

Atlantis

Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice



Fish (ceramic study, 2024) by Tanja Harrison

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In Memory of Tanja Harrison

by Donna Bourne-Tyson, Jacqueline Gahagan and Bernadette V. Russo

Tanja Harrison, the beloved University Librarian at MSVU for eleven years, was a graduate of the Dalhousie School of Information Management. She was a dear friend and colleague, and a highly respected member of the library community in Atlantic Canada and beyond. One can open any number of professional sites associated with the Maritimes and likely come across her numerous accolades and contributions to community within local, regional, and academic settings and sectors.

Tanja was an active member and leader of various key committees and organizations including the Dalhousie University School of Information Alumni Association, the Atlantic Provinces Library Association, the International Association of Library Associations, the Canadian Library Association, Novanet, the Council of Atlantic University Libraries, the Canadian Research Knowledge Network, the Ex Libris Association, and the Nova Scotia Library Association. As noted on Acadia University's memorial page for Tanja, among her numerous contributions was her central role in the development of the "*You Quote It, You Note It* tutorial, a tool that revolutionized how students approached citation and academic integrity" (<https://www2.acadiau.ca/about-acadia/newsroom/news-reader-page/acadia-mourns-tanja-harrison.html>). Further exemplifying the magnitude of her contributions, in 2021, Tanja was awarded the Atlantic Provinces Library Association (APLA) Merit Award.

Tanja's dedication to and passion for *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, which is a Diamond Open Access, peer-reviewed, scholarly journal in publication since 1975, and her commitment to open access in general, were exemplified by her continued efforts to support *Atlantis*. Even through her most challenging moments, Tanja consistently worked hard to navigate *Atlantis* through the difficult processes of funding an open access journal, including stepping up to assist wherever needed to support the journal. While she was transitioning out of her role as University Librarian before her passing away, Tanja made it clear that she was very much looking forward to having more time to devote to her work with *Atlantis*. She was passionate about open science, institutional support for open access journals, and historical research focusing on the Maritimes; her strong contributions to the success of *Atlantis* demonstrated this commitment.

Donna Bourne-Tyson, retired Dalhousie University Dean of Libraries, writes of Tanja that "Tanja always went that extra mile, not only organizing interesting events but also adding a creative spark to them—her energy and innovative ideas were always welcome. Meetings were always a little more fun and productive when Tanja was in the room. Whether working on a silent auction together, or a governance, copyright, or 2SLGBTQIA+ digital archives committee, the experience was that much more rewarding when Tanja was a partner in crime."

Jacqueline Gahagan, MSVU Associate Vice-President Research reflects on the many interactions with Tanja: "I first met Tanja in September, 2021, shortly after joining the Mount in my role as Associate Vice President Research (AVPR). Through that connection, we explored a partnership between the MSVU Research Office and the Library to share the cost of our membership in *The Conversation with Communications* to increase the visibility of the worldclass research being conducted at the Mount. We also looked at other partnerships to augment research awareness through Research In View, various training events, and webinars."

Bernadette V. Russo (mixed Indigenous ancestry), Assistant Professor at MSVU recalls, “I met Tanja on June 22, 2021 on a tour of MSVU as a newly hired faculty, just as the Mount was preparing to reopen. Tanja was where she always was: the library. Meeting her felt like reuniting with an old friend, and that feeling never waned. Her positive, kind, and generous spirit touched everyone she met. Equally true, Tanja was a strong, steadfast, and staunch supporter of social justice and EDIA as well as an activist-advocate-ally for Indigenous initiatives, always appreciating and respecting the land and its people.”

A rock hound, ceramicist, photographer, traveller, lover of whales and all other animals, and avid Manchester United fan, Tanja will be forever missed. To know Tanja was to love her—her zest for life, her easy laughter, her love for her family, and the joy she found in people, art, music, research, writing, and sharing ideas.

Donations to *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* may be made in her memory.

A New *Atlantis*? Shifting Shorelines and Salt Marshes: Between Third and Fourth Wave Feminism in the Twenty-first Century

by Tegan Zimmerman

Author: Tegan Zimmerman is Chair of the Alexa McDonough Institute at Mount Saint Vincent University and Chair of the International Comparative Literature Association's Comparative Gender Studies Research Committee. She specializes in women's writing, with a concentration on Caribbean and Canadian literature and historical fiction, as well as contemporary gender theory that centralizes the maternal and mother-daughter relations. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Feminist Theory*, *MELUS*, and *Women's Studies*, and she is the author of *Matria Redux: Caribbean Women Novelize the Past* and *Chronotopics: Caribbean Women Writing Spacetime*, a co-edited collection with Odile Ferly. Zimmerman also serves as Editor of *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*.

The road to Atlantis is neither straight nor narrow. It, may, however, have been paved in gold. It depends on which Atlantis you are talking about; there are as many Atlantises as there are geopolitical positions, symbolic-historical references, and philosophical-literary discourses claiming to be authentic, authoritative sources. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of Mount Saint Vincent University's women's studies journal *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*, this essay endeavours to bring together three unlikely bedfellows: Plato, Shirley MacLaine, and *Atlantis*. I reflect on the references each of these sources make to the infamous lost city of Atlantis as a means to make sense of the tumultuous, conflict-laden, and volatile political situations feminists are currently facing. I believe that feminism finds itself once again in a murky, transitional period and is experiencing an ever-shifting/eroding shoreline. Contrary to my previous claims in *Atlantis* (Zimmerman 2017), I now sincerely doubt whether a fourth wave of feminism emerged, and I have pivoted to thinking that we (in the Global North) have witnessed instead the tail end of the third wave. But it's precisely the gap in between waves or feminist movements (some might say backlash) that I'd like us to imagine differently—as a saltmarsh. At the risk of cliché, environmentally-charged imagery is used throughout this piece to articulate what I am calling marsh feminism. Coding feminism with ecologically-rich language and vice versa is far from discursive originality, but the specific image of the saltmarsh does illuminate new paths for understanding different women's movements and activisms in terms of a deep, rich, and murky subversive space where timelines and goals overlap and intermingle whilst continuing to compel us to confront the risks and threats we, like all species, all face on our planet in crisis.

The concept of Atlantis as a fictional utopian island is typically traced back to Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*. But upon close reading (which is the methodology I employ here), it becomes increasingly clear to me that Plato's Atlantis is far from ideal. In *Timaeus*, Critias tells Socrates (as told by old Critias and as reported by Solon who received the story from priests in Egypt long before that) about the great island of Atlantis, which was once ruled by royal power (Plato 1997b, 25a, 1232). After extending its rule to several other geographic locations, Plato writes how this formidable power set out “to enslave all of the territory inside the strait [of Gibraltar, or ‘the Pillars of Heracles’]” (Plato 1997b, 25b, 1232). Remarkably, Athens withstands this military assault and triumphs: “She prevented the enslavement of those not yet enslaved, and generously freed all the rest of us who lived within the boundaries of Her

acles” (Plato 1997b, 25c, 1232). In the next eponymous dialogue, Critias continues his tale of Atlantis and the ensuing war between its rulers and the city of Athens.

Critias elaborates on the genealogy of Atlantis’s rulers starting with the Greek God of water, Poseidon, and how he, and later his sons, including his first one Atlas (begot with the mortal Clito_) received the island as their domain (Plato 1997a, 113c, 1299; 114b, 1300). Atlantis’s rulers observe primogeniture and Plato describes the empire of Atlantis as amassing more wealth than any previous region, hence “paved with gold” (Plato 1997a, 114d, 1300). Initially this wealth benefits all its citizens, for in addition to imports, the island’s resources provide much that is needed. Critias names next the mines “that produced both hard and fusible ore” and a copper/*oreichalkos* that was nearly as valuable as gold (Plato 1997a, 114d-e, 1300). Moreover, the sacred island provides lumber, abundant flora and fauna (with access “to graze in marshlands” (Plato 1997a, 114e, 1300) and “sweet smelling roots and greens, herbs, trees, and gums from flowers and fruits as well, and they flourished there” (Plato 1997a, 115a, 1300-1301). Critias continues to describe the establishment of palaces, temples, canals, bridges, and other marvel constructions like a shrine to Clito and Poseidon. Yet, Plato notes that as Atlantis became increasingly obsessed with possessions the “divine portion” waned (Plato 1997a, 121a, 1306). Compromising their virtues, the empire became “disordered.” Interestingly, Critias remarks that to the untrained, undisciplined, or ignorant eye, Atlantis would appear at its zenith but to those committed to higher truths and virtues, Atlantis was “hideous...losing the finest of what were once their most treasured possessions...filled with an unjust lust for possessions and power” (Plato 1997a, 121b, 1306). The dialogue ends with Critias describing Zeus’s determination to punish the deeds of the Atlantis empire but what follows next requires turning back to the *Timeaus*.

The *Timeaus* fills in the gaps left by Critias’s earlier story. We are told that after Atlantis’s failed militarized naval attempt to seize and destroy Athens, an earthquake erupted and the island “sank below the sea and disappeared” (Plato 1997b, 25d, 1232). Submerged, Atlantis remains known only by its unexplorable, impassable mud shoals—this fate is also mentioned in *Critias* (Plato 1997a, 108e, 1295). Plato’s depictions of Atlantis as a lost imperialistic, monarchical land and its failed attempt to overthrow the new democratic polis of Athens proves to be a cautionary and punitive tale. So how, if at all, does this concept of the island relate to feminism in the twenty-first century? Why should a women’s studies journal be named after a war-loving ancient island, one known from its brief citations by a Greek philosopher whose writings on women are at best ambivalent? The discussion of women and wombs alone at the end of *Timaeus* should make anyone cringe. So, I find myself asking: Why wouldn’t a feminist journal want to distance itself from both the patriarchal polis and the island of kings and the “language of Atlantis” (Plato 1997a, 114b, 1300)? Plato, too, casually remarks upon comparing “ancient laws with ours today” writing, “You’ll discover many instances that once existed among you, existing among us today” (Plato 1997a, 24a, 1231). For isn’t it reasonable to say that the likes of Donald Trump and Elon Musk in the United States are new Atlantean figures boldly amassing wealth and power? That they are putting democracy at risk with their repeated threats to subsume nations like Greenland, Canada, Panama, and Gaza into America’s national fold?

But the story of Atlantis precedes Plato; pre-Socratic writers like the historian Hellanicus and the poet Hesiod, for example, both mention the Titan Atlas’s daughters, specifically the eldest, Maia. O.R.H. Thomas claims that Hellanicus was likely working from Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women* (Thomas 2007, 15, 22) since in his Atlantis, Hellanicus names a genealogy of daughters on the “islands of the blessed” (as qtd. by Thomas 2007, 15). While the literary, historical, and philosophical origins of this island are not my main concern here, what strikes me about these earlier pre-Socratic texts is their focus on women. A genealogy of women is centralized by both Hesiod and Hellanicus, whereas in Plato’s dialogues women often seem peripheral at best. Instead, Plato offers us a story of kingship and the deeds of men.

Now consider the epigraph to the very first issue of *Atlantis: A Women’s Studies Journal* published in fall 1975:

Atlantis was an ancient kingdom, an island in the Atlantic which disappeared during an earthquake.
Fabulous stories are told about the beauty of the people who lived there and the kind of civilization they

created. We take Atlantis as a symbol of the lost kingdom which women are striving to rediscover by discovering themselves.

If feminists are to reclaim the lingering layers of land and deep shoals of mud then the legacy and the logos of the patriarchy (*patros*: pater=father; patriot=countrymen) must be discarded. Monuments to our mothers are comprised of sand and silt, tethered to the banks by threadbare roots. They rise for a time, then sink with the tides. This shifting, unstable, disturbed ground shares affinities with the pre-Socratic recognition of the power and agency of women; the maternal-feminine must be revived as an alternative foundation for Western thinking.

We cannot replicate the errors of the old vanguard (replete with armadas and battles at sea or military occupations and invasions). The disembodied Atlantean masculine, (neo)colonial-hyper-capitalist subject—selfish, dangerous, and violent—accelerates human-made climate disasters, catastrophes, and cataclysms; turns time upside down; celebrates a logic of theft; and threatens to bring to heel vulnerable and/or disobedient communities. We also know that “[w]omen, girls, and gender-diverse people often face harsher impacts of climate change, especially when marginalized by racism, poverty, and other forms of inequality” (The Canadian Women’s Foundation 2025). Climate justice is conditional upon gender equity. Atlantis for me therefore invites a continuous process of reflection (watery pools and puddles facilitate and necessitate self-reflexive critiques of feminism, the limits of women’s and gender studies, as well as my own overt references in this essay to the Western tradition and white feminists, too). You can’t discipline water into a binary of 0 or 1. There are other codes (languages of hysteria?): wool, blood, ooze, milk, tides, rivers, moons, some call this stream of consciousness. The work we do is overflowing: there is no done, only doing. We must seek beyond. We must search for something else that lays hidden, buried, a messy Eleusinian mystery that is subterranean, submarine, rivulets and droplets, bones and pellets, scat and urine, caves, and the places where the reeds lay flat because an animal has been sleeping. All of this is a part of marsh feminism: to let things seep, drip-dry, flood, and evaporate. Reciprocity. A marsh can be shockingly cyclical but it too escapes that grasp. There is no map to marsh feminism but a marsh wants to write. It wants to give itself up to writing every morning (confessional poetry preferred) and inscribe itself in the chatter of stillness, embracing the perfumed stench of decay and rot. A marsh has a biography in the strictest sense of the word’s etymology: *bios*, for life, *graphia* for writing. We can write the life of a marsh if we read the earthy red mudflats dotted with filamentous algae and trace sandpiper tracks and bill-holes as marking the place where third and fourth wave feminist goals coalesce and co-mingle. Distinctions, like linear timelines, are difficult. Yet, it is in this sticky, messy, richly diverse, and thriving place that feminists must dwell. As those seeking to make sense of third and fourth wave feminism, we must learn to embrace the contradictions and contrapuntal aspects of marsh feminism.

Marshes are therefore often associated with the feminine. For instance, in Margaret Atwood’s poem “Marsh Languages,” she writes, “The dark soft languages are being silenced:/Mothertongue Mothertongue Mothertongue/falling one by one back into the moon” (Atwood 1995, 1-3). For doesn’t the Greek poet Sappho also tell us, “The moon has set and the Pleiades/Have gone”? (Sappho, “The moon has set and the Pleiades”). The languages of the marsh are plural, sibylline. They express a certain kind of fecundity that is closely linked to the feminine/maternal. Marshes are wet, moist, dense, deep womb-like locales that harbour an innumerable number of species and vegetal life and whose shores are constantly in flux and motion. High tides and low tides reveal a wetland always in transition; a marsh by definition is never static. Marsh feminism is unapologetically performative. To survive against the war-machine, that persistent, pernicious polis, is to dance and sing underwater or to “trample the hyacinths/Upon the mountain-side until they stain the earth” (Sappho, “Purple Earth”).

In 2017, I published an article in *Atlantis* called “#Intersectionality, The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community.” It examined the Twitter hashtag #intersectionality and attempted to trace the transition from third wave feminism to a new fourth wave. To summarize, the third wave was predominantly ushered in by Black, anti- and post-colonial, and 2SLGBTQIA+ feminist thinkers such as Alice Walker’s daughter Rebecca Walker, Audre Lorde, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Kim Anderson, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Judith Butler as well as Jack Halberstam among others. I argued that although the third and fourth wave shared some overlapping goals like emphasizing difference, applying intersectional frameworks, and putting LGBTQ+ rights at the forefront, e.g., the legalization of gay

marriage in Canada (Bill-38, 2005), one major distinction was the inception of social media and its ubiquity by the end of 2010. This is when we switched to smart-phones and apps. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter were all media platforms that were readily being taken up—but Twitter, I argued, proved to be the most useful and widely used for disseminating feminist discourse. I was especially interested in how Twitter users were introducing hashtags like #intersectionality to call out white feminism for racism and to put forth an agenda of inclusivity. It was this activism that signaled to me at that time—and, then, shortly thereafter—solidified with the Women’s March on Washington (2017) and the viral #Metoo hashtag (indebted to activist Tarana Burke who used the term in 2006 and was revived by actress Alyssa Milano on Twitter)—that indeed we were in a new wave of feminism, aptly called the fourth wave.

Many gender theorists (e.g., Judith Roof 1997 or Linda Nicholson 2013) have critiqued the wave metaphor for oversimplifying complex feminist movements, generalizing or universalizing women’s experiences, and advancing white feminism by misrepresenting or excluding those in the Global South as well as women’s and people of colour’s perspectives. As I reflect on feminist activity, social media, and our current socio-political milieu, I find myself leaning towards believing that a fourth wave did not happen ... (marsh feminism is infatuated with ellipses) ... instead, we are in a transitional period, one that marks a shift between third and fourth wave feminism. I still find the wave metaphors helpful, especially for understanding the first and second wave, but like Nicholson who questioned when the third wave began and ended, I too have been asking myself this question and whether there was or is a fourth wave. Several interrelated events have prompted this crisis in thought: 1) In 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, effectively ending abortion as a fundamental right in the United States.¹ This right has traditionally been marked a major achievement of the second wave. As a follow-up, Olivia Rodrigo also caved into backlash and stopped handing out free contraception at her concerts. 2) In 2022, Twitter devolved into X, the once left-friendly space is now owned and operated by Elon Musk, an until recently fervent Trump supporter. 3) Donald Trump was elected as President of the United States in late 2016 after defeating Hilary Clinton and was re-elected in 2024, after defeating the Democratic Party leader Kamala Harris. Trump has publicly affirmed the gender binary, essentially erasing or denouncing the existence of trans and non-binary lives.

Turning to the award-winning actress and writer Shirley MacLaine can be unexpectedly helpful. I learned about this strange reference while out horseback riding with my second-wave feminist aunt (a la Woolf, let’s call her Mary Beton). She studied at Acadia University, but unfortunately not in 1975 when *Atlantis* came into the world through a homebirth: the estuary and tidal landscape of the Minas Basin. In her memoir *Walking the Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* (2000) MacLaine, recounts one of her past lives in Atlantis. After having lived as an “androgynous soul” (MacLaine 2000, 242), MacLaine describes, in ways that echo Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium* (minus the extraterrestrials found in MacLaine’s account), how the complete self was separated into two bodies according to a binary of sexual difference. MacLaine claims she lived in Atlantis as a male, while her soul mate (born from her own body) lived as her female counterpart. MacLaine remembers in ways that resonate with Plato’s dialogues how the island, which had once shown Edenic promise, became increasingly corrupt. Consumed by materialism and technology as well as the self, Atlantis turned away from spirituality (MacLaine 2000, 232). The result was the island suffering destruction at the hands of its own greed and godlessness. Yet, it is not Atlantis that MacLaine witnesses crashing into the sea but rather her original spiritual motherland Lemuria. The result is that she is “forbidden reincarnation until the end of the Atlantean civilization” at which time she will be reborn and “remain earthbound until the end of the Adamic Age at the turn of the twenty-first century” (MacLaine 2000, 281). MacLaine thus combines her present experiences of walking the Camino, her past memories of *another* Atlantis, and her search for spirituality to offer a scathing critique of our hyper-capitalist, techno-driven, celebrity-obsessed, anthropogenic, androcentric world in the twenty-first century.

Incidentally, fourth wave feminism, strictly speaking, has roots in the new millennium, circa MacLaine’s pilgrimage, with E. Anne Kaplan’s 2003 article “Feminist Futures: Trauma, the Post-9/11 World and a Fourth Feminism?” Kaplan references the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and a feminist response by American psychotherapist and activist Kathlyn Schaaf as inaugurating the fourth wave. Schaaf began organizing women on her website “Gather the Women” as a call for world peace. Schaaf’s website on 9-11 likewise prompted journalist Pythia Peay to claim, “the long-awaited ‘fourth wave’ of feminism [is]—a fusion of spirituality and social justice reminiscent of the Amer-

ican civil rights movement and Gandhi's call for nonviolent change" (Peay 2005, 59). It seems to me that if peace was heralded as a founding principle of fourth wave feminism, we have lost that focus in the twenty years since. When one thinks about humanitarian crises, as a result of militarized conflict, in Gaza, Sudan, or Ukraine, for instance, peace does not spring immediately to mind. It also strikes me that feminists in the Global North have drifted away from considering class as a meaningful category of feminist inquiry. Is the influence of celebrities on feminist issues and our society's idolization of the rich and famous to blame? A confluence of celebrity, politician, and feminist has arguably dampened the socialist agenda that seemed to go hand-in-hand with second wave feminism. And despite the achievements of recent online movements like #MeToo, might it also be true that social media is an anathema to feminism? A handful of technocratic men own the means of communication, the means of (re)production: Mark Zuckerberg (Meta, formerly Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), Elon Musk (X, attempting to purchase Sam Altman's OpenAI) and, Zhang Yiming (Bytedance, TikTok) not to mention Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder who purchased the *Washington Post*.

In 2025, how do we make sense of the original *raison d'être* of *Atlantis*, the women's studies journal? The lost kingdom of Atlantis surely cannot be that described by either Plato or MacLaine. This is to say, *this Atlantis* advances gender studies and social justice by rejecting the founding fathers of the philosophical tradition in the West that begins, primarily, with Plato and ends with the patriarchy-plutocracy (Pluto was the Roman god of the underworld after all) of the twenty-first century. This *Atlantis* offers an alternative feminist space, a wet-land premised on equity, empowerment, diversity, consciousness-raising, anti-capitalist struggle, and peace. Such a flooding, overflowing, vibrant ecosystem celebrates the exchange of ideas and critical dialogue, yet, there are no philosopher-kings—only kingfishers chasing wind patterns through narrow channels and steep cliffsides. It's easy to envision *Atlantis* as a utopic feminist space but this is too simple and it teeters on escapism and/or bio-essentialism.

