattended, leavin

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