Still, an old Atlantis remains. Isn't the real catastrophe that the earthquakes, global warming, and natural devastation are neither events in the past nor in the future but are here and now? Is this not why *Atlantis* dearly matters to our slowly sinking (ethical-philosophical-bios) Atlantis? This is how history folds and unfolds. Two parallel bloodlines. Atlantis's mythic origins in Ancient Greece and the journal's birth from an estuary, led by Donna E. Smyth and the members of the Editorial Board: Maureen Baker, Margaret Conrad, Carrie Fredericks, Lethem Sutcliffe Roden, Lorette Toevs, and Lois Valley-Fischer. These feminist scholars and the many others who have kept the journal afloat have, through continually striving to rediscover and discover themselves, re-created and re-imagined Atlantis as a veritable catalogue of women and gender studies in the form of the journal *Atlantis*, encapsulated by Suzanne MacKay's stone sculpture "Emerging Woman" featured on the first cover in 1975. To answer the call of embracing plurality and intersectionality, we are diving into the archive to rediscover our beginnings and all the polyphonic feminists we have been and all the voices and lives still waiting to resurface in the next 50 years to come. We are still living in the time of Atlantis but it's up to us to decide which one.

Origin stories can be born in a cave or a marsh. In Spring 1979, *Atlantis* dropped its signature description: "We take Atlantis as a symbol of the lost kingdom which women are striving to rediscover by discovering themselves." A year later, *Atlantis* took root at Mount Saint Vincent University (Volume 4, Number 2, 1980). *Atlantis* inspires traitors, those who dare to skirt around in the dirt, get stuck in the weeds, and practice spodomancy. It is probably far-fetched and sentimental (twee?) but picture the Mount as Mount Helicon, the home of the Muses or Mount Cyllene, the home of the Atlantides—a mythopoetic endeavour to conflate and alchemize daughters, Muses (who breathed divine song into Hesiod for his *Theogony*) and Pleiades (whose catasterism is marked by fleeing the sexual advances of Orion)—or as Mount Saint Vincent University, the current home of *Atlantis* (incidentally, like the journal, I started my journey at Acadia and managed its student literary magazine *estuary* before arriving here). A university, overlooking the harbour and basin, historically a safe haven for women and the queer community but not without clear colonizer-settler ties; MSVU is located on unceded ancestral Mi'kmaq territory.²

The type of critical thought employed here is indebted to feminist borderland theory and decolonial thinking like that by the late twentieth-century writer Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa's (1987) anticolonial mestiza consciousness meant embracing her pluriculture heritage as an inhabitant of the contested Mexico-Texas (US) border. In the spirit

of Anzaldúa's disruptive narrative warning against rigid and limiting national or cultural identity markers, marsh feminism is predicated on plurality, webs, rhizomatic roots and shoots systems, plant communities, upward-rising botanical branches and leaves, and (sub)marine and (sub-) and (extra)-terrestrial life. Marsh feminism shares deep affinities with transnational feminist thinking: see how its elasticity stretches it from the fringes of a shoal to the depths of a nest concealing eggs within. Notice the name change in 2013—when one *Atlantis* ends, (*Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*) another *Atlantis* comes into being: *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Justice, and Social Justice*. Marsh feminism moves beyond land imagery—it seeps and saturates; it flourishes; it floods; it cracks; it replenishes; it binds; it protects; it safeguards; and beckons for us to “wreath lovely garlands in your hair,/Weave shoots of dill together, with slender hands” (Sappho, But you, O'Dika, 1-2) For as Sappho reminds us “the Graces prefer those who are wearing flowers,/And turn away from those who go uncrowned” (“But you, O Dika”, 3-4).

Not exactly jumping from a Leucadian cliff *a la* Sappho (a heteropatriarchal spurious claim anyhow), feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray was nevertheless exiled from the polis—she lost her position at the Sorbonne—for critiquing the origins of the phallogocentric Western tradition e.g., Plato, Freud, Lacan in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985). Irigaray has in recent years increasingly turned towards a kind of marsh feminism that is significantly predicated on ecological and social justice in what she calls “she – nature, woman, Goddess” (2013, *In the Beginning She Was*, 2).³ She has returned to Nature and the pre-Socratics as a means to resurrect the importance of the maternal/feminine and to contest the loss of women's voices under the Master's logos, e.g., Plato or Aristotle. Her work further invites us take the earth, sometimes given that maternal appellation Mother, seriously. Thus, “a return to the marsh, replete with excess, *jouissance*, fluids, blood, milk and an ‘undefined flow that dampens, wets, floods’” (Irigaray 1995, 64) offers an alternative feminist perspective. Because “Western culture associates the mother with contagion and contamination [...] madness and death” (Irigaray, cited in Murphy 2001, 59), the marsh's abject position ensures it remains subversive: a refuge from the patriarchal Western polis, inclusive of its colonial and imperial exploits, which is certainly threatened by a feminine wild(er)ness; hence the need to tame, to drain, to consume, to draw hard lines, and to contain her, if not expel her.

In the first essay published in *Atlantis*, Margaret Andersen writes of the need for a feminist literary tradition of women writers ranging from Christine de Pisan to Margaret Lawrence to destabilize this male-dominated field. Atwood figures prominently in this piece but Andersen revises a well-known paragraph from Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) to reflect the “the significance of the discovery of ‘their’ [women's] literature”:

What a lost woman needs is a map of the territory, with her own position marked on it, so she can see where she is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For the members of a sex [*sic*] or a culture, share knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (Andersen 1975, 9)

Saltmarshes are key to our survival too. Belatedly, recognized as buffers, salt marshes prove to be a place of necessary resilience. Scientists and poets alike know that saltmarshes can provide a “better coastal defense over conventional engineering, but project realization is often hampered by practical and governmental obstacles” (Baptist et al. 2021). And, yes, there are active efforts not to just to appreciate saltmarshes but to restore and even create them. But creating new (“artificial”) ones is difficult, i.e., they need to grow organically.

Saltmarshes, the places where feminists, women, queer folks write and dwell, are under increasing threat by right-wing politics; despite sustaining life in significant ways, marshes are often taken for granted, used-up, exploited, extracted, eroded, polluted, and threatened. A loss of autonomy (bodily, politically, ecologically) ensues. This reality of course maps onto the erosion of gender and sexuality rights we are witnessing such as the reversal of Roe V. Wade and the abolishment of DEI policies in the old-made-new-again *Atlantis*. This essay therefore encourages those of us in *Atlantis* to embrace the marsh, to be comfortable with getting dirty and to see the beauty in a submerged tangled mess of rushes and reeds. For it is in these murky depths and secret cavernous dens that feminism not only lives or survives but also thrives.

Endnotes

1. Abortion became legal in Canada in 1988.
2. In 2021, MSVU's then President Dr. Ramona Lumpkin MSVU apologized on behalf of the University to the survivors, their families and communities, as well as all Indigenous Peoples, for the University's role in the tragedy of residential schools in Canada. The Sisters of Charity Halifax, the founders and previous owners of Mount Saint Vincent University, had members who staffed the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia, which was open from 1930 to 1967, and the Cranbrook Residential School in British Columbia, which was open from 1890 to 1970.
3. Irigaray's advocacy for sexual difference has resulted in her being regarded as a trans exclusionary radical feminist, however, a careful reading of her work, especially of the "other woman," in works like *Speculum* resists bio-essentialism.

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Of Two-Spirit and Indigenous Queerness: Indigenous Queerness Today

by Nicolas Côté-Saucier

Abstract: This article examines Indigenous queerness by moving beyond the literal definition of “two-spirit” to explore the diversity and commonalities of Indigenous queer identities. Through detailed analysis of three distinct examples—the Diné/Navajo *Nádleehi*, the Shoshone *Tainna wa'ippe*, and the Inuit *Sipiniq*—this article demonstrates the vast differences in Indigenous gender systems while identifying four unifying characteristics: spirituality, fluid notions of gender/sexuality, connections to tradition, and a state of “in-betweenness.” This article concludes by examining contemporary indigiqueer realities, highlighting ongoing challenges such as historical disconnection, community homophobia, racism in queer spaces, and lack of intersectional approaches, while acknowledging positive social changes and increasing representation in mainstream media.

Keywords: colonialism; Indigenous queerness; indigiqueer; intersectionality; sexuality and gender diversity; two-spirit

Résumé : Cet article examine l'altersexualité autochtone (Indigenous queerness) en allant au-delà de la définition littérale de « bispiritualité/Two-Spirit » pour explorer la diversité et les points communs des identités altersexuelles autochtones. À travers une analyse détaillée de trois exemples distincts - les Nádleehi Diné/Navajo, les Tainna wa'ippe Shoshone et les Sipiniit Inuits - cet article démontre les vastes différences dans les systèmes de genre autochtones tout en identifiant quatre caractéristiques unificatrices : la spiritualité, la fluidité de genre/sexualité, le rapport à la tradition et l'état d'« entre-deux » (in-betweenness). Cet article conclut en examinant les réalités indigiqueers contemporaines, en soulignant les défis persistants tels que la déconnexion historique, l'homophobie dans les communautés, le racisme dans les espaces queers et le manque d'approches intersectionnelles, tout en reconnaissant les changements sociaux positifs et l'augmentation de la représentation dans les médias populaires.

Mots clés : colonialisme; altersexualité autochtone; indigiqueer; intersectionnalité; diversité de sexualité et pluralité de genre; bispiritualité

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Many academic works explain the origin of the concept of *two-spirit* as well as define it in different—sometimes contradicting—ways (Adams and Phillips 2006; Anguksuar 1997; Brown 1997; Driskill 2010; 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonnetti 2011; Gilley 2006; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Morgensen 2011; Roscoe 1998; Walters et al. 2006; Wilson 2011). The term is also critiqued for imposing foreign cultural concepts, erasing the diversity of Indigenous forms of queerness, evicting sexuality and/or presenting a “noble magical savage” im-

age (Driskill 2010; 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonnetti 2011; Gilley 2006; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Laing 2021; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Roscoe 1998). For these reasons, the term two-spirit is increasingly rejected especially among activist groups and, in recent years, a new word—*indigiqueer* (sometimes spelled *indigequeer*)—has emerged and has become increasingly popular.

In this present article, I take the critiques of the two-spirit concept and look into Indigenous queerness and indigiqueer identities. Bridging older and more recent literature, I will focus on Indigenous queerness today, on the diversity of identities, roles, and models it can take, as well as the similitudes. This is important because, working on Indigenous queerness with indigiqueer individuals, (non-Indigenous) queer organizations, and academic researchers over the past decade, I have noticed a recurring confusion when it comes to the subject of defining Indigenous queerness. This confusion comes from a decontextualized use of the literature, with people sometimes disregarding the age of the accounts (using decades-old accounts as if they portrayed today's realities), sometimes focusing on a problem rather than on the general lived experience (thus magnifying the importance of the problem), and, especially, often treating Indigenous Nations as one homogenous cultural group and consequently treating “two-spirit” as one homogenous queer category/reality.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to explore and contextualize the recent literature on Indigenous queerness to paint a portrait of current indigiqueer realities. This objective is three-fold: 1) presenting how the “two-spirit” label groups very different realities under its umbrella that should not be lumped together; 2) presenting how, beyond their diversity, the many queer Indigenous identities, roles, models, and traditions still have four main characteristics in common (queerness, indigeneity, spirituality, and in-betweenness); and 3) presenting a few common elements that emerge from the more recent literature as shaping the current indigiqueer experience (disconnect to the past, homophobia, racism, the lack of intersectionality, dire vulnerability, and social change). This three-fold objective of presenting Indigenous queerness today translates into three sections.

First, I will present three very different examples to show the immense diversity amongst Indigenous cultures: the Nadleehé of the Diné/Navajo, the Tainna wa'ippe of the Shoshone, and the Sipiniq/Sipiniit of the Inuit. These examples show how the roles and models create very different experiences and identities although they are often—wrongfully—seen as “the same thing” by most researchers and policy makers.

Once the diversity is acknowledged, clarified, and exemplified, I will enter the second section of this article in which, using the same three examples, I focus on the similarities of experience and identification of indigiqueer individuals. I will draw out the main characteristics that are at the core of all or most indigenously queer roles, models, and identities as presented in the literature.

This article culminates in a presentation of the current realities and, especially, struggles experienced by indigiqueer individuals today as recurrently expressed in the literature and observed in the fieldwork of my own research on the experience of queer Indigenous individuals in Québec.

Three Very Different Examples

One recurrent critique of the term *two-spirit* is the way it reduces a very large diversity of roles, models, and lived experiences to one limited concept, thus erasing difference (Driskill 2010; 2016; Gilley 2006; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Roscoe 1998). In his book *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America*, Roscoe (1998) documented over 155 tribes in North America that have more than two genders.

To present the diversity of the different sexuality and gender roles and models under the two-spirit umbrella, I will explore three examples of sexuality and gender norms in three different Indigenous cultures of North America. These are not meant to be complete and exhaustive presentations of Indigenous gender systems but overviews to help un-

derstand the full complexity of Indigenous queerness. The following examples are among the most documented and still represent a living cultural practice in their respective cultures (although the practices may have changed to reflect current realities).

Example #1 : Nádleeh (Diné/Navajo¹)

The first example is from the Diné Nation (formerly known as Navajo) which is situated at the border of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah, and for which the gender system is well documented. The presentation of this example is based on the works of Roscoe (1998), Lang (1997), Epplé (1997) and, foremost, the works of Jennifer Nez Denetdale (2006; 2009; 2020), Carrie House (1997), and Wesley Thomas (1997), who are themselves Diné/Navajo.

Thomas explains that Diné culture had a sex-based gender system with five genders although Roscoe (1998) saw only three, since three of these genders bear the same title. “Sex-based” here means that biological sex is the primary marker for assigning gender roles. There is (1) the feminine female gender called ‘*asdzáán*, which is translated as “woman” and (2) the masculine male gender called *hastiin*, which can be translated as “man.” Then there are three genders called *nádleeh* (also spelled *nadle* and *nadleehi*) which means “person who changes.” The (3) masculine-female *nádleeh* is female-bodied and has a masculine social role with a masculine gender expression; (4) the feminine-male *nádleeh* is male-bodied and has feminine social role with a feminine gender expression and (5) the intersex *nádleeh* is born with a physical configuration that is not clearly one sex or another and can have any gender role.

This sex-based system is similar to the western one where ‘*asdzáán* and feminine-male *nádleeh*, the western equivalent of trans-women, follow feminine gender norms wearing feminine clothing and having associated occupations like gathering and weaving, while *hastiin* and masculine-female *nádleeh* (trans-men) follow masculine gender roles, wearing masculine clothing and working masculine occupations like hunting. One can see the word *nádleeh* as similar to “trans” in western cultures. Epplé cites a *nádleeh* informant who sees herself as “a complete woman, just without a vagina” (Epplé 1997, 181). But another *nádleeh* informant refers to herself as a “queen” but not a “woman,” rather a man attracted to men with a “womanly” occupation (Epplé 1997, 181). Epplé confirms that “drag queens” are *nádleeh*, no matter how they live their lives off the stage.

Except for the intersex *nádleeh*, no one is born *nádleeh*; everyone is assigned a sex-concordant gender. When a child grows older, if they develop interest in occupations and behaviour associated with the other gender, they become *nádleeh*. This can also come later in life. Epplé (1997) gives the example of an informant who became *nádleeh* after the death of their mother to take on the role of mother for their young siblings.

This gender system also has a spiritual aspect to it, although minor. A *nádleeh* plays a big part of the Diné origin story and, therefore, they are seen as important and spiritual. Children or teenagers who are identified as *nádleeh* will often be steered towards spiritual, leadership, or mediation adult roles. Roscoe (1998) quotes a recorded comment from the 1930s stating, “They are leaders just like President Roosevelt. [...] We must respect a *nadle*. They are, somehow, sacred and holy” (Roscoe 1998, 43 quoting Hill 1935, 274).

One interesting point is how the Diné conceived of homosexuality and relationships with five genders. While gender was sex-based, norms regarding sexuality and relationships were gender-based. Homosexuality was therefore seen as “inconceivable” (Roscoe 1998, 162) but defined as a relationship of two persons of the same gender, not the same sex, as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Diné Sexual Relationships and Classifications I: Traditional and Transitional as found in Thomas 1997, 162 (colour-coding added)

Gender categories	Feminine female	Masculine male	Masculine female (<i>nádleehi</i>)	Feminine male (<i>nádleehi</i>)
Feminine female	inconceivable	heterosexual	heterosexual	relationship rare
Masculine male	heterosexual	inconceivable	relationship rare	heterosexual
Masculine female (<i>nádleehi</i>)	heterosexual	relationship rare	inconceivable	relationship rare
Feminine male (<i>nádleehi</i>)	relationship rare	heterosexual	relationship rare	inconceivable

Thomas (1997) explains that this conceptualization no longer existed at the time of his study but more recent works like Denetdale (2006; 2009; 2020) and Estrada (2011) show that the term *nádleehi* is still used and the Diné's conceptualization and classification of gender and sexuality has merely changed yet remained mostly the same. With western colonial influence and the impacts of HIV in the Diné communities, the relationship norms and classifications shifted to a more sex-based and binary classification. With this shift, any relationship between two individuals of the same sex, no matter their gender, is now considered homosexual, while any relationship between two individuals of the same sex, no matter their gender, is considered heterosexual. Thomas (1997) also notes that the intersex *nádleeh* has virtually disappeared from the contemporary gender system as intersex babies are now generally and automatically assigned a binary sex through surgery. Much in the same way as it was then, the term *nádleehi* is now used for gender non-conforming individuals which includes effeminate men, “half woman half man” (Estrada 2011, 169) non-binary gender identities, trans-gendered individuals and drag queens (Denetdale 2020; Estrada 2011).

Another way the Diné gender system has changed is in the inclusion of bisexuality. Interestingly, in the Diné gender system, there is no prescriptive sexual behaviour: nothing says that a masculine male has to be the penetrator (the “top”) and that being penetrated is a feminine behaviour. Consequently, although homosexual relationships were “inconceivable” as romantic unions, homosexual intercours were seen as inappropriate at worst; they were “permitted although rare” (Thomas 1997, 167). This might explain the absence of pre-colonial formal models of bisexuality. However, as Thomas notes, bisexuality is now “practiced among contemporary [Diné/]Navajo males and females” (Thomas 1997, 167) and it is part of today's relationship norms and classifications. Therefore, the lack of pre-colonial documentation is of little importance.

Example #2 : Tainna wa'ippe (Shoshone)

The second example I will explore is the Shoshone three-genders system. The Shoshone are situated in the Plateau region in the North West of the United States, geographically close to the Diné and yet culturally very different. The presentation of this example is based on Lang's works (1997; 2016).

The Shoshone have three genders: a masculine gender called *tainna* which translates to “man,” a feminine gender called *wa'ippe* which translates to “woman,” and a third gender called *tainna wa'ippe* which translates literally to “man woman.” This third gender is seen as both a man and a woman, masculine and feminine.

In Shoshone society, gender has a strong spiritual aspect which takes form as visionary experiences. *Tainna wa'ippe* experience a powerful vision about their identity, their role in the community, and their gender: "The vision causes them to adopt the ways and clothing of the other sex [...]" (Lang 1997, 106). No matter their sex, *tainna wa'ippe* have their own gender norms which blend the two others. They are seen as born with the gift of being medicine people and will often have elevated status and social roles linked to healing, leadership, and war.

There is also no sexual prohibition regarding homosexuality. *Tainna wa'ippe* are not seen as "gay" or "lesbian" since they engage sexually and romantically with the two other genders. However, *tainna wa'ippe* cannot have a sexual or romantic relationship with another *tainna wa'ippe* not because it would be homosexual but because it would be incest: All *tainna wa'ippe* are seen as spiritual sisters. Homosexual relationships among *tainna* (men) or among *wa'ippe* (women) are permitted but are seen as "gay" and "lesbian" relationships not as *tainna wa'ippe* because of the absence of spiritual calling: "A gay person, as opposed to a *tainna wa'ippe*, is defined as lacking the spiritual element, acting on personal preference instead of a manifesting spiritual power" (Lang 1997, 106).

While occupation was central in the Diné gender system, for the Shoshone it is the spiritual aspect that is central. Biological sex is inconsequential and the gender expression of *tainna wa'ippe* is not a full or partial switch of gender norms as it is for the *nádlee*, but rather a mix closer to western non-binary or gender-queer gender models along with a strong spiritual aspect.

Example #3 : Sipiniq (Inuit)

Before we get comfortable with a premature idea of Indigenous queerness, let us look at a third example which differs radically from the two discussed above and has no western cultural translation. The third example comes from Inuit cultures of the Arctic Circle in the north of Québec, Canada's northern territories, Alaska, and Siberia as researched by Bernard Saladin d'Anglure since 1960 (Saladin d'Anglure 2006, 6). For this example, I will concentrate on his more recent book *Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth: Gender, Shamanism, and the Third Sex* (2018). In this book, Saladin d'Anglure revisits, summarizes, and updates his life's work. I will also use Lang's (2016) summary of other works on the topic.

In Inuit culture, there are, technically, only two genders, masculine male (man) and feminine female (woman). And yet there are individuals called *sipiniq* (plural: *sipiniit*). *Sipiniq* means "an infant whose sex changed at birth" (literally "split infant" from the verb *sipi* (to split) for the fetus' penis that "split" to become a vulva). When a baby is born, one of the two genders is attributed to the newborn, not based on genitalia and physical configuration but based on spiritual (reincarnation) and practical reasons (necessity). One can also become *sipiniq* through shamanic transformation.

Reincarnation is very important in Inuit culture and a newborn is seen as a reincarnation of a deathly ill or deceased family member. If the newborn is of the opposite sex from this person, there is "*sipiniuniq* (change of sex): a fetus or baby can choose a sex other than the one of the person it is reincarnating" (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 174). This change happens in the womb or at birth. For example, a grandmother may have died very recently while expressing the wish to be reincarnated as a human baby. Days/weeks/months later, a grand-daughter may be giving birth. The baby would be seen as the reincarnation of grandmother regardless of the sex and would bear the name of the grandmother (and of all the previous incarnations) in addition to their own; her parents would call her "grandmother." The person being reincarnated can even express the wish to be reborn in the opposite gender. Saladin d'Anglure gives the example of *Iqallijug*:

I was a *sipiniq* because *Savviurtalik* [her grand-father of whom she is the reincarnation] had wanted to live again as a woman and not as a man. He no longer wanted to hunt because hunting took too much effort and for him meant a high risk of getting cold. So, I had become a girl after changing sex at birth. I previously had a penis but then got a vulva; this is how it is with *sipiniit*. (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 174)

Sipiniit babies are raised as the gender of their previous incarnation until they reach puberty, at which point they can choose to remain as the gender which they were raised or be reassigned as the opposite gender. From that moment on they will follow their new gender's norms but they will still be considered *sipiniit*.

A more practical reason not to assign gender based on the sex of the infant is when there are not enough people of a given gender in the village to allow for the reproduction of the labour assigned to that gender (for example: not enough men to have a full hunting party). As Lang (2016) explains:

If there were not enough boys in a community or family, some fathers would teach their daughters hunting skills and raise them to fulfill a hunter's role. Among some Inuit groups, for example, such girls learned to hunt seals from a kayak, acquired a quasi-masculine status, and wore men's garb. [...] While the "man-woman" featured in [Saladin] d'Anglure's 1992 article bore no less than six reincarnation-related masculine names, he/she was raised to fulfill a man's role due to a lack of boys; his/her father decided that he "needed a helper to support him in hunting." (Lang 2016, 306)

Like the reincarnation-based *sipiniit*, once the child reaches puberty, they could choose to remain of their labour-assigned gender or be reassigned the gender corresponding to their sex. From that moment on they would follow the chosen gender's norms. However, Saladin d'Anglure explains in recent works (2018) that the assignation of gender for labour needs is no longer practiced.

Non-*sipiniq*—meaning individuals whose gender "matches" their gender assigned at birth—cannot normally change gender once they reach puberty; it only happens in the womb or at birth. But there is an exception to this rule. A person, usually a child, could have their gender changed after birth through a shamanistic transformation: "A shaman could also authorize a gender change to heal a seriously ill child. The child would receive a new name and identity from someone of the opposite sex or even from one of the shaman's helping spirits to prevent evil spirits from recognizing the child" (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 222). The child will then be considered *sipiniq*. They will be dressed according to norms of the new gender, their hair will be cut or left to grow, their name will be changed to a new one, and they will be encouraged to engage in activities of their new gender, including adopting boyish/girlish behaviour and associating with other children of their new gender.

Sipiniit often have roles of mediation and spiritual or political leadership and have specific roles in certain ceremonies. This is not necessarily because of a "spiritual power," as with the *tainna wa'ippe*, but because their unique life experience puts them in an ideal situation to understand both man and woman, act as mediators, or make decisions understanding all aspects of a society in which everything is divided in two genders. *Sipiniit* are not automatically shamans, and shamans can be of any gender (*sipiniit* or not). But there is certainly a spiritual aspect to being *sipiniq*.

As for sexuality in Inuit culture, it is strongly heteronormative—meaning heterosexuality is enforced and homosexuality is forbidden: "Homosexuality, for example, was severely disapproved of even though the transgender shamans who sometimes practiced homosexuality were thought to be the most powerful" (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 221). Homosexuality is allowed only if one of the partners is *sipiniq* (of the same sex). *Sipiniit* who have changed gender at puberty are even seen as better partners than non-*sipiniit* because they understand the burden of the gender norms of their partner. Two *sipiniit* together as a couple is considered the best pairing and communities will often try to pair *sipiniit* together.

So, the "Inuit two-spirit" is not a gender role in the classic sense since it conforms to binary man or woman gender roles in their society. It is not really a "third gender" since *sipiniit* do not have a specific gender role and are never both at the same time. Yet, it is clearly a form of gender queerness that does not fit western heteronormative and heteropatriarchal models. It does not fit even the non-heteronormative western models, which allow for a certain fluidity.

These are merely three examples showing the vast diversity of Indigenous queerness. These are *not* three main categories of gender systems among Indigenous societies in North America but three cases within a plethora. Many past and

present gender systems and gender roles and models are understudied, some even lost, but more are being documented in the present, not just as pre-colonial systems. Readers are invited to explore how these examples of Indigenous queerness have changed and how they are lived today. I used these three examples but could also have drawn examples from the Zuni *lhamana* (Roscoe 1992), the Lakota *winkte* and Dakota *winkte* (which integrated very differently in their communities) (Cooper 2018; Little Thunder 1997), and the Cherokee Asegi *udanto* (Driskill 2016) among others.

Main Characteristics of Indigenous Queerness

The three examples presented above show how diverse Indigenous forms of queerness can be but, beyond their differences, key elements unite them and allow us to delineate what Indigenous queerness is and is not. In this section, I will focus on these similarities using the three examples presented above to illustrate how these common characteristics are expressed in various ways. Of course, indigeneity and queerness are two fundamental elements of these three examples but other recurring elements arose from the literature as a “core” or “essence” of Indigenous queerness. I grouped these elements into four main characteristics: (1) spirituality, (2) gender over sexuality, (3) relation to tradition, and (4) in-betweenness. I decided to focus on characteristics that differentiate Indigenous queerness from non-Indigenous queerness.

Spirituality

Spirituality is central to the concept of “two-spirit” (Anguksuar 1997, 2010; Driskill 2010, 2016; Lang 1997; 2016). As explained above, this focus on spirituality was an important strategic tactic to help the acceptance of queer individuals in otherwise homophobic and conservative communities. However, this tactic did not invent or fabricate the importance of spirituality, rather it magnified a significance that was already there.

Almost all Indigenous alternative gender (meaning other than the man/woman binary) and sexuality (meaning other than heterosexuality) identities have a spiritual component. This spiritual aspect is not always central or important but is still present. As we have seen with the three very different examples presented previously, spirituality is central in the Shoshone three-gender system and the Inuit *sipiniq* while being a minor aspect of the Diné five-genders system. Throughout the literature, spirituality is often presented as the source of the distinction between gay, lesbian, and transgender identities and the two-spirit identity: “Two-Spirit and gay clashes. Gay is flesh-centered; Two-Spirit is spirit-oriented” (Lépine-Dubois 2018 57). As in the example of the Shoshone gender system, queer individuals who are not *tainna wa’ippe*, like cis-gendered gay men (*tainna*) and cis-gendered lesbian women (*wa’ippe*), lack the spiritual calling of the *tainna wa’ippe*. This begs the question of whether these queer Indigenous individuals, the gay *tainna* and the lesbian *wa’ippe*, are considered two-spirit or whether only the *tainna wa’ippe* identify as two-spirit—a question that is unfortunately not answered in the literature. Nevertheless, spirituality affects all Shoshone genders and the fact that the gay *tainna* and the lesbian *wa’ippe* identities are defined in relation to spirituality (as lacking or rejecting it) shows that spirituality is still important. One common symbol of spirituality is the feather which, in many Indigenous cultures, at least in the northeast of North America, is associated with spirituality. This is why one can often see feathers in “two-spirit” imagery. It is a subtle yet ever-present symbol.

The importance of spirituality is emphasized in the literature to the point of incurring counter-discourse. As with the gay *tainna* and the lesbian *wa’ippe* Shoshones, queer Indigenous individuals who prefer to use labels like “gay,” “lesbian,” “trans,” and “non-binary” sometimes reject cultural-specific terms and labels or the two-spirit label because of the pressure of spirituality. As Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004) explain, most Indigenous people have converted, often by force, to a form of Christianity and live with a legacy of multi-generational trauma relating to religion and spirituality. Their traditional spiritual language is not something that is accessible everywhere and for everyone but many still express aspects of spirituality in other terms.

The main way queer Indigenous identities, roles, and models are associated with spirituality without using the spirituality language is through the caregiving/caretaking language: “Caregiving is perceived as an important and integral

role of two-spirit people, and it is clear that many two-spirit people already engage in caregiving or expect to provide care for others at some point during their lifetime” (Evans-Campbell et al. 2007, 88). Meyer-Cook and Labelle use similar language stating, “Many people who are Two-Spirited are active in their communities today, and are using the gifts they have been given. [...] They use their gifts in the service of community [...]” (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004, 36). For Driskill (2010; 2016) and many others, it is clear that caretaking/caregiving is part of the spiritual medicine role of queer Indigenous individuals: “Two-Spirit asserts ceremonial and spiritual communities and traditions and relationships with medicine as central in constituting various identities, marking itself as distinct from dominant constructions of GLBTQ identities” (Driskill 2010, 73).

Gender and/or Sexuality

The distinction between gender conceptualization and sexuality conceptualization in the many forms, roles, models, and identities under the “two-spirit” umbrella is quite complex and convoluted. One cause is that, for over a century, anthropologists did not differentiate between gender pluralism and sexuality diversity (Jacob, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Roscoe 1998; Saladin d’Anglure 2006, 2018). For example, the Inuit *sipiniit* were thought to be homosexuals: “Cross-dressed individuals were long believed to be homosexual, but only a tiny minority actually were. In fact, they should be viewed through the lens of gender rather than sexual orientation” (Saladin d’Anglure 2016, 221). Although this has changed in the light of Queer Studies, the umbrella “two-spirit” still mixes every form of queerness almost indifferently: “The term Two-Spirit is presently used to describe Aboriginal people with different roles or identities, including gays, lesbians, other genders (not-men, not-women), those of multiple genders (hermaphrodites and bisexuals), transvestites, transsexuals, transgendered people, drag queens and butches” (Meyer-cook and Labelle 2004, 30).

Gender and sexuality, previously undifferentiated, became separate in the literature after the 1990s. In an attempt to differentiate, the literature split into two sides: the spirit and the flesh. That is, there are those who place “emphasis on gender as constitutive or two-spirit identity (in opposition to any notion of a sexual minority identity)” (Hames-Garcia 2013, 393) and those on the other side who embrace “sexuality and desire as central to the project of queer indigenous studies” (Hames-Garcia 2013, 393). Since the 1990s, the literature on “two-spirit” as a gender concept has become more prevalent in academia thus downplaying sexuality. This conscious focus on gender aimed to distance the “two-spirit” label from sexuality amidst the HIV crisis and aligned with queer portrayals in the media in the 1990s and 2000s as non-sexual, “inoffensive” funny gay best friends (Hames-Garcia 2013; Rothmann 2013).

A new wave of literature emerged just before the 2010s (Brown 2014; Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen, 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonnetti, 2011; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Morgensen 2011; Wilson 2011). This wave addressed sexuality *and* gender. This shift recognized that downplaying sexuality misrepresented reality and painted a false image of the two-spirit lived experience, even causing erasure: “Many Indigenous GLBTQ2 people testify to the erotic being central to their definition and experiences of Two-Spirit identity, community, and spirituality” (Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen 2011, 16). This division of gender and sexuality was helpful to break from hetero-patriarchal practices that plagued the “berdache studies,” but did not represent Indigenous world-views in which spirituality, gender, and sexuality are integral aspects of being in the world (Cooper 2013).

This shift is political and ideological. By bringing sexuality back into focus, Two-Spirit Studies connects with Queer Studies and its critiques of (hetero)patriarchy, modernity, and colonialism to create the Queer Indigenous Studies. It connects to queer activism and queer struggles. In *Sovereign Erotics*, Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonetti use the concept of the “erotic” as a way to connect sexuality, spirituality, and decolonialism: “The erotic, then, is not only about sexuality—though it is certainly about that—but also [...] a return to our bodies as whole human beings [which] can disrupt colonial gender regime that have attempted to disavow and colonize indigenous genders and sexualities” (Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonetti 2011, 3). Through this concept, they recognize that the control of Indigenous sexualities and genders “is a central tactic of colonial oppression” (Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonetti 2011, 3-4) and resistance to colonialism, past and present, must include sexuality and gender.

Because of these shifts in the literature, any study on Indigenous queerness must pay attention to the context of each publication. What seem like contradictions on the importance of sexuality are most likely a result of emphasis on gender, and a resultant downplaying of sexuality, caused by political climates and ideologies.

Relation to Tradition

A recurrent element that often arises in the literature is how queer Indigenous individuals relate to tradition differently than non-Indigenous queer individuals. As Driskill explains:

While radical white-dominated queer movements often attempt to reject religion because of institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism or—on the other hand—create spiritual movements and communities that often appropriate Native practices, Native Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people insist that we already have a place within traditional religious and spiritual life. It is this part of our identities that many Two-Spirit movements emphasize. (Driskill 2010, 86)

It is common among queer people of colour to have to choose between their queer identity and their ethnic identity (Driskill 2010; Lang 2016). Indigiqueer individuals tend to see themselves as Indigenous first, queer second: “One of our major emphases is that we are Indian first, we’re Navajo, we’re Pima, we’re Apaches. And we do not divide our group and say that we’re gay, and making us different. We’re all Indians, and that’s the way we portray our feelings, and that’s the priority in terms of our organization” (Erna Pahe (Diné/Navajo) about GAI in Lang 2016, 312-313) Driskill (2010) explains this by the fact that Indigenous cultures have a traditional place for queer individuals and, therefore, queer individuals do not really have to choose queerness over their Indigenous tradition. On the other hand, if they choose white-dominated queer communities or identities, their indigeneity is erased.

The erasure of Indigenous queerness in queer communities is real and critiqued by many (Adams and Philips 2006; Driskill 2010; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, Morgensen, 2011; Gilley 2006; and others). According to Adams and Philips’s (2006) study, “Despite feelings of acceptance in the lesbian or gay community, all participants thought that their ethnicity was invisible within these communities” (283) The racism is real and leads many queer Indigenous individuals to find they “have much more in common with those of ‘straight’ Native Americans than with those of white lesbians and gays, or even other LGBTQ people of color” (Lang 2016). But Lang (2016) also states that the peer pressure to “be Indigenous first” is just as real.

In the end, it is a recurring element that queer Indigenous people are much more often connected to tradition than non-Indigenous queer individuals. For them, tradition not only represents their indigeneity but also spirituality, history, community, and traditional practices.

In-betweenness

The last recurring element is both ubiquitous and rare. While other elements like spirituality or tradition are explicitly stated in the literature, the in-betweenness is a very frequent recurring element that is almost never directly stated. I first encountered this concept transposed to Indigenous Studies in a geography thesis by Lépine-Dubois (2018) on the movement of two-spirit individuals in cities. Drawing from Baas (2010; 2013), Lépine-Dubois (2018) places “in-betweenness” as a desired position characteristic of queer Indigenous individuals. In-betweenness is a state that is not belonging to one or another category and is a bit of both at the same time: not woman but not man either, both and neither at the same time, in-between the Indigenous identity and the queer identity, in-between cities and communities, between the spirit world and the material world, between the past and the future. As Meyer-Cook and Labelle state:

They are of two worlds, the world of the differently gendered, and the world of being Native. [...] To achieve a sound identity, Two-Spirited people need to simultaneously follow two tracts of identity formation: first as Native people or people of a minority group; and second, as people who are differently gendered.” (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004, 38)

Gilley further states: “Two-Spirit men must, as Ben put it, ‘keep one foot in the gay world’ where their sexuality is accepted, and ‘one foot in the Indian world’ where their cultural heritage lies” (Gilley 2006, 89).

This state of in-betweenness is also a state of constant change, shifting from one identity to another, navigating communities, and it is the reason Roscoe (1998) titled his seminal book on Indigenous queerness *Changing Ones*. More concretely, Lang talks of

two-spirit women, rather than subscribing to rigid European categories of “gay,” “lesbian,” or “straight,” will rather self-label as bisexual due to their recognition of the fact that sexual preferences may change in the course of an individual’s lifetime. In other cases, they will use the term “lesbian” in a sense that includes the possibility of having sexual relationships with both women and men; in still others, they will use “lesbian” synonymous with “man-woman,” referring to contemporary manly women on the reservations including their relationships that are by no means exclusively homosexual.” (Lang 2016, 315-316)

This in-betweenness is even found in concrete examples like in the high proportion of queer Indigenous people in urban settings, how they move from reserves to cities and back (Lépine-Dubois 2018; Medicine 1997; Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante 2010), how they engage in intertribal concerns (Driskill 2010), and the number of “mixed heritage” individuals among Indigenous individuals who identify as queer indigenous individuals (Lépine-Dubois 2018; Lang 1997). This in-betweenness is the reason intersectionality is absolutely necessary when talking Indigenous queerness.

Current Realities and Struggles

So far, I have addressed diversity and difference among Indigenous forms of queerness but also how, despite their differences, some elements emerge in the literature as recurrent. The four main characteristics of Indigenous queerness are not always agreed upon by all authors but are recurrent enough to provide a set of unifying characteristics. However, these characteristics tend to focus on past realities and on identity rather than experience. To create a more accurate portrayal of the current situation of indigiqueer realities, we need to switch from a focus on identity to a focus on the lived experience of indigiqueer individuals. Recent literature emphasizes the struggles and hardships impacting indigiqueer lives but there are occasionally silver linings of positive experiences that are also documented.

It is important to remember the diversity of socio-cultural contexts that shape indigiqueer experiences. The realities reported in the recent literature should never be looked at without a cultural and social context. The reality of one Indigenous group can be very different from the reality of another, as we have seen above. Therefore, although I have tried to remain as general as possible, the elements presented below are based on indigiqueer realities in Québec. These elements are not only applicable to Québec and have been chosen because they resonate with many other accounts and studies on indigiqueerness.

Disconnect with the Past

The body of literature on two-spirit and Indigenous queerness is quite meagre because of the queer models, roles, and traditions in specific Indigenous cultures – and even in given multi-nations territories—only a few have been studied and recorded, and thus the knowledge is incomplete. Much of the literature is decades old. Older research can still provide contextual historical information but it is often riddled with biases. Outside academic sources, while some Indigenous nations may have many historical accounts and oral stories on queer Indigenous traditions, roles, and models but, for most, there is little historical information with which to work and the rare accounts that can be found are often two or three centuries old, and are not very reliable because they are biased or describe very little (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020, 117). These accounts, academic or otherwise, are critical and necessary to create a continuum. The absence of a documented historical past creates a disconnect between the past and present and hinders the recognition and sense of belonging of queer individuals (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020; Laing 2021).

The problem is enhanced by the Residential Schools system which erased whatever (and whoever) did not fit “Christian values”—including heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy, and binary notions of gender—and taught homophobia and transphobia. This is paired with an AIDS crisis which saw the death of a large proportion of a generation of queer individuals and even more violent acts of homophobia. More than a loss of knowledge and tradition, these events led to the literal killing of queer Indigenous individuals which results, today, in an absence of queer elders and mentors (Laing 2021; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul, 2022). Without historical accounts and queer elders and mentors, many queer Indigenous individuals have no means to connect their queer identity and their Indigenous identity. One of Liang’s participants stated:

[I am] on a constant quest to find our lost stories and teachings and ceremonies and languages specifically in my Haudenosaunee community. I feel kind of envious that there are other nations and other communities who retained that, and who have those words to describe two-spirit people in their language, and who have the teachings of what it means and what your roles were, and what your responsibilities were.” (Liang 2021, 121)

Homophobia/Transphobia in Indigenous Communities

Many authors speak of the presence of homophobia and transphobia in Indigenous communities (Adams and Philips 2006; Anguksuar 2010; Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020; Meyer-Cook 1998; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Lépine-Dubois 2018). Homophobia and transphobia are still a reality for most queer Indigenous individuals today but, in general, acceptance has increased. Although no recent works talk about this growing acceptance, it can be seen in the way people on reserves are more open to discussing the subject, as witnessed by Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee (2020). But these authors also note that the openness to discussing queerness is limited, slow, and often uncomfortable. Where academic literature fails, non-academic literature (Chacaby and Plummer 2016; Whitehead 2017; Whitehead and Abdou 2023; Youssef 2020) provides many accounts of this greater acceptance. The best example comes from current events: on July 3rd 2021, Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer became the first woman and the first openly queer person to be elected as Grand Chief of the Kanien’kehá:ka/Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke. This is a major change as the Kanien’keha:ka is one of the two most powerful and influential Indigenous nations in Québec.

Racism in Queer Communities

While they are sometimes victims of homophobia in their Indigenous communities, indigiqueer individuals are also sometimes victims of racism in queer communities (Lépine-Dubois 2018; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul 2022). This situation is far from unique to Indigenous people: racism in queer communities is a problem that has been identified throughout the literature.² As Lang (2016) explains, this racism leads many queer Indigenous individuals to choose Indigenous or other queer persons of colour as partners.

I have observed a recent wave of interest towards Indigenous inclusion and representation that arose following the Truth and Reconciliation movement which led to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30th), and the creation of many committees, in addition to extensive media coverage of a conjecture of Indigenous events in the early 2020s (mainly the discovery of unmarked graves in residential schools, the death of Joyce Echaquan, and the Wet’suwet’en resistance). This wave and its impacts have yet to be documented but it has raised awareness and created opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

In the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation movement, many queer organizations are making an effort toward representation of Indigenous people in different ways. Although these efforts matter, queer Indigenous individuals still face racism in their everyday lives when they interact with the local and global queer communities (Adams and Philips 2006; 2009; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul 2022). Non-Indigenous queer organizations are often poorly equipped to address Indigenous issues and queer Indigenous individuals are, therefore, often left feeling like they do not belong.

Settler Colonialism and the Lack of Intersectional Approaches

The racism mentioned above leads many queer Indigenous individuals to feel out of place in queer communities, and homophobia leads them to feel they do not belong in Indigenous communities. This stems from a systemic lack of recognition of intersectionality and intersectional approaches. Intersectionality is a concept from Crenshaw (1989; 1991; 2015) which explains that discriminations are not parallel but rather overlap and intersect: “Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking” (Crenshaw 1989, 149). Consequently, a queer Indigenous cis-woman is not just a victim of racism, homophobia, and sexism separately but all of these together, at the same time, and intertwined in a way that shapes these discriminations differently than for a white trans woman, or a disabled queer indigenous woman, or a queer indigenous cis-man.

Indigiqueer literature is full of examples of a lack of recognition of intersectionality and of intersectional approaches, such as the fact that queer organizations rarely address Indigenous issues, Indigenous organizations rarely address queer issues (although now it is increasingly common for them to do so), and that even organizations working on anti-racism activism almost never address Indigenous issues (Driskill 2010; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Hames-Garcia 2013; Lépine-Dubois 2018). Many struggles and issues mentioned earlier in this paper are caused by the lack of intersectional approaches, such as the feeling of erasure and the pressure to choose between queerness and indigeneity.

Moreover, in Crenshaw’s intersectionality, power is used and maintained in treating inequalities separately without considering the compounding overlap (Crenshaw 1989; 1991; and 2015). A lack of intersectional approaches and even the impossibility of working on settler colonial projects through an intersectional lens is prevalent in decolonial literature (Driskill 2010; 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen, 2011; Greensmith 2018b; Hames-Garcia 2013; Hawley 2001; Larouche 2010; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Lévesque 2016). The lack of intersectional approaches is not accidental as it is in line with settler colonialist ideologies and practices that shape queer communities (Greensmith 2018a; Hames-Garcia 2013; Morgensen 2011). This lack of intersectional awareness hinders indigiqueer inclusion in queer communities and contributes to the erasure of Indigenous presence in queer spaces.

Isolation, Homelessness and Suicide

The historical and cultural disconnect, the lack of mentors and elders, the homophobia and transphobia, the racism, the lack of intersectional approaches, and the feeling of erasure all generate a dire situation of exclusion and isolation (Lépine-Dubois 2018). Indigiqueer individuals often do not feel like they belong in any community; they do not have a place to call their own, a place to meet, to find people to support or help them, to unify and organize. Queer Indigenous individuals often feel isolated, alone, and powerless in the face of their experienced homophobia, discrimination, and violence (RCAAQ 2016).

Amplified by a cultural barrier and, for some, a linguistic barrier, all the issues and struggles discussed above can lead to situations of vulnerability which can sometimes result in homelessness, addiction, and death/suicide (Patrick 2014; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul 2022). Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004) write about how these compounded vulnerabilities lead to high HIV infection and high suicide rates: “Suicide becomes the only option for many, especially among youth. Suicide among Native youth is several times greater than for other adolescents” (40). Coupled with the already higher-than-average suicide rate among vulnerable queer youth, the intersectional situation for queer Indigenous youth becomes dire. More recent publications by Patrick (2014) and Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul (2022) show that the problem is still present and that there is a higher-than-normal proportion of queer individuals among the homeless Indigenous population (Patrick 2014). But, as Patrick (2014) explains, the lack of intersectionality approaches in most research on either queer homelessness or Indigenous homelessness generate incomplete data on indigiqueer homelessness. Unidimensional research often fails to account for multiple and compounding identities and vulnerabilities, beyond occasional surface-level quantitative data.

Times are Changing

This section paints a grim portrait of the situation and, since this is a review of the literature, one must remember that a lot of the literature focuses problems and struggles thus skewing the representation. The most recent academic works (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020; Denetdale 2020; Driskill 2016; Laing 2021; Lépine-Dubois 2018) as well as non-academic accounts (Chacaby and Plummer 2016; Whitehead 2017; Whitehead and Abdou 2023; Youssef 2020) paint a more positive picture of indigiqueer realities. Although more positive, they still present many of the elements discussed above. There are not enough recent publications to allow for a general conclusion other than the observation that things are changing for the better: there is a greater recognition of indigiqueer identities in many queer communities as well as many Indigenous communities. This is also supported by the growing presence of indigiqueer figures in mainstream media such as Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs (queer Kanien'keha:ka actor), indigiqueer couple Anthony Johnson (gay Navajo-Diné) and James Makokis (two-spirit Nehiyô/Plains Cree) (winners of Canada's *Amazing Race* season 7), Kent Monkman (queer Cree artist/activist), Jeremy Dutcher (queer Wolastoq/Malécite musician/signer), two-spirit Drag artists Ilona Verley (Nlaka'pamux/Thompson), Venus (Red River Métis), and Jaylene Tyme (Métis) who brought unapologetic indigiqueer representation to the *Drag Race* franchise. Laing (2021), who worked with indigiqueer youth, talks about the use of online groups and hashtags such as #twospirit. Social change was also noticed in my own research with indigiqueer individuals living in urban centers in Québec in the way that younger participants had a much more positive narrative and outlook and experienced less violence than older indigiqueer participants.

Conclusion

In this article, we have seen how Indigenous roles, models, and identities of queerness can be very different: from the Diné *nádleeh* whose gender is based on sex and on occupation, interests, and talents, to the Shoshone *tainna wa'ippe* who is both man and woman but different, called by a powerful spiritual vision, to the Inuit *sipiniq* whose gender is given through reincarnation. Beyond their differences, four characteristics emerge from the literature on the indigiqueer lived experiences: a place for spirituality, a fluid notion of gender and/or sexuality, a stronger relation to tradition than non-Indigenous queer individuals, and a very important "in-betweenness." To this, I add an overview of the current realities and struggles of queer Indigenous individuals, with the magnitude varying greatly: "Today, some are greatly respected in their communities, but many others suffer violence and worse" (Anguksuar 2010, 46).

A great deal of activism and research is currently taking place. More works are being published on this topic each year. More Facebook groups, more unofficial meetings are on the verge of becoming official and queer organizations are starting to decolonize themselves, decolonize their practices, and be open to ethnic diversity. This answer to the question "what is two-spirit?" was researched and written as a response to our own struggle to find a clear answer to the question. I hope that a review of the scattered and often contradictory literature on the topic will help present and future researchers as well as community organizations and activist groups understand the situation and have the tools to engage with and understand queer Indigenous individuals in their capacity as experts.

Endnotes

1. In 2017, the Navajo Nation changed its name to Diné Nation. Many of the sources refer to them as Navajo since their publication pre-dates this change.
2. Solely looking at racism towards Indigenous people, see Adams and Phillips 2006 and 2009; Brown 1997 and 2014; Cooper 2018; Driskill 2010 and 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonetti 2011; Hames-Garcia 2013; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Lang 2016; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Lehavot, Walters, and Simoni 2010; Medicine 1997; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Miranda 2010; Morgensen 2011; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul 2022; Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante 2010; Smith 2011; Walters et al. 2006; and many more.

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Masculinities at the Crossroads: Theoretical Insights into Gendered Violence and Social Class in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*

by Sanjana Chakraborty and Dhananjay Tripathi

Abstract: The present article critically examines the intricate tapestry of gendered space within Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014). It aims to unravel the social positionality of men within minority communities in conflict scenarios. Primarily based on the theories of Susan Bordo, Michael Kimmel, and Raewyn Connell, among others, the paper underscores the complexities surrounding gendered violence and the formation of male identity. It highlights the emergence of subaltern masculinity, layered with the embodied realities of masculinity. This fosters a sense of "otherness" among men belonging to minority groups. It further explores the psychological and physical trauma borne by male bodies in the discourse of gender-based violence. This paper delves into the intricate intersections of racial and ethnic identities within social class dynamics, unraveling the multifaceted expressions of masculinity within diverse communities. Through a lens focused on gendered violence, I explore the unique challenges and experiences faced by men navigating the complex terrain of multiple intersecting identity factors. The research probes into the systematic invisibility of victims who identify as men on the gender spectrum, juxtaposed with their unjust association with the image of the perpetrator. In essence, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse surrounding the connections between masculinities and social class, unraveling the multifaceted layers of gendered violence against men within the unique socio-cultural context depicted in *Lajja*.

Keywords: gendered violence; identity; intersectionality; masculinities; otherness; social class

Résumé : Le présent article offre une analyse critique de la complexité des espaces réservés aux hommes ou aux femmes dans *Lajja* (2014) de Taslima Nasrin. Il vise à éclaircir la position sociale des hommes au sein des communautés minoritaires dans les scénarios de conflit. S'appuyant principalement sur les théories de Susan Bordo, Michael Kimmel et Raewyn Connell, entre autres, l'article souligne les complexités entourant la violence fondée sur le genre et la formation de l'identité masculine. Il met en lumière l'émergence d'une masculinité subalterne, à laquelle s'ajoutent les réalités incarnées de la masculinité. Cela favorise un sentiment d'« altérité » chez les hommes appartenant à des groupes minoritaires, qui renforce le traumatisme psychologique et physique que subissent les corps masculins dans le discours sur la violence fondée sur le genre. Cet article se penche sur les intersections complexes des identités raciales et ethniques au sein de la dynamique des classes sociales, révélant les multiples facettes de l'expression de la masculinité au sein de diverses communautés. En adoptant un point de vue axé sur la violence fondée sur le genre, j'explore les défis particuliers et les expériences vécues par les hommes confrontés à l'entrecroisement complexe de plusieurs facteurs identitaires. La recherche examine l'invisibilité systématique des victimes qui s'identifient comme des hommes sur le continuum des genres, juxtaposée à leur association injuste avec l'image de l'agresseur. Essentiellement, cette étude enrichit le discours théorique sur les liens entre masculinité et classe sociale, en révélant les multiples facettes de la violence fondée sur le genre à l'encontre des hommes dans le contexte socioculturel unique dépeint dans *Lajja*.

Mots clés : violence fondée sur le genre; identité; intersectionnalité; masculinités; altérité; classe sociale

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Introduction

In theorizing masculinities and social class, gendered violence perception often confines male victims to a female image. Understanding that men are also subject to societal power dynamics, akin to those experienced by women, necessitates an examination of the factors shaping male perceptions of masculinity across different social contexts. This research unveils the concealed realm of gendered violence against men within minority communities, as depicted in the novel *Lajja* (2014), and thereby aims to debunk stereotypes, raise awareness, and foster a more inclusive comprehension of gender-based violence. By shedding light on the complexities of male identity within the nexus of gender and socioeconomic class, this paper delves into the intersectionality of masculinity vis-à-vis social class, elucidating the ramifications of marginalization on male victims of violence and their psychological well-being.

Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014) was published, originally in 1993, as a reply to the atrocities brought down upon the Hindu and other minority communities in Bangladesh, as a ripple effect of the 1992-3 Babri Masjid demolition. In her novel's preface, Nasrin states:

I wrote *Lajja* when I saw Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh attack Hindus.... The Hindu fundamentalists of India destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The Muslim fundamentalists of Bangladesh avenged the destruction ... attacking the blameless Hindus of Bangladesh ... destroying their temples ... and raping Hindu women. (Preface to *Lajja* 2014, ix)

Lajja means "shame" in Bengali; the manuscript associates this with the shame and humiliation upheld through silence. The narratives of sexual harassment act as an illustration of this shame which is portrayed through Nasrin's Bengali men, Suronjon and Sudhamoy. The novel encircles the after-effects of the 1993 Babri Masjid demolition and narrates the life of the Datta family in these Hindu-Muslim riots, which Nasrin portrayed through the male protagonists, Suronjon and Sudhamoy Dutta. In Bangladesh during those riots most Hindu families were abducted, molested, killed, or forced into conversions. As per reports, the Babri Masjid demolition in India led to riots and violent attacks on Bengali Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities that took place from December 1992 to March 1993.

The report *Minorities at Risk* chronologically records national riots and related social incidents during the period of Babri Masjid conflict (UNHRC 2004). For example, in December 1992, Muslims mobbed and attacked various Hindu temples across Bangladesh. These incidents were followed by a disruption in India-Bangladesh cricket at Dhaka National Stadium, due to the destruction of Babri Masjid by Hindu fundamentalists. At least ten people died, many Hindu women were raped, and hundreds of Hindu homes and temples were destroyed (UNHRC 2004). In October 1993, Hindus in Bangladesh curtailed their Durga Puja (Hindu religious festival) due to atrocities committed against them. This news was reported by All-India-Radio (AIR) on October 16, 1993. Just six months after *Lajja's* publication in July 1993, the country banished the book and several radical Muslims marched the streets of Dhaka for the arrest and execution of Taslima Nasrin, a female Muslim writer who has been critical of male chauvinism and Islamic fundamentalism. In November of that year, a “fatwa” was released in her name by the *Council of the Soldiers of Islam* (a religious fundamentalist group) claiming she insulted the Islam religion in the world forum. The significance of selecting this novel as a point of analysis is established within the narratives of Nasrin’s *Lajja* (2014). This paper underscores the necessity of reconfiguring literary representations in feminist texts like *Lajja* and segregating the male experiences of cultural minorities after communal upheaval. This study focuses on the scars carried by the male bodies who fall prey to this type of cultural marginalization and subalternity.

Psychological Trauma of Gendered Violence on Male Bodies

Through a nuanced analysis of gendered violence, this study illuminates the often-unacknowledged challenges faced by male minority community members who have endured both physical and psychological trauma. The paper highlights the pervasive discrimination fuelled by patriarchal biases, emphasizing how violence is inherently gendered and reinforces masculine norms. By exploring the intersection of social dynamics, gendered violence, and cultural shifts within minority communities, this study offers a varied perspective on the multifaceted impact of violence on diverse gender identities, challenging prevailing narratives that primarily focus on female and child victims.

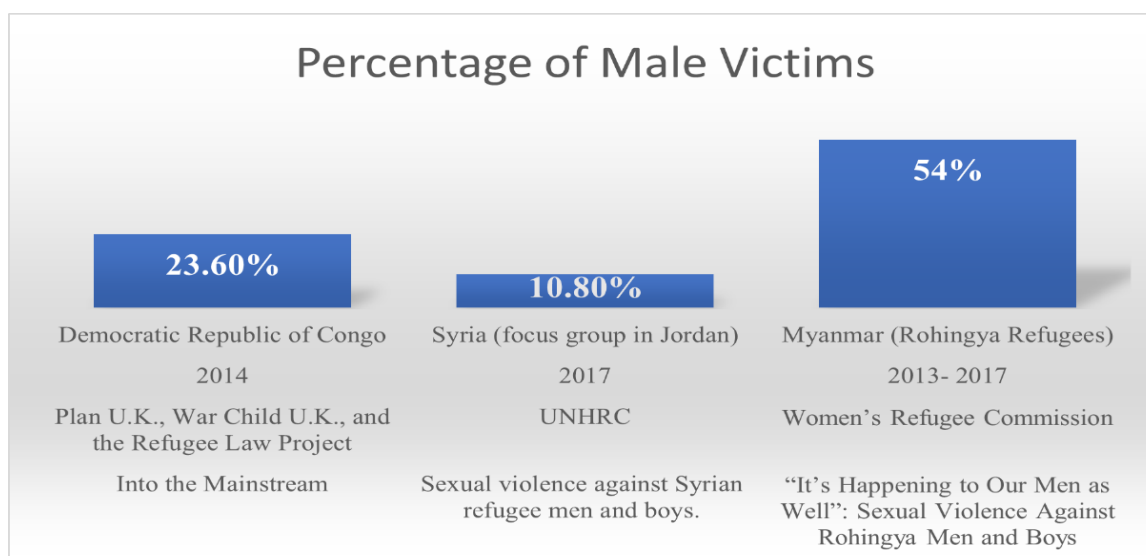


Fig 1: Graphical Representation of Male Victims of Sexual Violence in Conflict Areas.

The data shown in Figure 1 are extracted through various sociological initiatives undertaken by renowned institutes such as Sarah Chynoweth’s report, *We Keep it in our Heart*, commissioned by UNHRC (2017), the Into the Mainstream-Refugee Law Project (2014), and the Women’s Refugee Commission (2013-17). This representation emphasises a prevalent issue of gendered abuse targeting men, especially in conflict-ridden regions. Gendered violence, an eminent concern in public health and human rights discourse, epitomizes manifestations moulded by societal paradigms that dictate gender roles. The prevalence of the invisibility of men who are victims within specific social

spaces highlights the entrenched power differentials between genders, conflicting human rights and substantial negligence to public health. Acknowledging an often-overlooked reality, it is evident that males can be victims of gendered violence, particularly at the hands of other men, especially when they (the victims) deviate from the expectations of hegemonic or ruling masculinity. A meticulous analysis of the text, *Lajja* unveils a profound transformation in the lives of the Datta family men, Sudhamoy (the father) and Suranjon (the protagonist). Their journey unfolds as they grapple with the challenge of not conforming to the terms of hegemonic masculinity within the societal context of a Muslim country. The research presented here sheds light on the diverse complexities surrounding male victimization within the dynamics of gendered violence.

This study interpolates these dynamics of gendered violence and its subsequent effect on Bangladesh's trajectory since independence reduced religious diversity from approximately 23.1% to 9.6% during 1971 (Shahisullah 2016). The same reduction in religious diversity is illustrated in Figure 2, whose statistical data was retrieved from Minorities Rights Group (Shahisullah, 2016).

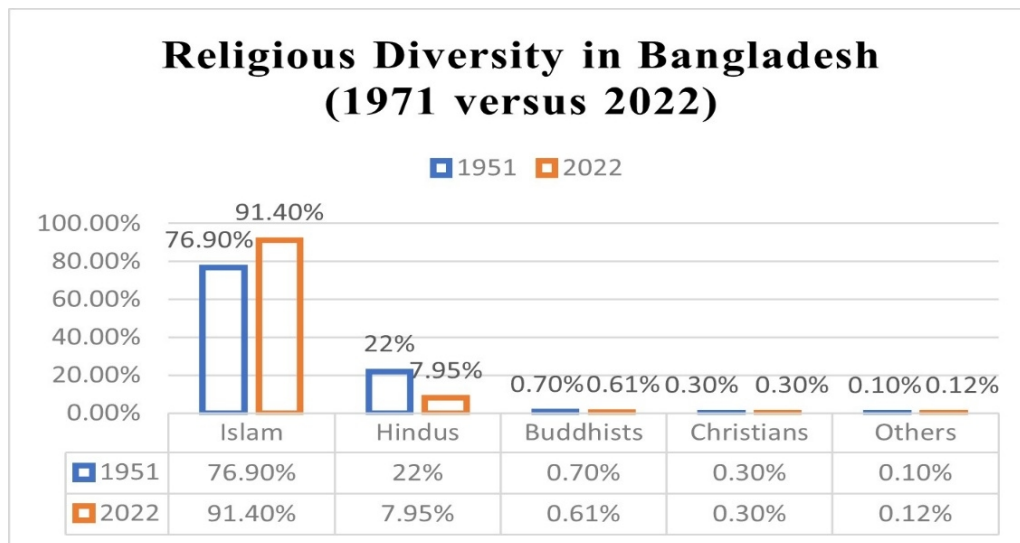


Fig 2: Graphical Representation of Religious Diversity in Bangladesh (1951 versus 2022)

This representation vividly shows a nation-state's move toward one religious community and a significant reduction in other communities, especially Hindus. According to the *Times of India* (2024), minorities, like Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, have been forced to resign from various workforces due to threats and harassment. Recently, *The Print* reported that an adaptation of *Lajja* was staged at Delhi's Bipin Chandra Pal Auditorium in Delhi in November 2024 (Halder 2024). The adaptation showed how Nasrin's 1993 novel—still banned in Bangladesh—remains relevant today. As there was no Citizenship Amendment Act in India to provide refuge to Hindus fleeing the country when Taslima Nasrin's novel came out, a new play based on the novel serves as an unspoken yet emphatic nod to the CAA. Thus, this paper analyses these real-time scenarios of religious and cultural discrimination and mingles them with South Asian parameters of masculinity to explore the subalternity of minority men in Bangladesh.

Theoretical and Analytical Approach

This study incorporates a qualitative approach that merges literary analysis and close reading with an intersectional analysis of social implications through *Lajja*. The paper portrays the gendered violence implicated in male bodies of minority (racial/sexual/religious) communities. The research blends close textual reading with gender theory and reports on gender-based violence against men within conflict situations, which emphasizes the plight of marginalized masculinities, through Suronjon (protagonist and son) and Sudhamoy (his father) creating a space for subaltern male identities. Sudhamoy's perspective explains the psycho-social impact of systematic violence on Hindu men in Bangladesh during the 1993 communal riots of the Babri Masjid incident.

In *The Masking of Masculinities*, Harry Brod observes: “Men’s studies scholars repeatedly face a problem in explaining their task.... Women’s lives have been so privatized—some feminists call it the “male-stream”—tradition. Men’s studies have no such immediately appealing claim to make since men have been the subjects of scholarship (Brod 1987, 2).

Thus, this study primarily utilizes Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak’s (2005) subaltern lens to understand male victimization in conflict situations through thematic analysis of minority communities. It observes Nasrin’s depiction of masculinity in her narrative by focusing on specific themes in the text, such as reactions to shame and representations of resilience and vulnerability amidst socio-political shifts.

Unexpected Social Clashes: Reconfiguring Male Bio-metaphors

Masculinity is profoundly defined by the cultural traditions of gender norms. This formulation is interwoven with socio-economic metaphors embodied through male bodies, which is then portrayed as an artificial state that boys and men must navigate, suggesting they are not inherently born with a fixed masculinity; rather, they are shaped by the prevailing hegemonic gendered social codes within their cultural milieu.

This section delves into gender politics influenced by unexpected socio-political clashes that create spaces of subaltern masculinity. It observes how Nasrin vocalizes the atrocities bestowed on minority (religious) communities due to the 1993 Babri Masjid socio-political conflict. She uses the narrative of a Bengali Hindu family in a Muslim-dominant Bangladesh in 1993. Using male protagonists, Suronjon and Sudhamoy, Nasrin focuses on the vulnerability of Hindu men who fail to fulfill the hegemonic role of protector during the Bangladesh conflict and thus lose their male privileges.

This study is primarily based on Connell’s study of hegemonic masculinity in *Gender and Power* (1987) which legitimates the social code of manhood. She further developed this idea in her work *Masculinities* (1995, 2005). While Connell revisited her original theory with James Messerschmidt in *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005) they mention the *Hierarchy of Masculinity* in this work, a hierarchy which outlines four categories of masculinity. First, *hegemonic masculinity* comprises traits such as heterosexuality, fair skin colour, stoicism, and perpetuation through patriarchy. Second, *complicit masculinity* neither aligns nor challenges hegemonic norms. Third, *marginalized masculinity* adheres to cultural expectations but fails to access the hegemonic privileges. Last, *subordinate masculinity* opposes hegemonic traits and is often associated with effeminacy. This conceptual framework elucidates the complex interplay between various manifestations of masculinity and the fluid dynamics of social class based on the economic standing and religious belief system.

During the time of the Babri Masjid riots, Muslim fundamentalists attacked minority communities, especially the Hindus, who were mainly Bengali. In *Lajja*, it is observed that the responsibility of the Babri Masjid demolition in another country by Hindu fundamentalists was foisted on the shoulder of “Sudhamoys” (Nasrin 2014, 17). The plural usage of “Sudhamoys” represents a singular character vocalizing and representing the plight of many Hindus in Bangladesh during that time. They “had not escaped the clutches of the fundamentalist Muslims in 1990, and so it was unlikely that they would be able to escape their clutches in 1992” (Nasrin 2014, 17). They were expected to leave their home and nation. This fostered a fear of forced displacement and vulnerability which eventually became a reality for many Hindus. Thus, it placed them within the parameters of marginalized communities.

Triple Vulnerability of Minority Masculinity in 1993 Bangladesh

The explicit placement into the category of marginalized creates the space of subaltern masculinity. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) coined the term *subaltern*, in his Prison Notebooks (1971 in English) to elaborate on socio-economically marginalized groups within colonial politics. The term was used to identify the cultural hegemony in a postcolonial context that corroborates social exclusion and displacement of specific social groups to deny their voices. This created the binary space of “them” and “us” and further emphasized the subaltern paradigm.

Later, this term was developed into the postcolonial studies subgroup, Subaltern Studies, by Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Partha Chatterjee. This paper, however, uses this concept with Spivak's lens of subalternity which states: "It is not just a classy word for 'oppressed' for the other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie... everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference" (Spivak 1992, 45; also cited in De Kock 1992, 45). Spivak further clarifies that the creation of a subaltern identity is based on the "mechanism of discrimination" (De Kock 1992, 45). Thus, this paper argues that, during conflict situations, minority communities navigate the realms of layered vulnerability. Nasrin's men—Sudhamoy and Suronjon—embody what can be termed as a *triple vulnerability* within their homelands. This vulnerability weaves the tapestry of *Othering* and paves the way for making their masculinity as *subalterns*.

Drawing on Spivak's concept of subalterns, the narrative in *Lajja* captures the layers of vulnerability faced by minority masculine identities. Their identities are forced into the space of "difference." First, in the world of *Lajja*, being a Bengali Hindu man within a Muslim-majority space makes these men religiously vulnerable and consistently othered. The role of religion affects the social placement of men as "religion produces socio-cultural systems through processes of domination, subordination, inclusion and exclusion, all spiced with an aura of factuality" (Geertz 1973, 90).

Second, their Hindu Bengali identity correlates to the cultural identity created their minority status. Mrinalini Sinha states, "The Muslims in Bengal, who as a group had a slight numerical advantage over Hindus, were similarly usually exempted from the popular elaboration of Bengali effeminacy" (Sinha 1995, 16). This colonial subordination imbued with sexual harassment pushes them to unredeemable positions of continuous subjugation.

Third, their masculinity is thus shaped by this hegemonic masculinity, which Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define as established by dominant socio-cultural groups while emasculating the minority. This *triple vulnerability* pushes Suronjon and Sudhamoy to subaltern masculinity and snatches away their agency and visibility through communal violence, socio-cultural biases, and gendered hierarchies. Sudhamoy and Suranjon embody marginalized masculinity and showcase two sides of the male image hampered by the hegemonic masculinity in a Muslim country. They are trapped within their homelands because of their subaltern identities, which leads to desperation, alienation, and emasculation.

The subaltern embodies no identity and lacks representation. The subaltern is oppressed by the "reproductive heteronormativity" (Spivak 2005, 478) which restricts their "social mobility" (Spivak 2005, 476). This restriction elucidates subalternity which is also termed "stuckedness" (Hage 2009, 4). Hage defines this as an entrapment where "a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation they are in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves" (Hage 2009, 4). This shifting gendered hierarchy furthers the subalternity of Sudhamoy and Suronjon, where social class is formulated based on "economic collectivity" (Spivak 2005, 476). This is exemplified by Sudhamoy's disqualification for an academic promotion in his teaching career. He states, "Do you think something will happen with the file, dear man? he would ask.... Will my work get done, Forib Sahib? he would ask.... Sudhamoy's juniors got their promotions. His file had been buried under the files of Dr. Korimuddin and Dr. Yakub Mollah, but they soon began working as associate professors. (Nasrin 2014, 29).

His Hindu identity consistently delays a well-deserved promotion, reflecting the intricate layers of *triple vulnerability*—religious, cultural, and socio-political subjugation—which results in loss of social agency. His compromised economic standing serves as a poignant illustration of the profound impact of evolving socio-political power dynamics on the fundamental facets of male identity. This reflects the intricate interplay between economic agency and social status within the broader context of masculinity. Sudhamoy did not fit the conventional archetype of "real manhood," which equates with economic stability. Moreover, his religious and cultural identity added to the systematic dismantling of his masculinity towards emasculation: "Finally, Sudhamoy Datta retired as an assistant professor. His colleague Madhob Chondro Pal whispered in his ear ... as they bade him farewell, "In a country of Muslims, we should not expect too many opportunities for ourselves. Even what we're getting now is a favor" (Nasrin 2014, 30).

Social class intricately interweaves with racial and ethnic identities, contributing to economic disparities that profoundly impact the construction of masculine identities. Thus, it is observed that minority men encounter barriers to

economic mobility, unequal pay, and limited access to resources. Economic challenges thus shape perceptions of success and failure, influencing the definitions of masculinity within the context of financial stability and independence.

Shifting Male Bio-metaphors and Bengali Masculinity

The Bengali men are equated with the aspect of “feebleness” as observed through Sinha’s work. In *Colonial Masculinity*, she quotes Macaulay: “the physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy.... His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid” (Strachey 1888 (1911), 450; also cited in Sinha 1995, 15). This languid state of being, which was a product of a colonial mindset, impacted the Bengali men’s identity during communal violence (1992-3) and in many cases till the contemporary times. In her seminal work Mrinalini Sinha observed, *Colonial Masculinity* (1995), that the colonial motive of divide and rule was established by creating a rift between Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Specifically, after the Partition (1905 and 1947) of East Bengal (now Bangladesh), the colonial lens exempted Muslims in Bengal from the brand of *effeminacy*. In Nasrin’s narrative, the politicized religious belief system by fundamentalist Muslims bestows gendered and racial violence: “Suronjon saw his mother pull the windows shut ... they could hear the slogans. “Pick up Hindus/ One or two/ And snack on them.” ... Suronjon remembered that they had heard the same slogan in 1990.... And who were they? ... They were people like Jobbaar, Romjan ... almost like younger brothers....” (Nasrin 2014, 23).

These processions with religious hate speeches and bullying inflict trauma on Bangladesh’s minority communities, mainly Hindus. The reference in Suronjon’s narrative of a similar scene in 1990 specifies how communal violence marginalizes the Bengali Hindus and minority groups. This understates how the psychological weapon of public shame was an efficient strategy to emasculate men, making them voiceless against the screams of culturally dominant groups. Shame and fear erode the foundation of “liberalism” and “independence” with fear of identity loss among the minority communities, creating a subaltern space for individuals like Suronjon and Sudhamoy. Moreover, Michael Ropar and John Tosh state, “Masculinity is in constant relation to the ‘other’, colonizer and colonized, later defined as emasculate and in need of control whereas the former imbues the image of imperial masculinity” (Ropar and Tosh 2021, 1-24).

These recurrent shifts in the bio-metaphors assigned to the male bodies within the national borders create the marginalized “Other.” However, this binary impacts the assigned gender roles of men from minority groups, especially Bengali Hindus of Bangladesh. Nasrin implores this contrast with the women of the Datta family, Maya (daughter) and Kironmoyee (mother). The men and women of the Datta family represent the two sides of vulnerable social placement within the communal riots of Bangladesh in 1993. The former, the father-son duo, represents the non-acceptance of subaltern identity within the failed parameters of manhood, whereas, the mother-daughter duo represents the sense of acceptance of defeat and vulnerability. Maya (daughter) serves as the prominent relic that sets a series of events that changes the father-son duo’s social placement of being men. The following passage shows Maya’s willingness to change her cultural identity and migrate to India: “What will you do with your name, Maya?” he [Sudhamoy] asked, recalling when he had identified himself as Sirajuddin.... “I’ll do that, and call myself Firoja Begum,” she replied in an unwavering tone..... Maya was prepared to take any step to carry on living” (Nasrin 2014, 18).

In this incident Sudhamoy questions Maya’s sense of nationalism. However, in retrospect, he is reminded of his act of choosing the Muslim identity, Sirajuddin, during a street confrontation. This emphasizes the hypocritical ways men and women are judged based on the definitions of nationalist identity. These definitions of identity is particularly linked with the social standing of real manhood. The intertwining nature of embodied masculinity with social metaphors like economic status, nationalist standing, etc. marginalizes both Sudhamoy and Suronjon.

Conundrums about masculinity thus arise from these clashes between “cultural epistemologies” (Haywood et al. 2018, 4) of understanding masculinity in its performative nature. This facet is overlooked in the mainstream discourse of gender-based violence against men within the space of communal violence. Thus, this article contends that masculinity is more than an inherent quality linked only to the biological symbols. However, the meaning to biological metaphors is influenced by cultural fabrication and sustained by social metaphors and peer recognition.

Masculinity Shifts and Social Class Dynamics in Minority Community

Masculinity has undergone several cultural re-productions and institutional metaphors attached to its physiological form. Susan Bordo in her seminal work *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* states: “Images of masculinity that will do double (or triple or quadruple) duty with a variety of consumers, straight and gay, male and female, are not difficult to create in a culture like ours, in which the muscular male body has a long and glorious aesthetic history” (Bordo 1999, 181).

This shift in masculinity unfolded as a religious-inspired criminality within Bangladesh’s 1993 riots as portrayed in *Lajja*. This shift further threatens the minority community, as embodied within the colonial lens, and subjugates the male body. Sudhamoy, in *Lajja*, embodies this ghost of masculine metaphors, especially the spirit of nationalism. His commitment to the nation sets him apart from the wider minority community.

In the novel, with escalating tension in Bangladesh, some Hindus sought refuge in India but later returned, an act which Sudhamoy condemned. His frustration and condemnation reflect his understanding of masculinity: “When the war broke out in the country, Sudhamoy would often say while talking to them, “You fled to India like emasculated men. Once the country was liberated you came back like heroes. And now, whenever there is a spot of trouble, you say you’ll go away to India. A cowardly bunch, that’s what you are” (Nasrin 2014, 27).

His reaction underscores the deep-seated valuation of being a man and its alignment with institutionalized masculine ideals, tied with a sense of nationalism and glorification of violence. However, his lack of resources to challenge the situation leaves him internally struggling, resulting in a perceived failure to achieve masculine respectability. This tension underscores the fragmentation of identity that often arises at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and social class. These intersections are like puzzle pieces representing varied layers of identity. The challenge is, however, to find a cohesive link between these intersections, such as race, ethnicity, social class, and religious background, to create a normative image of masculinity. It is a labyrinth of internal and external struggle to align with the hegemonic narrative of manhood and masculinity within the socio-political strife in Bangladesh.

Socio-Political Dynamics Subjugates Subaltern Masculinity

In one of her recent interviews with Goutam Karmakar, Susan Bordo states, “Images of the body are ‘never just pictures’ ... they carry fantasized solutions to our anxieties and insecurities...the culturally successful image ... carries values and qualities that ‘hit a nerve’ that is already exposed...about how to become what the dominant culture admires—and/or how to escape the pain caused by that culture” (Karmakar 2020, 6-7).

These images of the body form a tapestry to construct an identity intertwined with social metaphors of manhood. Moreover, this identity negotiation is further complicated by social clashes, like the riots of 1993 in Bangladesh. This creates a state of subalternity for men like Sudhamoy and Suranjon who are subjugated based on their socio-economic standing and social class embedded with racial and ethnic backgrounds. This negotiation is further complicated when men are faced with intersectional discrimination or oppression for following their ethnic heritage through sexual harassment.

Sudhamoy’s personality shifts drastically after he faces street sexual harassment and forced imprisonment in a Pakistani military camp where he is tortured as he fails to align with the structural markers of dominant masculinity. While returning from his friend’s house, he falls into the clutches of the Pakistani army and they ask him, “What is your name?” (Nasrin 2014, 14). He is startled and afraid to give away his Hindu identity and names himself “Sirajuddin Hussain” (Nasrin 2014, 14), which was the straw that breaks his connection with his nation. Then, the troop orders him: “Take off your lungi ... and they pulled it off him” (Nasrin 2014, 14). After this incident, Sudhamoy chooses to always wear pajamas (pants-like loose cotton trousers). This signifies the dynamic relation between how the male body and clothing are intertwined with social bio-metaphors which shifts with the change in socio-

political dynamics. Therefore, these socio-political dynamics traps men from minority communities within the restrictive constructs of manhood. This reference highlights how the internal struggle of Sudhamoy to acknowledge his subaltern position by changing his Hindu name forces him to feel psychologically mutilated. It uproots him from his cultural grounding and changes his association with masculinity and the male body.

Mrinalini Sinha, in her *Colonial Masculinity* (1995) highlights the image of effeminacy imposed on Bengali men due to their physicality against the lens of imperial masculinity. This, as discussed earlier, adds to the shifting political dynamics of Bangladesh and the masculine identity struggles of the minority community in Nasrin's *Lajja*. It represents that, even though the biology of gender identity is determined at birth, becoming one's gender is culturally influenced. As bell hooks quotes Connell from *In Gender Politics of Men* (1997) that when men "who oppose patriarchy remains at odds with the world.... They are likely to be met with derision from many other men..." (as cited in hooks 2004, 73). This derision isolates, imprisons, and confines men within the spaces of subalternity. As Sudhamoy observes, this change was with his nationalist views, which were attached to the perception of manhood: "He was quick to join gatherings against Pakistani rulers, getting there before anyone else. He had never felt restrained by home and family. Where had that courage gone!" (Nasrin 2014, 16).

This passage outlines how men from minority communities within a conflict situation are burdened with the sense of protecting their families without realizing their state of vulnerability, often due to age and loss of economic standing. This loss of agency further point out the drifting state of the father-son relations, as they both suffer from gendered emotional mutilation.

Suronjon (son) viewed Sudhamoy (father), as a "guide and teacher of the family. Suronjon thought his father was a Superman-like person" (Nasrin 2014, 93). However, in 1993 Bangladesh did not have liveable condition for liberals like Sudhamoy. Suronjon, who mirrored the youthful passion of his father, stood in grief with his father's lack of nationalist passion and his mother's wish to seek refuge in India. He felt alienated within his own family and among friends, the majority of whom were Muslims, and he moved to nothingness. In the failure to fulfill the duties of being a man, he felt ashamed and insulted. Thus, masculinity pervades several cultural epistemologies and becomes essential for the politics of (un)intelligibility and subjugating subaltern men.

Identity Struggles: Masculinity, Social Class, and Gender Violence Realities

Susan Bordo, in the chapter "Hard and Soft" in *The Male Body* (1999), quotes French feminist Luce Irigaray, "This sex which is not one" (Bordo 1999, 36) to understand the relationship between women's biology and their social placement. However, Bordo follows this argument by analyzing the social placement of the male body and their identity negotiations. Bordo (1999) argues that the cultural significance of potency and genitals weighs down a man's understanding of their manhood, which formulates their identity.

This "cultural equation of penis" (Bordo 1999, 37) is questioned in *Lajja* when the men of minority communities face gendered violence within a conflict situation. Sudhamoy observes this by stating it was "about torturing the weak whenever possible" (Nasrin 2014, 26). This was highlighted by the assault of Sudhamoy's female student, where she asked to remove her sari in the middle of the street, however, the fact that shocked Sudhamoy was, that, this student was Muslim, her weakness was her female identity. There is a consistent correlation between biology and culture which aids in the interpretation of the male body. The symbolic constructs feed into human history, which influences the flesh and body. This is further elevated by the interlinking ideologies of race and ethnicity, which form the struggles of subaltern identity. As the novel progresses Nasrin specifies how the minority men were subjected to sexual violence within Pakistani army camps in 1993: "How many days was it before Sudhamoy returned from the camp? Seven days... Sudhamoy felt that his chest and tongue were bone dry all the time. He would moan for water and the soldiers would laugh horribly" (Nasrin 2014, 94).

The tortures bestowed on Sudhamoy and other prisoners from the minority communities highlight a shift in power dynamics which alters the metaphors of masculinity and pushes the minority towards subaltern masculinity. "Sexual

terrorism” (as cited in Kimmel 2011, 137), as termed by legal theorist Carol Sheffield, is a constant reminder for the minority of their vulnerability. Within the space of politicized religious warfare, *forced imprisonment* is one of the greatest weapons. A similar instance of that can be seen in the era of the Holocaust, where Jews were imprisoned in torturous concentration camps under harsh conditions. In the novel, during their imprisonment, many Hindus were forcefully asked to recite the Kalma and convert to Islam: “One day, after Sudhamoy had steadfastly refused to become a Muslim, they lifted his lungi and said that since he hadn’t agreed to become a Muslim, they were going to circumcise him—they sliced off his penis. Then they held up his organ and laughed” (Nasrin 2014, 95).

This permanent physical scar left him with mutilated genitals and impotence while acting as a reminder of his subaltern position. Beyond the physical trauma, this fractured his spirit of nationalism and associated sense of masculinity as he also suffered a loss of agency and identity. The general dissociation of masculinity and victimization happens in both the private and public spheres. Sandesh Sivakumaran (2007) points out, “A man should have been able to prevent himself from being attacked” (255) and be able to cope like a man. Amidst the armed conflict, as portrayed in the novel, and forced imprisonment, these masculine stereotypes are more intensely attached to the self-perception of manhood, which is meant to shatter the centerpiece of the household. Therefore, it alters the structural metaphors of masculinity associated with the “protector” image of men. This image of minority men’s loss of identity relates to Alex Haley’s *Roots* (1976), “where the black boy (protagonist) keeps on claiming that he is Kunta Kinte yet he is being whipped and forced to be the man named Toby” (as cited in Nasrin 2014, 95).

Impact of Gendered Violence on Subaltern Men and Social Class Dynamics

Gendered violence to a man or boy scars his physiology and mental and social welfare. This violence ranges from “bruises, lacerations, stabbings and fractures, genital pain during urination, anal and testicular pain, and sexual dysfunction including impotence” (Solangon and Patel 2012, 421). However, castration is often viewed as mutilation and rape as torture is seen as watered down interpretation of the male-on-male atrocities, which hinders with the identification of male victims of armed conflicts. Gottschall describes this type of violence as a “coherent, coordinated, logical and brutally effective means of prosecuting warfare” (Gottschall 2004, 131).

The physical mutilation of men by dominant opposition serves as the greatest biological weapon. It is used to destabilize and emasculate the men from minority communities. The generational gap in response to the conflict in the novel is embodied through Sudhamoy, clinging to the fractured sense of nationalism. Suronjon represents the lost generation: “Suronjon’s air of indifference dampened Sudhamoy’s enthusiasm” (Nasrin 2014, 90). Suronjon’s proclamation of his liberalism bridges his familial responsibilities and cultural conflicts: “He was aware that he was not taking on the responsibilities required of him. He should have taken everyone in the family to hide somewhere but he had not done that. Perhaps he did not feel like doing it” (Nasrin 2014, 19). In some societies where masculinity is associated with being powerful and being head of the family, some men who feel they have failed to live up to this role, such as unemployed men who are unable to provide for their families, may feel that sexual violence, with its connotations of force and power, allows them to regain some control over their masculinity.

Suronjon’s inability to protect his family, especially after his sister Maya is kidnapped and abused, makes him feel alienated and enraged, which leads him to question his manhood. bell hooks observes in her work *The Will to Change* that “rage is the easy way back to a realm of feeling. It can serve as the perfect cover, masking feelings of fear and failure” (hooks 2004, 73). In an attempt to mask his feelings of failure and regain control, Suronjon assaults Shamina, a Muslim prostitute. He visualizes her as a symbol of the Muslim community whom he blames for his pain: “Suronjon did not look at Shamima as a whore—he saw her as a Muslim woman. He was extremely keen on raping a Muslim woman.... She was a streetwalker and yet she was yelping in pain—this made Suronjon very happy” (Nasrin 2014, 294).

This episode marks a turning point in Suronjon’s life, triggering a shift in his psychological space and prompting a redefinition of his identity: “Suronjon was calm. He felt unburdened. He had been able to do something with the de-

sire that had gnawed at him all day” (Nasrin 2014, 295). His sense of unburdening after committing such a heinous crime underlines the struggle and failure to embody the patriarchal role of family protector, which profoundly impacts his connection to his sense of self.

Nasrin’s *Lajja*, echoes the plight of Hindu and other minority families while highlighting how sexual abuse on men and women of minority communities is weaponized to emasculate men by dominant masculinity. This abuse creates the category of *othering*, which causes psycho-social implications for men, implications that are often eliminated from the gendered violence discourse.

Chris Dolan, in *Into the Mainstream* (2014), reports on the psycho-social and familial trauma of male victims of sexual abuse through documented cases of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For instance, one of the interviewees/victims of sexual violations reports how his wife left him, asserting that a man who cannot protect himself cannot protect her. This shows how trauma, masculinity, and gendered violence are imbued with social expectations. Carpenter also observes, “But there has been very little specific effort to recognize the trauma of such atrocity for the male relatives of the victims” (Carpenter 2006, 96), calling attention to the neglected emotional toll on male survivors in communal conflict.

The underrepresentation of diverse portrayals of male identities based on varied intersections such as race, ethnicity, and social class in media, literature, and cultural narratives exacerbates the marginalization of male victims. This invisibility perpetuates cultural stereotypes that narrow the spectrum of acceptable masculinities. This void in the narrative sustains systematic oppression and gender hierarchies, which denies visibility and legitimacy to minority masculinities.

The impact of this skewed representation extends beyond mere storytelling; it shapes societal perceptions and moulds the collective consciousness. The emerging narratives often adhere to stereotypical moulds, reinforcing preconceived notions about how individuals at the intersection should embody masculinity. Nasrin’s *Lajja* reflects Sudhamoy’s struggles and trauma, symbolizing the older generation of men from the minority community. It focuses on the psycho-social trauma that incubates subaltern identity within the familiar socio-economic strata. It captures the systematic socio-economic inequalities creating the space of subaltern masculinity: “Sudhamoy thought to himself that he had not become an associate professor simply because his name was Sudhamoy Datta. If only he had been Muhammad Ali or Salimullah Chowdhury! Even in trade and business, very rarely did a Hindu institution get a license if there was no Muslim partner involved” (Nasrin 2014, 30).

The paper highlights intersectional perspectives of how male bodies of minority communities are violated. This relates to the reconstruction of their identity within their social placement. Even though Masculinity Studies are evolving and addressing intersections they pay negligible attention to the phenomenon of the racialization of masculinities and the pervasiveness of hegemonic whiteness (Wong and Wang 2022). The same can be said about gender-based-violence male survivors in conflict areas as observed through works of Dolan 2014; UNHRC 2017-18, which exposes the deep embedding of the definitions of victimhood and masculinity which creates the space of subalter identities for the male survivors of GBV.

Conclusion

The patriarchal ideals of *protector, breadwinner, and provider of the family* exacerbate dominant masculinity to marginalize alternative expressions of masculinity and silence their voices. Failing to stand up to those standards alters the male identity triggering subaltern male identity within social power structures. This paper highlights how socio-political shifts echo through the varied social standards of violations, particularly for male victims whose struggles are often overlooked. Kimmel observes this development of feminism and gender equality: “Four decades of feminism has been accompanied by four decades of increasingly shrill denunciations of feminists.... Gender Equality, we’ve been told, is really for women ... but underneath this is the idea that gender equality is bad for men” (Kimmel 2010, 3).

These social dynamics reveal the tension between evolving gender norms and restrictive narratives of dominant masculinity. This article explores the male characters in *Lajja* who are from the Hindu minority community, Suronjon, and Sudhamoy, depicting their constrained emotional range, dominated by despair, failure, and anxiety which manifests as anger as they fail to reclaim individual agency. The paper critiques the homogenized portrayal of masculinity, advocating for diverse narratives that challenge stereotypes and explore varied masculine expressions across race, ethnicity, and social class.

Often in conflict scenarios, sexual violence involving rape and physical mutilation is used as a biological weapon against male members of the marginalized community, which psychologically impacts the victims, highlighting the complexities of gendered subjectivity. This violence is also heightened during socio-political shifts that disrupt power dynamics, deepen male alienation, and reinforces the patriarchal ideal man. These further results in a loss of agency as shown in *Lajja*: “Sudhamoy sat up suddenly as he heard the sounds of the procession. Suronjon clenched his jaws... Should he not be angry too?” (Nasrin 2014, 32).

Religious discrimination in Bangladesh, rooted in colonialism and the Partition, continues to marginalize minorities post-independence. Events like the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition in India incited widespread rioting in Bangladesh, targeting Hindu shops, and businesses, and inflicting gendered violence. Nasrin’s *Lajja* vividly portrays these atrocities, emphasizing the intersections of gendered violence and social class. It examines masculinities through the lens of intersecting racial, ethnic, and class identities, shedding light on how these dynamics shape the perpetuation or resistance to gendered violence. Thus, the novel adds to the ongoing discourse of male victimhood in conflict areas, while addressing the intersectional perspectives attached to the South Asian male identities which often create subaltern masculinity.

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“Coming In” to Queer Psychology: The Value of Blending Queer Theory and Psychology in Critical Autoethnography

by Alicia Wright, Phillip Joy, Conor Barker

Abstract: This commentary reflects upon an Honours thesis undertaken in 2024-2025 to analyze the subjective experience of coming out in adulthood through critical autoethnography. The method used, which blends autobiography with ethnographic observation, was rooted in psychological frameworks and drew upon queer theory—a scholarly perspective that challenges and attempts to disrupt heteronormative assumptions of gender and sexuality—to analyze the first author’s experience of changes in sexual orientation in her thirties. The authors discuss the challenges, and ultimate benefit, of interweaving psychology, which tends to be grounded in positivist and structured views, with queer theory, which promotes fluidity and resists established norms. Sharing their unique perspectives, each author contributed to this essay from their respective discipline, highlighting the possibilities that appear when holding two seemingly opposing theoretical tensions; not just in understanding experiences of diversity among sexual orientation identities, but also in questioning the traditional boundaries of research and the complexity of human experience. As researchers who are also part of the queer community, the authors found great value in queering psychology scholarship, supporting a need for diverse representation within academia.

Keywords: autoethnography; LGBTQ+; queer pedagogy; queer theory; psychology

Résumé : Ce commentaire porte sur une thèse honorifique rédigée en 2024-2025 qui analysait l’expérience subjective du dévoilement de l’orientation sexuelle à l’âge adulte, au moyen d’une autoethnographie critique. La méthode utilisée, qui allie l’autobiographie et l’observation ethnographique, s’appuyait sur des cadres psychologiques et sur la théorie queer – une approche scientifique qui remet en question et cherche à déconstruire les suppositions hétéro-normatives liées au genre et à la sexualité—pour analyser l’expérience de la première auteure quant aux changements de son orientation sexuelle survenus dans la trentaine. Les auteurs abordent les défis, ainsi que les avantages ultimes, d’associer la psychologie, qui a tendance à être fondée sur des points de vue positivistes et structurés, à la théorie queer, qui encourage la fluidité et remet en question les normes établies. En partageant leurs points de vue uniques, chaque auteur a contribué à cet essai selon sa discipline respective, mettant en lumière les possibilités qui émergent lorsque l’on tient compte de deux tensions théoriques apparemment opposées; non seulement pour mieux comprendre la diversité des expériences liées à l’orientation sexuelle, mais aussi pour remettre en question les limites traditionnelles de la recherche et la complexité de l’expérience humaine. En tant que chercheurs faisant eux-mêmes partie de la communauté queer, les auteurs reconnaissent la valeur qu’apporte l’intégration d’un point de vue queer dans les recherches en psychologie, soulignant ainsi la nécessité d’une représentation diversifiée au sein du milieu universitaire.

Mots clés : LGBTQ+; théorie queer; psychologie; autoethnographie; pédagogie queer

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This commentary reflects upon my (Alicia Wright) Honours thesis, undertaken in 2024-2025 to analyze the subjective experience of coming out in adulthood (Wright 2025). Guided by the mentorship of my co-supervisors (Phillip Joy and Conor Barker), whose research expertise respectively resides in the fields of queer health and psychology, I conducted a critical autoethnography, a method that blends autobiography and ethnographic observation while employing theoretical views to analyze lived experience (Poulos 2021), to explore this change in sexual orientation. Specifically, this essay considers the benefits and challenges of interweaving psychological frameworks with queer theory, a scholarly view that challenges and attempts to disrupt heteronormative assumptions of gender and sexuality. These perspectives do not always align easily: queer theory often prioritizes fluidity and anti-normativity, while psychological frameworks tend to emphasize diagnosis and structured models. Yet, these seemingly incompatible lenses were used together to more deeply examine the tensions, possibilities, and productive disruptions that emerge when personal narratives are situated at the intersection of identity, theory, and practice.

With the aim of understanding how sexual identity transformation happens in adulthood, I wrote reflexive narratives to evocatively depict three turning points in my experience of a sexual identity shift away from heterosexuality in my thirties, involving a deconstruction, recognition, and reconnection of identity. Rooted in psychology, these first-person stories were compared to psychological models of identity formation and were understood in intrapersonal and interpersonal terms, with the recognition of sexual identity being both socially constructed and guided by a sense of authenticity (Rust 1993). Queer theory was then drawn upon to remove the heteronormative lens from personal stories and review them through an acknowledgment of religious, patriarchal, and heterosexist influence that acted to obscure non-heterosexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. We argue that queer theory was integral for understanding the complexity of my experience of forging a sexual orientation identity against the resistance of dominant, insidious, and pervasive social systems.

Throughout the arc of this story, themes were revealed that captured aspects of embodiment, unlearning, being witnessed, grieving, belonging, and *coming in*—an introspective concept that honours the nuanced nature of sexual dis-

covery and self-acceptance (Rosenberg 2018). To better understand these phenomena on a personal level, queer theory concepts were used to understand not just *how* these experiences happened but *why* they were such an important part of change. Namely, Adrienne Rich's compulsory heterosexuality (1980), which views heteronormativity as an institution that subordinates women to men by promoting heterosexuality as the only standard by which to live, was drawn upon to illuminate barriers to my sexual diversity recognition and my sense of obligation to a heterosexual role. Similarly, Judith Butler's theory of the heterosexual matrix (2007), which describes how sexuality, gender, and sex are collectively socially performed and reciprocated, was used to support the understanding of my earlier life stages, where I tried so hard to embody a wife, woman, and mother in just the "right" way. This study concluded with an understanding that sexuality is fluid, and orientation can change across the lifespan through non-linear, non-sequential, and non-hierarchical stages—a claim that extends the understanding of popular developmental models of identity formation that see sexual identity as something that is stable and typically formed in early life.

The primary challenge of this research was using the boundaries and predictability of psychological theory alongside queer theory. Specifically, I aligned my sexual identity shift with social constructionist perspectives, noting the relational meaning-making aspects of my sexual orientation while also acknowledging an essential sense of authentic truth that felt as if it was being uncovered. The latter concept of an essential self runs counter to queer theory, which promotes an ever-evolving dynamic experience of identity that is sensitive to sociopolitical, cultural, and historic forces. However, when considering the idea of authenticity as something that is not absolute or stable, but rather a sense of congruence or incongruence with one's evolving values (Erickson 1995), it is fair to accept that queer people experience their sexuality as something that is stable and retrospectively make sense of their experiences as leading to an authentic sense of self (Rust 1993). To support a retrospective analysis of this process, from a feeling of incongruence with my heterosexual life to an experience of greater alignment with my lesbian identity and same-sex relationships, queer theory was helpful in addressing the social constructionist factors that both impaired a healthy expression of sexual diversity and enabled the adoption of a more aligned sexual orientation identity.

Mentorship and Methodology: A Queer Reflection (Interlude by Phillip Joy)

As a queer health researcher and mentor, I approach scholarship from the understanding that knowledge is never neutral, and that some of the most meaningful insights arise in spaces of discomfort and contradiction. When Alicia proposed exploring the experience of coming out in adulthood, I was struck by both the vulnerability of the inquiry and the intellectual ambition of engaging with psychological and critical theoretical frameworks simultaneously.

Queer health research often requires navigating across epistemological boundaries, including clinical models that seek to diagnose, stabilize, or normalize, and queer theoretical approaches that emphasize fluidity, disruption, and resistance to categorization. Rather than resolving these differences, I encouraged Alicia to hold space for the tensions between them. In this project, the friction between psychological structure and queer fluidity is not a problem to be solved but a site of possibility.

My role as mentor was not to guide Alicia toward certainty but to support her engagement with uncertainty. I aimed to affirm that her lived experience holds value as a site of knowledge production, not in need of justification but worthy of exploration on its own terms. The choice of critical autoethnography as methodology allowed for a politically engaged and reflexive approach that foregrounds the embodied and affective dimensions of coming out. This aligns with my broader commitment to queering health scholarship and reimagining how we produce, value, and share knowledge within systems that are often hostile to difference. This project illustrates the generative capacity of working across disciplinary, theoretical, and identity-based borders. It also reflects how queer mentorship can serve as both method and ethic, grounded in collaboration, care, and the shared pursuit of more just and expansive ways of knowing.

Mentorship and Methodology: A Psychological Reflection (Interlude by Conor Barker)

As a queer faculty member in psychology and education whose research focuses on inclusion and the voices of those underserved by school psychology, supervising this thesis was a personal and professional challenge that evoked something deeper in me. When I joined the psychology department through a diversity cluster hire, I brought a qualitative orientation into a space traditionally dominated by positivist, quantitative approaches. Like many in psychology, I once imagined myself becoming a quantitative researcher. But the questions that emerged from my practice, as a clinician and as a queer person, demanded something different. They were questions grounded in lived experience, cultural complexity, professional competency, and identity. In short, they were qualitative in nature, necessitating a deep appreciation for theory as it applies to my research questions.

What became clear to me, early in my role as a supervisor, was how under-prepared psychology students often are for this kind of work. Psychology education tends to emphasize statistical significance and generalizability, privileging knowledge that conforms to the scientific method. But qualitative research invites us to step outside that framework and ask different questions. It calls on us to consider how we know what we know, and to recognize that rigorous research can emerge from reflection, emotion, and identity. This was especially true in supervising Alicia's thesis, where her process of *coming in* to her sexual identity pushed conventional undergraduate research to *come out*—to assert its place within psychology as both valid and necessary.

Before participation in this thesis, I would often say that I am a researcher who happens to be queer, not a queer researcher. That distinction once felt important, perhaps protective. But over time, and especially through this project, I have come to understand that my queerness informs my way of seeing the world and my way of doing research. Supporting Alicia's work and collaborating with Dr. Joy, helped me claim that identity more fully.

This work illuminated something important for me: that queer research is not just about queer topics or queer people, but about queering the research process itself. It is about disrupting linearity, embracing contradiction, and valuing stories that resist easy categorization. Queer theory gave Alicia a lens through which to reinterpret her life and not as a deviation from the norm, but as a narrative shaped by and resisting dominant structures and oppression. At the same time, the psychological frameworks she used grounded her story in developmental and relational processes, creating a powerful interplay between the destabilizing force of queer theory and the interpretive lens of psychology. There is a deep tension here, and it is productive. Psychology often seeks to explain, to categorize, to make stable what queer theory insists is fluid. Alicia's narrative helped us hold both truths: that there is a felt sense of authenticity that is meaningful, even as identity is understood to be constructed, shifting, and contingent. This isn't a contradiction in need of resolution, but a generative tension, one that encourages psychology students to reckon with the limits of our discipline and expand what is accepted and valued as knowledge.

As queer researchers and educators, we must create more space for this kind of work: research that is messy, embodied, intersectional, real. It is only through embracing these stories, stories that do not fit cleanly into variables or diagnostic criteria, that we begin to understand the full range of human experience. Through this process, I came to understand that queerness is not just part of who I am, but also how I think, question, and engage with research. And I now wear the label of queer researcher with pride.

Conclusion (by Alicia Wright)

This thesis, and the opportunity to delve into deeply meaningful and complex critical analysis at the undergraduate level, would not have begun without the guidance of queer supervisors. Aside from their academic expertise, their identities as gay men allowed them to direct my work through their subjective understanding of my experiences, thereby implicitly guiding me through the appropriate lens and introducing me to theoretical perspectives that allowed me to see my own story in a new way. Moreover, my perspective as a late-in-life lesbian helped to expand our

collective concept of queer experience, sparking an acknowledged need for this type of vulnerable discourse in scholarly investigation. This process confirms the benefit of enacting a mission of equity, diversity, and inclusion in academia and the powerful possibilities of queer representation in research.

Regarding the outcome of this study, queer theory was ultimately critical in weaving a multidimensional experience of dynamic sexuality with the awareness of a reciprocal performance of expected social roles. This approach suggests that the use of queer theory can serve to enhance and extend psychological perspectives, which are traditionally rooted in heteronormative standards that see non-heterosexuality as something to be explained outside of a norm (Jones 2019; Minton 1997). Using queer theory to question psychology supports existing research that calls for a move away from the minoritization of groups and towards a resistance of hegemonic ideas of gender and sexuality that perpetuate the problems of patriarchy and heterosexism (Minton 1997). There is growing scholarly discussion around the ways in which queer theory helps with “queering” research, not simply through its ability to deconstruct hierarchical structure and binary-based thinking of gender and sexuality, but also by encouraging researchers to remain open to an ever-changing landscape of psychosocial experience (Lesutis 2023).

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Intersectional Promises: How Well Did the Canadian National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence Integrate an Intersectional Approach?

by Olesya Kochkina

Abstract: It took more than ten years of feminist advocacy for the Canadian government to adopt the National Action Plan (NAP) to End Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on November 9, 2022. This study is among the first to trace the development of and critique the NAP. Specifically, I interrogate how well is the NAP grounded in an intersectional approach. Using the adjusted Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) and qualitative content analysis as research methods, I argue that the recently adopted NAP is premised on a deflated definition of intersectionality and lacks attention to the role of existing policies in reproducing social inequalities. The NAP fails to centre the voices of those most affected and to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of systemic causes and effects of GBV resulting in different intersectional needs of various at-risk groups. As a consequence, the NAP provides symbolically intersectional solutions that are unlikely to be effective in addressing GBV. In addition, the NAP relies on non-intersectional data for progress assessment, and it is without built-in mechanisms for meaningful engagement of the most affected groups. With such a design, the current NAP will not be able to achieve the stated vision of a Canada free from GBV.

Keywords: content analysis; gender-based violence; IBPA; intersectionality; policy analysis

Résumé : Ce n'est qu'après plus de dix ans de défense des droits des femmes que le gouvernement canadien adopte, le 9 novembre 2022, le Plan d'action national (PAN) pour mettre fin à la violence fondée sur le sexe (VFS). Cette étude est l'une des premières à retracer l'évolution du PAN et à en faire une critique. Plus précisément, j'examine dans quelle mesure le PAN repose sur une approche intersectionnelle. En utilisant la version adaptée de l'analyse des politiques fondée sur l'intersectionnalité (IBPA) ainsi qu'une analyse qualitative de contenu, je soutiens que le PAN récemment adopté repose sur une définition édulcorée de l'intersectionnalité et néglige le rôle des politiques existantes dans la reproduction des inégalités sociales. Le PAN ne fait pas entendre la voix des personnes les plus touchées et ne démontre pas une compréhension approfondie des causes et des effets systémiques de la VFS, qui se traduisent par des besoins intersectionnels différents selon les groupes à risque. Par conséquent, le PAN propose des solutions symboliquement intersectionnelles qui ne seront probablement pas efficaces pour lutter contre la VFS. De plus, le PAN s'appuie sur des données non intersectionnelles pour évaluer les progrès réalisés, et il ne comporte pas de mécanismes intégrés permettant une participation significative des groupes les plus touchés. De ce fait, le PAN actuel ne sera pas en mesure de concrétiser la vision d'un Canada exempt de VFS.

Mots clés : violence fondée sur le sexe; intersectionnalité; analyse des politiques; IBPA; analyse de contenu

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Introduction

Researchers acknowledge the potential of intersectionality as a policymaking framework to deliver more equitable social outcomes (Bowleg 2008; Hankivsky and Cormier 2011). The Canadian government promised that the National Action Plan (NAP) to End Gender-Based Violence (GBV) would be “grounded in an intersectional approach” (WAGE 2022b, “The high-level framework for joint action”). This aligns with what Canadian feminist organizations have advocated for: “[W]e need the national action plan to be bold, to be robust, to be well resourced and to be intersectional” (Grant, Hayes and Renzetti 2022).

The goal of this paper is to examine how the NAP integrates intersectionality. First, I provide background on the development of the current action plan. Then, I review the literature discussing what it means for a public policy to be intersectionality-informed. Next, I present the findings of qualitative content analysis of the NAP informed by Hankivsky’s Intersectionality Based Policy Analysis (IBPA). I aim to contribute to intersectional critique that applies intersectionality “to examine a text, a discourse or policy in order to determine whether they are intersectional” (Garcia and Zajicek 2022) with an ultimate goal to move discourses and policies towards greater social justice. Scholars advocate for the use of an intersectional approach in policymaking because it has the potential to bring a “paradigm shift that foregrounds the complex contexts and root causes of health and social problems” (Hankivsky 2012, 8). An intersectionality-based policy framework brings forward the vantage point of groups that may otherwise remain invisible (Cole and Duncan 2023; Crenshaw 1989), thus producing more equitable and inclusive policy outcomes. This is particularly important in addressing GBV since, as scholars pointed out, the analytical frameworks that focus on single issues, such as race, class, or gender, fail to address the problems produced by a complex web of oppressive powers (Crenshaw 1991; Day and Gill 2020). The assumption that experiences with GBV are the same for all women leads to “one size fits all” solutions that are generally ineffective for everyone. Developing an approach to safety tailored to the intersectional needs of various groups “offers genuine empowerment to end *all* forms of oppression and violence against *all* survivors” (Day and Gill 2020, 847). It may be argued that the practical application of intersectionality is challenging (McCall 2005) and its use within policies tends to be “blurry” (Manning and Levac 2022). However, a wide range of tools guiding the implementation of intersectionality within policies are currently available (Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery 2019), thus policymakers have resources to address these challenges.

My analysis of the NAP reveals a weak and inconsistent application of intersectionality which is likely to produce results opposite to that which intersectionality intends. Sara Ahmed called this phenomenon “*non-performativity*: when something is named without coming into effect” (Ahmed 2018, 333, emphasis in the original). The NAP’s recommendations demonstrate the non-performative use of intersectionality; its surface adoption of the language of intersectionality masks the lack of commitment to disrupting the existing power status quo disadvantaging certain groups in the context of GBV. Furthermore, by failing to centre the standpoints of marginalized groups, the policy contributes to reproducing their vulnerable position. The design of the NAP works to sustain rather than challenge the existing hierarchies in the context of GBV.

Background: Decades of Feminist Advocacy Resulted in Adopting the NAP

On November 9, 2022, the Government of Canada released a ten-year National Action Plan (NAP) to End GBV. The introduction of the NAP was a culmination of more than ten years of strategic advocacy by Canadian feminist organizations. NAP signifies a critical step in addressing “one of the most pervasive, deadly and deeply rooted human rights violations” (WAGE, 2022b Introduction). Yet the advocates for the NAP were far from celebratory (see Joint Statement on the Release of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence 2022).

The Canadian campaign to advocate for the NAP addressing GBV started around 2012 as a response to the series of United Nations resolutions and a global UN campaign calling on states to adopt multi-sectoral action plans to address Violence Against Women (VAW) by 2015. Women’s Shelters Canada (WSC) spearheaded a national advocacy campaign, involving more than 250 organizations (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 362). The goal was to push the Cana-

dian government to enact a plan that is “bold, ambitious, and intersectional” (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 135).

The Justin Trudeau Liberal government, elected in 2015, was generally supportive of developing a comprehensive policy on VAW and GBV; however, instead of introducing a long-term NAP, it adopted a five-year Strategy titled “It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence” in 2017. Although the Strategy contained important initiatives and increased funding towards GBV, it was criticized for a scattered approach and limited coherence of actions (Gotell 2023).

The 2021 federal budget provided \$600 million over five years to advance the NAP; the next year another \$540 million over five years was added to work with provinces and territories on the NAP. Another milestone was the endorsement of the Joint Declaration for a Canada Free of Gender-Based Violence by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women in January 2021. This Declaration states that the NAP is a high-level framework for joint action; it identifies the vision, goals, pillars, guiding principles, and foundation for the NAP. However, the Declaration left the question of coordination mechanisms open.

One of the initiatives funded under the 2021 budgetary allocation was the development of the report titled “Roadmap for the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence” (hereafter “Roadmap”). The report was sanctioned by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) and developed by anti-violence experts from advocacy groups, front-line service organizations, academia, and professional organizations (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021). These experts developed a prototype of a NAP with recommendations structured around five pillars: (1) enabling environment and social infrastructure; (2) prevention; (3) promotion of responsive legal and justice system; (4) support for survivors and their families; and (5) Indigenous Women's leadership (assigned to a different group, WAGE Indigenous Women's Circle). The Roadmap put forward over one hundred recommendations offering transformative solutions to systemic problems. In addition, the Roadmap had calls to action covering police and state violence, complexities of transformative justice, wrap-around services, and stability of VAW/GBV sector. Arguably, the Roadmap was a comprehensive and well-researched document developed through a transparent participatory process that could be translated into a national framework for action, provided there was political will.

The launch of the NAP in November 2022 could be viewed as a victory for feminist advocacy. However, the experts who developed the Roadmap expressed serious concerns. “The document released two weeks ago is not a National Action Plan,” they said in a Joint Statement on the Release of the NAP (Joint Statement 2023). Acknowledging that the NAP is aligned with many of Roadmap's traits, the authors critique the NAP for not being binding on Canadian governments and for providing recommendations that are too broad, not far-reaching, and without identified priorities.

All provinces and territories signed bilateral agreements with the federal government between June and November 2023. These agreements cover four fiscal years from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2027. One of the advocates' key demands – as well as one of the main promises of the policy document – is that the NAP integrates an intersectional perspective. How effectively does the NAP use intersectionality? To answer this question, I will first outline the characteristics of an intersectionality-informed policy.

Literature Review: Intersectional Policy Framework

Defining Intersectionality in a Policy Context

Intersectionality's “methodological pluralism” (Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery 2019, 10) means there are multiple ways that intersectionality is defined and applied in policymaking. The very definition of intersectionality used within a particular policy sends a message about that policy's focus. Scholars point out that some definitions of intersectionality extend towards social justice, while others have limited transformative potency (Collins 2015; Christoffersen 2022; Walby, Armstrong and Strid 2012). The literature strongly cautions against the “additive” approach to intersec-

tionality; socially constructed categories of gender, race, sexuality, and (dis)ability must be recognized as co-constitutive and indivisible (Bowleg 2008). In addition, scholars underline that a productive way to engage with intersectionality is by paying attention to the ways that different regimes of inequality shape each other (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). It is important to focus the definition of intersectionality on the systems of domination that place individuals in a multi-dimensional hierarchical position rather than on identities alone.

For example, compare the following definitions:

The concept of “intersectionality” refers to the interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender in fostering life experiences, especially experiences of privilege and oppression. (Gopaldas 2013)

Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views the categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age—among others—as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. (Collins and Bilge 2020, 2)

Unlike the first definition, the second one highlights the relationships between different social levels emphasizing the primary role of power in creating inequalities. Formulated this way, the definition invites us to think about the role of policies in shaping lived experiences, social relationships, and overarching power relations. As much as intersectionality’s “definitional fluidity” (Collins 2015) allows policymakers to adjust the conceptual framework for a particular initiative, it is important to ground it in a definition that guides towards transformative solutions.

What Makes a Policy Intersectionality-Based?

The application of intersectionality to public policy can be traced to 2006, with the publication of Tiffany Manuel’s paper, which first talked about the advantages of using an intersectional lens in public policies (Garcia and Zajicek 2022, 273). Since then, authors have explored the core elements of an intersectionality-informed policy. Attention to power is arguably at the heart of an intersectional approach (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013; Collins and Bilge 2020; Hankivsky 2012). Power structures intersect at multiple levels (Hankivsky 2012) placing people in unique social locations, thus the same policy will be experienced differently by different groups (Collins and Bilge 2000, 6). A core intersectionality tenet is bringing the lived experiences of people from marginalised communities to the centre of policy analysis and formulation (Bowleg 2012, 1268). Methodological misuse of intersectionality can lead to the re-centring of hegemonic subject positions, such as whiteness (Tate 2023). Recentring whiteness and other dominating groups along with the othering of non-white and other disadvantaged communities often happens through the application of a so-called “colourblind intersectionality” (Carbado and Harris 2019, 2223), which is defined as a false assumption of neutrality of certain subject positions. This leads to treating white, able-bodied, cis-gender and other privileged groups as the default baseline. Scholars underline the importance of examining the realities of historically marginalized populations from their unique vantage point and not through comparison with an imagined “norm” (Bowleg 2012; Carbado and Harris 2019).

Meaningful engagement with the intended beneficiaries helps to address the risk of falling into the trap of “colourblind” intersectionality. For example, Samantha LaMartine, Nakamura, and García (2023) examined the experiences of victimization from the vantage point of Afro-American transgender women, highlighting that their aggravated vulnerability to GBV comes from the intersection of racism, classism, cissexism, and sexual stigmatization (105). The interaction of these powers positions Black transgender women at a higher risk for intimate partner violence, sexual assaults, police violence, re-victimization, and criminalization; at the same time, the authors underline the resilience of the community and their creativity in developing coping mechanisms (LaMartine, Nakamura, and García

2023, 106-107). The authors examine the situation from Black transgender women's vantage point to inform their recommendations for GBV-related counselling and programming.

A common critique of intersectionality is that it works to fragment advocacy movements rather than support unity and cohesion. This argument is often taken up by policymakers who reason that it is not feasible to introduce a different policy for each "interest group"; intersectionality-based policy is "too complicated" (Manning and Levac 2022). However, Dorothy Roberts and Sujatha Jesudason demonstrated that intersectionality can forge political alliances between such different groups as reproductive justice activists, racial justice activists, women's rights, and disability rights activists. They suggest that even though these groups operate from distinct social locations, the analysis of their commonalities "reveals ways in which structures of oppression are related" thus offering better ways to address them (Roberts and Jesudason 2013, 316). Unfortunately, rather than acknowledging variabilities and spaces of convergence, policies tend to operate from an underlying assumption of being gender-, race-, class-, sexuality- and ableism-neutral which results in an ineffective "one size fits all" approach. Scholars argue that policies and programs addressing GBV from appropriate vantage points are scarce (Henriksen et al. 2023).

Methodology

To answer the question "How does the Canadian NAP on GBV use an intersectional approach to frame the policy?" I draw on Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) (Hankivsky 2012) and qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Altheide and Schneider, 2013; Krippendorff 2019). Introduced in 2012, IBPA aims "to better illuminate how policy constructs individuals' and groups' relative power and privileges vis-a-vis their socio-economic-political status, health and well-being" (Hankivsky 2012, 134). The core of IBPA consists of eight guiding principles and twelve descriptive and transformative questions. The descriptive questions help to interrogate the policy issue while transformative questions help to develop approaches to tackle it. IBPA's guiding principles imply that the work will be done collectively by people who have lived experiences with the policy issue, be rooted in reflexive processes, include multi-level analysis, and acknowledge contextualized power dynamics with the ultimate goal of achieving social justice.

For my analysis, I adopted the approach to combining IBPA and QCA used by other scholars (e.g., Di Matteo 2022). I adjusted the IBPA framework to match my research question and the availability of resources. Four slightly modified questions were used to guide my analysis of the NAP (adapted from Hankivsky 2012, 39-42):

- 1) How does the NAP define intersectionality? How does the NAP use intersectionality to frame the causes of GBV and its effects on various groups? How does this framing shape the understanding of the groups' needs in the context of GBV?
- 2) How has this representation of GBV come about within the NAP? Who was involved and what type of evidence was used?
- 3) How will proposed actions address intersectional inequities?
- 4) What intersectional factors will be measured within the evaluation of the NAP and how?

Findings: the NAP's Non-Performative Intersectionality

The NAP's guiding principles assert that the policy is "grounded in an intersectional approach" (WAGE 2022b, "The high-level framework for joint action"). The words "intersectionality" and "intersectional" are sprinkled throughout the document: they appear in each section, twenty-one times in total. However, my analysis suggests that the kind of "intersectionality" used within the NAP is a hollowed-out version, depleted of its transformational potential (Bilge 2012). The NAP is premised on a flattened definition of intersectionality that does not orient the policy toward social justice. The NAP de facto homogenizes the most affected groups despite listing them separately. The monitoring and

reporting system deployed by the NAP does not have ways to integrate intersectionality-informed methods of data collection and analysis. The NAP demonstrates “non-performativity” (Ahmed 2006; 2018) in how it addresses systemic barriers and in how it commits to engaging people with lived experiences. Ahmed (2016) suggests that non-performative speech acts “‘work’ precisely by not bringing about the effects that they name” (Ahmed 2016, 105). Scholars argue that this failure is not a result of a mistake or a circumstance. “The failure is the function” (Jackson 2018, 47) in the sense that non-performatives are used to replace the action. The NAP’s non-performative intersectional language results in evading further intersectional analysis and response.

Diluted Definition of Intersectionality

The first set of questions that guided my content analysis was: “How does the NAP define intersectionality? How does the NAP use intersectionality to frame the causes of GBV and its effects on various groups? How does this framing shape the understanding of the groups’ needs in the context of GBV?”

The Glossary provided in the Annex of the NAP contains the following definition of intersectionality:

Approach to analyzing social relations and structures in a given society developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectional approaches recognize that every person’s identity is made up of multiple identity categories such as (but not limited to) ability, attraction, body size, citizenship, class, creed, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion. The ways a person may experience systemic privilege and oppression are affected by the intersection of these identity categories, depending on how they are valued by social institutions. (WAGE 2022b, “Annex C - Glossary”)

This definition frames intersectionality as an individual intellectual contribution rather than an outcome of the collective political struggles of historically marginalized communities. It wrests intersectionality away from Black feminist thought and detaches Crenshaw from the cohort of anti-racist and anti-colonial intellectuals/activists. The framing of intersectionality, organized around individual identity categories, is narrow and misleading as it obscures the roles of systemic forces. The language used to describe the relationships among multiple categories—“made up of”—does not strongly caution against the additive approach and treating identity categories as mutually exclusive (Bowleg 2008). For example, Bowleg underscores that personal identities are not made up of independent characteristics, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation but constitute each other and, if taken apart, they can’t fully explain unequal outcomes faced by individuals (Bowleg 2008, 2012).

There is another explanation of the intersectional approach within the NAP that gives slightly more attention to systemic factors and context:

...an intersectional lens, which recognizes that people often experience multiple oppressions due to the combined effects of systemic discrimination (e.g., ableism, classism, colonialism, a collective history of trauma, poverty, racism, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression). Intersectionality takes into account historical, social, and political contexts and centres the unique experiences of the individual and/or group in relation to their identity factors. (WAGE 2022b)

However, this explanation neglects the role of existing institutions, policies, and administrative decisions in (re)producing social inequalities. The document lists the “-isms” without discussing how they work together to position specific groups as more vulnerable to GBV. As a result, the dominant underlying assumptions about GBV remain unchallenged (e.g., that GBV is an individual-level problem) and may be reproduced. Sirma Bilge pointed out that framing social life as interactions of individuals, not a collective, can “create the conditions allowing the founding conceptions of intersectionality - as an analytical lens and political tool for fostering a radical social justice agenda - to become diluted, disciplined, and disarticulated” (Bilge 2012, 407). Despite talking about systemic discrimination, the NAP is premised on a disarticulated intersectionality.

GBV affects various groups differently. An intersectional understanding of variations and similarities among the most impacted communities is crucial for formulating effective policy responses. The NAP uses the concept of intersec-

tionality to name the most affected groups, it acknowledges that GBV is rooted in gender inequality amplified by other systemic factors (WAGE 2022b, “Introduction”), but it does not substantiate this statement with an analysis of intersecting power structures that create unique experiences with GBV for each of the listed groups. This results in de-facto homogenization of the groups and their needs. For example, the document states: “Certain populations that are at risk of GBV or underserved when they experience these forms of violence include Indigenous women and girls; Black and racialized women; immigrant and refugee women; Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQI+) people; people with disabilities, and women living in Northern, rural, and remote communities” (WAGE 2022b, “Introduction”).

In this and similar passages, all groups are lumped together without a discussion of how different “-isms” co-produce specific inequalities for various groups work in their specific situation. For example, immigrant and refugee women are included in the list, but nowhere in the document can we find discussion of how the intersection of precarious legal status produced by migration policies with gendered racializations makes some women more vulnerable to GBV. Moreover, “migrant and refugee women” are further homogenized as the NAP does not acknowledge diversities within and between these two groups. The policy does not take into account the ways that sub-groups even within a seemingly coherent “refugee” category are differently affected by the “welfare models and societal discourses related to migrant deservingness” (Di Matteo 2022, 70).

One of the NAP’s recommendations is to “improve programs, services, and supports that impact people experiencing GBV so they may better address the intersectional needs of diverse communities and populations” (WAGE 2022b, “Pillar One”). This recommendation is non-performative as it is not linked to a robust background analysis; it also does not specify which programs, services, and supports impact which groups and in which ways. Nor does it address what needs to be changed. The recommendation is too abstract to guide an intersectional response. Without concrete and targeted actions to address intersectional realities, the NAP’s solutions are likely to benefit those who are already relatively privileged and further marginalize those who are disadvantaged.

Engaging People with Lived Experiences of Intersectional Oppressions

My second set of questions was: “How has this representation of GBV come about within the NAP? Who was involved and what type of evidence was used?” Hankivsky (2012, 37) points out the critical need to engage with people who are typically excluded from policy formulation. Unfortunately, the NAP contains only a vague description of how diverse knowledges were taken into account while developing the policy.

The official Backgrounder for the NAP states that it “has been informed by over 1000 recommendations through years of engagement with Indigenous partners and a wide range of stakeholders, including victims/survivors, front-line service providers, community leaders, experts, academics and civil society” (WAGE 2022a). The text of the NAP echoes this statement (WAGE 2022b, “The need for a national action plan”). At the same time, the NAP suggests that one of the barriers to applying intersectionality is the lack of data that uses an intersectional lens. If “over 1000 recommendations” provided by “a wide range of stakeholders” did not offer substantive evidence grounded in intersectionality then what was counted as evidence?

The Roadmap is one example of a comprehensive analytic document, representing a collective voice of people with lived experiences and firmly grounded in intersectionality. Even though the NAP follows the structure offered by the Roadmap, the Roadmap is not directly cited in the policy and the two documents are not linked. Given the weak intersectional paradigm of the background and introduction of the NAP, there is no evidence that the authors of the NAP have substantively engaged with “over 1000 recommendations” mentioned in the policy.

On the surface level, the NAP recognizes the importance of future engagement with key communities. It suggests that “federal, provincial, and territorial governments, Indigenous organizations, GBV direct service providers, researchers, the private sector, and victims, survivors and their families work together” to achieve the NAP’s vision. The plan notes that the GBV Secretariat at WAGE will be responsible for this coordination (WAGE 2022b, “The Found-

ation”). Complimentary strategies are promised to be developed to support federal and provincial/territorial coordination. Unfortunately, the proposed mechanism lacks clarity.

The authors of the Roadmap have been calling on the government to establish an overarching NAP supervisory body and suggest that “independent oversight gives the NAP its best chance at strategic, long-term success” (Homepage, National Action Plan). However, two years after the NAP was launched, it is still not clear if and how the overall oversight board will be created, and there are no specific recommendations about it in the policy. The “Opportunities for Action” section related to engagement mostly talks about research and knowledge mobilization. It may be expected that stronger engagement mechanisms will be developed on the provincial level, but the national policy does not contain strategies that would ensure transparency for the NAP as a whole.

Symbolic Intersectionality in Addressing Systemic Issues

The third IBPA question guiding my analysis was: “How will proposed actions address intersectional inequities?” A critical characteristic of an intersectionality-based policy is the attention to intertwined powers that produce inequities operating on structural, cultural, disciplinary, and interpersonal levels (Collins and Bilge 2020); this attention must inform and guide policy responses. The NAP acknowledges the problems resulting in inadequate responses to GBV, such as systemic racism and discrimination, but does not deal with them in any substantive way. For example, the NAP suggests that “people are often reluctant to report GBV due in part to stigma, shame, fear, and systemic issues, which may lead to a lack of confidence that the justice response will be effective” (WAGE 2022b, “The evidence”). The NAP does not specify what those systemic issues are. The document could, for example, discuss victim-blaming by the criminal justice system, retraumatization of the survivors, and low conviction rates, among other issues. In another part of the document, the NAP describes the “underlying intersectional factors” as “systemic racism, discriminatory practices and institutional deficiencies that prevent survivors from experiencing just outcomes” (WAGE 2022b, “Pillar three, footnote”). Again, the NAP does not specify what institutional deficiencies it is referring to; it also does not discuss the link between the listed factors and barriers to accessing adequate GBV services. As a result, the solutions to addressing intersectional inequalities remain vague and are unlikely to address the systemic causes of GBV and the inaccessibility of GBV services.

To answer the question of how intersectionality could be deployed more authentically, we can look at the following example from the Roadmap:

Survivors of VAW/GBV, including sexual assault, do not often avail themselves of protections provided by the law and when they do, they often report re-victimization and/or re-traumatization. Since the services that are available are usually underfunded and piecemeal (i.e., legal aid lawyers frequently have strict limits on their hours and cannot complete all aspects of a file) survivors also require continuity of support. In the criminal law context, unless victims are also the accused, they do not have their own lawyer. (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 80)

In contrast to the NAP, the Roadmap provides a sufficiently detailed contextual analysis, for example, of the “‘twin myth’ that the complainant is more likely to have consented or [is] less worthy of belief” (despite the adoption of the “rape shield” provisions in the Criminal Code in 1992) and the lack of lawyers specializing in representing survivors within the governmental system. This makes it clearer what is understood in terms of systemic barriers and allows the Roadmap to offer tangible solutions, including, for example, access to Survivor Advocates and expanded community-based wrap-around services (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 79-80). The Roadmap also advocates that the “Correctional Service Canada’s (CSC) risk assessment tools that disproportionately impact racialized, Black, and Indigenous women” should be revised using an intersectionality-based perspective (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 86). This action would contribute to addressing the problem of over-incarceration of specific groups and thus help resolve the issue of GBV under-reporting. These are a few examples from hundreds of targeted strategies laid out by the Roadmap. Unfortunately, the NAP failed to achieve the same level of specificity in addressing the root causes of problems through intersectionality-informed solutions.

It may be argued that the elaboration of concrete actions is expected to happen on the provincial level. However, certain policies are under federal jurisdiction (e.g., criminal law, divorce, employment and social development policy, labour laws, and immigration policy) and there are areas where provincial and federal policies work in tandem. This allows for the formulation of more specific recommendations while leaving room for local adjustments. On the surface, the NAP commits to intersectionality but does not make substantive attempts to provide actionable intersectionality-informed recommendations. Ahmed (2016) talks about such commitments as a way of not doing things by appearing to do them.

The NAP's Accountability: Same Methods—Different Results?

The last IBPA question used for this analysis was: “What intersectional factors will be measured within the evaluation of the NAP and how?” The NAP describes applying an intersectional approach as challenging due to the limitations of data: “It is difficult to apply an intersectional lens to existing data, as available data only highlights specific forms of GBV on individual populations such as Indigenous Peoples or people with disabilities, for example, but not the experience of Indigenous people with disabilities” (WAGE 2022b, “The Evidence”). While vaguely acknowledging the need for change, the NAP builds its monitoring and reporting system around conventional performance indicators and existing data collection mechanisms. As stated within the document, the data will be collected by Statistics Canada through the Homicide Survey, Survey of Safety on Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) and General Social Survey on Victimization (GSS). There is no recommendation for reconsidering the nature of the results-tracking system so that it is firmly grounded in an intersectional approach, when good guidance for doing so exists. For example, emergent research offers intersectionality-informed mixed-method approaches to data collection and analysis (Grace 2014). Methodological advances such as survey data harmonisation, big data, and mobilization of interdisciplinary perspectives can help apply the intersectional framework to generate insights about policymaking, impact, and effectiveness (Dubrow and Ilinca 2019). In addition, considering alternative ways of understanding what may serve as evidence can expand intersectional understanding (Hankivsky 2012).

The NAP, however, makes no attempts to embed intersectionality in the design of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. The NAP suggests that “whenever possible, data will be further disaggregated by gender identity or expression, Indigeneity, sexual orientation, age, race, status, disability, geography (provinces or territories; urban or rural/remote/Northern) and by any other available identity factor(s)” (WAGE 2022b, “Reporting and monitoring”). Data disaggregation alone may not be enough to ensure an intersectional approach to M&E. For example, there is evidence that the responses towards GBV within the Canadian healthcare system reproduce ableism and other power relations that restrict “access to care and justice for women with disabilities and those who are historically marginalized” and sustain “the conditions that create vulnerabilities to GBV for these groups” (Grand'Maison 2024, 152-153). The existing progress tracking methods might, for example, show whether or not service utilization and satisfaction have changed, but they cannot assess whether or not the power relations have changed.

Without deploying a truly intersectional M&E framework it will be impossible to assess if the NAP is making a difference in transforming such structural issues as the healthcare system's ableism. One set of recommendations within the NAP pertains to “design, development and implementation of holistic performance measurement frameworks that are by, for, and accountable to Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, no matter where they live” (WAGE 2022b, “Reporting and monitoring”). This important aspiration should be extended to other marginalized communities.

Discussion and Conclusion

While intersectionality became “the gold standard of feminist work” (Nash 2019, 43), it can be used in ways that neutralize its transformative potential (Bilge 2012). My analysis suggests that even though the Canadian NAP rhetorically values this analytical framework, it engages in “the symbolic performance of intersectionality” (Mirza 2022, 196). The policy is premised on a deflated definition of intersectionality preoccupied with identities more than with the intersections of systemic inequalities. Within the document, there is no sound analysis of how intersecting social

structures create different types of vulnerabilities for the groups experiencing the highest rates of GBV and how existing policies and practices recreate and sustain barriers to addressing the needs of these groups. The in-depth intersectional analysis provided by the Roadmap—a guiding document produced by the leading Canadian front-line organizations addressing GBV—is ignored. The NAP follows the structure of the Roadmap but it does not have the same level of nuanced background analysis and recommendations. Without contextualization within the lived realities, the NAP’s recommendations remain too vague to produce tangible results. There is no evidence of meaningful engagement with the most affected groups. The text of the NAP implies that detailed strategies and actions are to be elaborated on the provincial level. However, the national policy provides a weak example of embedding intersectionality for the provincial-level plans. Since the NAP’s M&E does not integrate an intersectional lens, there are no accountability mechanisms to ensure that an intersectional approach to policy is used on the provincial level.

The NAP’s use of intersectionality is non-performative: the document labels solutions as intersectional to mask an absence of real action. By communicating the value of intersectionality, the NAP presents itself as an intersectionality-based policy despite the lack of mechanisms to operationalize intersectionality and be accountable for it. Rezai-Rashti et al. (2021, 9) discuss institutional commitments to diversity and inclusion suggesting that “having a good policy ultimately shields and protects the institution from having to effectively perform the policy”; similarly, declaring a commitment to intersectionality within the NAP allows it to bypass deploying transformative solutions.

Scholars have demonstrated that there is resistance at the governmental level to applying intersectionality within policymaking, especially within enforceable initiatives (Manning and Levac 2022). Intersectionality as a knowledge project operates within the same socio-cultural and political context that it strives to transform (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013), thus it is susceptible to de-politicization, co-opting, and misuse. In my analysis of the use of intersectionality within the Canadian NAP on GBV, I demonstrate how such a de-orientation of the concept happens within this policy document. Ahmed (2016, 2) argues that non-performativity reveals institutional mechanics of “how things are reproduced by the very appearance of being transformed.” The NAP contains the risk of further disadvantaging people with multiple intersecting identities in the context of GBV and reinforcing the systemic powers that work collectively to marginalise them. Through non-performative use of intersectionality, the plan re-institutionalizes attention to already relatively privileged groups, while the needs of most vulnerable groups continue to be neglected. The non-performative deployment of an intersectional approach within the NAP leaves little hope that the vision of Canada free from VAW and GBV will come true in the near future.

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Ejaculate Responsibly: A Whole New Way to Think about Abortion

by Jodi VanderHeide

Book reviewed: Blair, Gabrielle. 2022. *Ejaculate Responsibly: A Whole New Way to Think about Abortion*. Workman Publishing Company

Reviewer: Jodi VanderHeide is the Manager of the Sex Education Resource Centre at the Dalhousie Student Union, where she has the privilege of working with students on important issues relating to sex, sexuality, and gender. She has a BA in Social Work (UNBC) and an MA in Women and Gender Studies (St. Mary's University). She will continue her studies in the fall of 2025 at Dalhousie University, in Sociology (PhD), where she will further her research on the intersection of sexuality, religion, and community belonging.

In 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned the hard-won battles of *Roe v. Wade*, leading to the restriction of abortion and access to reproductive contraception in many of the states. As a researcher interested in the intersections of sexuality, politics, and religion, I felt drawn to read *Ejaculate Responsibly: A Whole New Way to Think about Abortion* by Gabrielle Blair who, in the introduction to her book states, “I’m a religious mother of six” followed by “the most important essay I have ever written, an essay about abortion” (1) (referencing her earlier work “Men Cause 100% of Unwanted Pregnancies, 2018”). This statement immediately piqued my interest, as there is a liminal space in which feminist or progressive viewpoints and religious identities co-exist publicly. Throughout the book, Blair navigates her positionality, and I appreciated the nuanced tone in which she confronted conservative rhetoric rather than bypassing these beliefs altogether. Despite her biting satirical narrative, in which it sounds as if she is poking fun at the simple anatomical process of unwanted pregnancies, Blair spends time addressing the foundational arguments of those who want to restrict abortion and the “fundamental mistake” (2) they are making in their efforts (hint, it has to do with men!). The premise of the book, as stated in the title, is that unwanted pregnancies are the result of [male] ejaculation. To expand upon this argument, Blair organizes the book’s chapters into 28 succinct and numbered arguments, directing the audience to the unacknowledged yet tenable facts of reproductive health (e.g., “men are 50 times more fertile than women”, 6), thereby dispelling the myths that position women as intuitively responsible for fertility and issuing a call for crucial refocus: it’s the men (1).

To contextualize the tensions related to reproductive health and abortion in the United States, Blair contends that the “for-or-against” abortion debate is ineffective. I paused here. While I understand her intention in bypassing the debate and moving straight into her synopsis of the issue as a means to engage a wider audience without presenting a particular socio-political stance, this bypass could be perceived as a dismissal of past (and present) reproductive rights efforts, which were/are immensely political and publicly debated. Nevertheless, Blair’s overall argument is logical: simply put, abortion is not a women’s issue but, rather, inherently a men’s issue as males, on average, are significantly more fertile. Flipping the narrative to place responsibility on male fertility would drastically shift the “abortion debate” by decentralizing women as the primary character in unwanted pregnancies. Let us pause again here. Blair has laid out an almost obvious argument but in doing so has completely under-minded the patriarchal power entrenched in western society and a government that actively works to displace male responsibility and forefront women as being reproductively responsible. The hyperbolic image of the fertile woman flows right into the narrative of the nurturing mother, who is expected to breastfeed, be a stay-at-home mom, and be responsible for “family life.”

Granted, Blair's commentary about the tragicomic nature of the female contraception industry, in comparison to the marginal attention focused on male fertility, paints an unspoken picture of patriarchal pursuits. She taps into her comedic voice to denote the unjust burden on women to access contraception, from attending doctor's appointments and filling prescriptions (with or without insurance) to adjusting to the potential side effects. The book is clear about the various barriers to procuring and taking birth control in the United States, barriers that do not account for the multiple intersecting layers that might affect a woman's access to reproductive health. In the same vein as the author's note on language at the beginning of the book, in which she acknowledges the exclusive cis-gendered, heterosexual focus of the manuscript, it is also critical to recognize the many variables entwined in reproductive health that impact women in various ways. For example, experiences of reproductive health care for women of colour can be profoundly impacted by systemic racism embedded in the health and scientific community.

Ejaculate Responsibly is full of interesting facts, with informative, concise, and easy-to-read arguments that confront the deficits of positioning reproductive responsibility as a women's issue. Blair provides a note at the end of the book stating, "This book was thoroughly and deeply fact-checked, and the end notes for this little volume are almost as long as the book itself" (129) and proceeds to provide a link to a 105-page citation guide—I checked! Each of the arguments is listed followed by multiple sources, ranging from peer-reviewed journals to medial based web sources. Despite the many reputable cited sources, it is unclear how many reliable deductions Blair made from the various data sources, noting she is not a trained medical professional.

As a feminist reader, my opinion fluctuated between whether Blair was strategically comedic about calling out a rampant toxic masculinity that evades reproductive responsibility or if there was an unnamed passivity that was reluctant to confront the ongoing harm of reproductive injustices. However, in the end, I felt Blair succeeded in presenting a comprehensive overview of the realities of sex and reproduction with candour. She does not shy away from addressing more personal reproductive issues, such as the notion of reduced sexual satisfaction with condom use or diminished masculinity in the aftermath of a vasectomy. Furthermore, in Argument No. 17, Blair states that "the uneven power dynamic between men and women is real and can turn violent quickly" (81). While the majority of the book is focused on stating facts with surface level remarks on sexism, here Blair takes the opportunity to address the patriarchal violence ingrained in American society and, in her satirical style, presents a "pop quiz" (referenced 82–84) for men with questions aimed at confronting the power dynamics inherent in many [hetero]sexual relations, thereby grounding Blair's overall argument in the realities of sexual violence for many women.

In conclusion, if you are looking for a book that delves into a socio-political analysis of reproductive rights, Blair's book may not be for you. As noted earlier, Blair's introductory statements, as well as her concluding chapter, address those advocating for abortion restrictions, stating, "If you want to reduce the number of abortions in your country..." (118). From this perspective, her approach seems strategic; she highlights statistics and bare facts and avoids delving too deeply into the religious, political, and patriarchal powers that enable the continued injustices shaping female sexual reproductive health. In summary, *Ejaculate Responsibly* is a condensed handbook that highlights critical reproductive injustices with an amusing dose of sarcasm. I would heartily recommend it to those looking for a succinct and informative read, especially the [hetero] men needing further education about their reproductive responsibilities.

AMI Working Papers

The following group of articles, “AMI Working Papers,” is a new, annual section that presents innovative essays, interviews, and creative writing from speakers hosted by the Alexa McDonough Institute for Women, Gender and Social Justice at MSVU throughout the current or previous year.

This year’s selection features two keynote addresses from the Women and Gender Studies Graduate Student Conference for International Women’s Day: MSVU’s Nancy’s Chair in Women’s Studies, Dr. Mary Rita Holland and the AMI Fellow (2024-2025) Adebola Osegboun, an MSVU graduate student in Women and Gender Studies.

Next is an interview with pioneering feminist activist, Julie Glaser who spoke to Sam le Nobel, the AMI’s Program and Planning Assistant as well as the President & Co-Founder, Women’s Studies Society at MSVU). Julie participated in a panel discussion called A Herstory of Consent Activism Across University Campuses that showcased the book *This Wasn’t on the Syllabus*, edited by Emma Kuzmyk and Addy Strickland.

Last, our inclusion of poetry celebrates the winners of the AMI’s International Day of the Girl Child: Girls’ Vision for the Future poetry contest: Mariana Caloca & Sam Sinclair (1st place), Jyotsana Balasubramaniyam (2nd place), Catherine Khaperska (3rd place). These original and thought-provoking pieces were also read at the AMI’s Girls Conference: Better Together.

Family Caregiving as Health Work: A Critical Perspective on the Value of Supporting a Loved One Aging at Home

by Mary Rita Holland

Abstract: This paper uses the example of family caregivers in Atlantic Canada to shed light on the invisible emotional labour—or health work—required to maintain the home as a site of care and manage disrupted meanings of home space and family relationships. It provides an overview of feminist political economics perspective to illustrate the history of women's exploitation, the extent of their invisible health work, and the impact of private home care and aging-in-place policies on their experiences of home. A critical perspective on gendered, familial care providers and their relationship to the care environment contributes to knowledge of the impact of imposing long-term care policy on domestic relationships and places.

Keywords: Canada; family caregiving; feminist political economy; home care

Résumé : Cet article s'appuie sur l'exemple des aidants familiaux dans les provinces de l'Atlantique canadien pour illustrer le travail émotionnel invisible – ou travail en santé – qu'implique le maintien du domicile comme lieu de soins et la gestion des bouleversements liés à l'espace domestique et aux relations familiales. Il offre un aperçu du point de vue féministe à l'égard de l'économie politique pour montrer l'exploitation historique des femmes, l'ampleur de leur travail invisible en santé, ainsi que les répercussions des soins à domicile privés et des politiques de vieillissement à domicile par rapport à leur expérience du foyer. Pour comprendre les conséquences de l'imposition d'une politique de soins de longue durée sur les relations et les milieux familiaux, il faut poser un regard critique sur les aidants familiaux selon leur genre et sur leur rapport à l'environnement de soin.

Mots clés : aidant familial; économie politique féministe; soins à domicile; Canada

Author: Mary Rita Holland is the current Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University. She holds a PhD from Queen's School of Kinesiology and Health Studies with a focus on health policy, a Master of Public Administration degree in social policy (Queen's), a Master of Arts degree in History (Queen's), and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History (University of New Brunswick). Dr. Holland's teaching interests include health equity, formal and informal caregiving, women and politics, social movements, and qualitative research methods. Her current research uses the example of family caregivers of rural older adults in Atlantic Canada to shed light on the invisible emotional labour required to maintain the home as a site of care and manage disrupted meanings of home space and family relationships. Her work has been published in the international journals *Health & Place* and the *Journal of Rural Studies*. She is also a Research Associate at the Trent Centre for Aging and Society.

Introduction

When health problems are chronic due to age or disability, family caregivers must take on the long-term work of supporting a loved one at home. Family members who find themselves caring for a loved one either at close proximity or from a distance over the long-term are an integral part of the health care system yet, because their efforts are based on

the private realm of the home, their contributions remain largely invisible and undervalued.

In 2019, I began an inquiry into the question: What do family caregivers do to maintain the home as a site of care and how are they supported? The project took place in rural New Brunswick and consisted of interviews with family caregivers and frontline health and social services staff. Participants spoke of the interior and exterior work involved in maintaining the home as a site of care. While housekeeping, administrative tasks, and property maintenance are not factored into home care policy, participants portrayed this work as “critical to care,” similar to findings of feminist political economists who study care in institutional settings (Armstrong, Armstrong, Scott-Dixon 2008).

The research used the example of family caregivers of rural older adults in New Brunswick to shed light on the invisible health work required to maintain the home as a site of care and manage disrupted meanings of home space and family relationships. Findings suggest that structural forces like government policies and income inequality create and perpetuate new forms of health work for family caregivers.

While presenting findings from the research, I encountered the perspective of people who supported family members living with chronic illness or disability living at a distance. It was clear that while the health work they engaged in looked different from that of family caregivers living in the home or nearby, those caring at a distance also played a significant role in the form of home care “without walls.” A critical perspective on gendered, familial care providers and their relationship to the care environment is necessary to understand the impact of imposing long-term care policy on domestic relationships and places.

Positioning Myself in the Research

My interest in the contributions of family caregivers began when I noticed contradictions inherent in the cancellation of the Primary Informal Caregiver Benefit (PICB) program in New Brunswick. In 2018, Premier Gallant’s government introduced a monthly, non-taxable benefit of \$106.25 to eligible informal caregivers, the PICB. The stated purpose of the benefit was twofold, first to “recognize the vital role informal caregivers play in supporting and assisting seniors and adults with a disability to remain safely in their own homes” and second “to help offset some of the costs associated with caregiving” (Government of New Brunswick 2017). The discourse suggested that the government recognized the contributions of family caregivers and the “home” as part of the health care system. Less than a year after the PICB was introduced, the newly-elected Progressive Conservative government of Premier Blaine Higgs cancelled the program, arguing that it had not proven effective as only half of those eligible had applied for the benefit (CBC News, April 5, 2019).

I have a personal connection to the research because my mother cared for my father full-time during this period. My mother experienced the cancellation of PICB as a personal insult and disregard for her work, caring for my father at home and “keeping him out of a nursing home.” The decision to direct funds to increase the pay of home care workers did not address my mother’s needs as my father did not qualify for subsidized home care hours. I endeavoured to learn more about the impact of the policy and the lives of people caring for loved ones at home in response to lingering questions over how government policy for informal care did not reflect my mother’s needs and experience.

Care is Health Work, not Housework

“Caring” is broadly defined as “the mental, emotional, and physical effort involved in responding to and supporting others” (Evans and Neysmith 1998, 11). A number of scholars have explored the negative economic and health impacts on family caregivers (Duxbury, Higgins, Schroeder 2009; Duxbury and Higgins 2017; Turcotte 2013). The research question “what do family caregivers do to maintain the home as a site of care” developed in response to the work of Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon (2008) who have shed light on ancillary health care work in long-term care. They found that by privatizing aspects of care like laundry and meal service, governments re-categorized this work as ancillary, or “outside of care.” Doing so meant they could cut costs by offering contracts for housekeep

ing and food service to the lowest bidder. The deleterious effects on care—standardization of personal care and poor quality food, to name a few—are compounded by the poor working conditions of non-unionized, low-waged contract employees. High turnover in the ancillary care work sector has become the norm as precariously employed laundry and food service workers may opt for hotel or restaurant work with better pay. Armstrong, Armstrong and Scott-Dixon (2008) argue that the work involved in feeding and clothing residents in long-term care facilities is fundamental to care, should be compensated accordingly and, most importantly, should be categorized as skilled care work to ensure its social value is upheld.

Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon’s theoretical contribution to research on long-term care can easily be extended to home care, particularly in areas where there is a private provision like New Brunswick. Subsidized home care supports are available for some forms of ancillary care work but homemakers, or home support workers, are employed by private, for-profit-agencies and are poorly trained and low paid. Government policy states that homemaker support is meant to supplement the work of family members and restrict homemaker activities through guidelines and strict, means-tested eligibility criteria. Therefore, I argue that family caregivers have become an essential workforce, providing laundry and meals similar to the ancillary workforce in the long-term care setting.

No matter where it is provided or by whom, care is work. According to Armstrong and Day, “unlike many other forms of labour, the timing and duration of care needs are often unpredictable and vary significantly over time of day and of life” (Armstrong and Day 2017, 10). Care involves two people and is therefore relational work; “doing the work well requires conditions that make relationships possible” (Armstrong and Day 2017, 11). In other words, policymakers must go beyond the atomized version of caregivers and task-oriented, for-profit model of service delivery to prioritize fundamental aspects of care.

Feminist Political Economy

Debates over women’s activities in relation to space are the hallmark of feminist scholarship. Feminist political economists move beyond discussions of “public” and “private” spheres to categorize women’s unpaid labour in relation to the institutions and social structures that shape their experiences. A comprehensive feminist political economics perspective can help to illustrate the history of women’s exploitation, the extent of their invisible care work, and the impact of private home care and aging-in-place policies on their experiences of home. While not all research participants in the study discussed here were women, the scholarly field of caregiving and the social organization of the home are gendered, thus feminist political economy is a good theoretical fit for the research.

While gendered expectations of women as caregivers constitute long-standing social norms, the relationship between unpaid care and the state has evolved over the past century in Canada. The post-war period of capitalism in Canada was based on a model of social reproduction; this period marked the institutionalization of unpaid care within the welfare state. Feminist political economists have fought against this gender bias in policy for years yet it has proven enduring. Their proposals have varied. Some argue unpaid labour should be commodified as a means of creating market value and material benefit. Others argue against market-oriented solutions in favour of social programs to de-commodify care.

Prior to determining in which direction policy should proceed, it is vital to conceptualize care in relation to where it is performed. Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon (2008) provide a framework that helps with commodifying family caregiving by demonstrating that care is more than units/tasks and medical services but skilled work requiring compassion and human interaction. This view of care necessitates a broader understanding of context, skills, and relationships with space (e.g., the home) than what currently exists in policy. Family caregivers want to be visible; this requires some way of reversing institutionalized invisibility of their work.

The Value of Care Work

Feminist political economists understand care as work and argue that there is a need to make it visible for the purpose of drawing attention to its value. Marilyn Waring (1988, 1999) challenges the assumptions of neo-classical economics in her critique of the general accounting of paid versus unpaid work in the global economy. Waring argues in favour of commodifying, or assigning a monetary value to, women's activities in the home in order to make their work visible. Work happens regardless of whether it is paid and must therefore be understood from beyond narrow economic constructs, otherwise, as Waring points out "my grandmother did not work, and those mothers I see with their infants are not working" (Waring 1988, 21). Donath (2000) and Folbre (2001) argue the best solution is to categorize care work according to what its substitutes would cost in the marketplace. Waring (1999), Braedley (2010), and Luxton (2010) call for assigning monetary value to care work in The National System of Accounts which measures global economic activity. Such commodification strategies dedicated to solving the practical problem of how best to measure the value of unpaid care are helpful in framing family caregiving as a form of unpaid labour.

The practice of valuing work according to where it is performed is institutionalized through labour categorization codes like the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and National Occupation Classification (NOC). Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon point out that the codes measure and categorize work based on the activity type (NAICS) and employer (NOC) rather than the location meaning that, for example, laundry services, housekeeping, or food preparation are grouped according to activity (i.e. housekeeping or food service) and whether an individual worker is employed in a hotel or a hospital (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon 2008, 16). As a result, nearly half of health care workers in hospital and long-term care settings are not classified as such. Breaking up care into units of activity gives the impression that it consists of a series of low-skill tasks. The associated low rates of pay have brought less care and poorer health outcomes, particularly for older adults and persons living with a disability care (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon 2008, 9). These same researchers further argue that activities categorized as "ancillary" in hospitals and long-term care—those that are classified as "out of care" and often contracted out to the private sector—require skill and are every bit as "critical to care" as the work of physicians and nurses.

The unpaid domestic work involved in maintaining and supporting the household's inhabitants is referred to as "social reproduction." Bezanson describes the concept as a set of processes involved in "providing for social, emotional and physical needs and efforts to secure an income" (Bezanson 2006, 26). Women in Canada have been involved in social reproduction since Confederation, yet the development of the welfare state has reinforced rather than mitigated the effects of women's unequal burden of care.

Scholars continue to draw attention to our lack of understanding of the price women pay in terms of time and energy devoted to social reproduction. Whether for no pay in the home or low pay in the market, women have buttressed the family, market, and society against the exploitation of labour. Luxton expands the definition of social reproduction to include "the complementary work (also often done by women for pay) provided by state services such as education and health care or in the market" (Luxton 2010, 36). By combining the paid and unpaid activities of women's caring, Luxton enhances our understanding of women's roles in social provisioning, and points out that state support for caring through investments in public services is one way to lessen the burden. Yet, as we can see with the Canadian example, the policy direction is toward greater individualization and privatization of social reproduction as governments reduce investment in care in the name of fiscal responsibility (Bezanson 2006, 11).

Unpaid caregiving is increasing in Canada while the concept of gender is disappearing from government policy (Morris et al. 2017). Policymakers have re-framed care as a “family” concern, and, as Braedley points out, promote their “presumption that households and communities should and will actively provide services formerly offered by the state or third sector organizations” (Braedley 2010, 216). Low-income women who are informal caregivers have fewer options for supports and services. As Braedley (2010) argues, women are less likely to have employee benefits that would support their care activities and are less likely to have the financial resources available to contract out their domestic work (e.g., cleaning services). Moreover, low-income women are more likely to receive some form of government assistance and be subjected to surveillance by the state because of their circumstances (Braedley 2010, 225).

Debates on the Commodification of Care

Key to understanding the ways in which women have been systemically disenfranchised through assumptions about their willingness to provide care is the fact that it is not the burden of labour in the physical sense but the social relations involved that perpetuate women’s subordination to capitalism (Luxton 2010, 34). Donath (2000) argues that it is possible to characterize the economy as a masculine entity and calls for a separate, or “other economy” to draw attention to women’s experiences. While Donath’s argument is clearly based on a concern for gender parity, it is also a call to improve the study of economics which has hitherto focused on an incomplete model of the economy. She argues that “in order to be able to investigate empirically the relationship between the other economy and the market economy, it is vital that feminist economists devise ways of measuring the other economy” (Donath 2000, 121).

Nancy Folbre is similarly dedicated to solving the practical problem of how best to measure the value of unpaid care. She argues that the most straightforward approach is to look at the cost of substitutes, like purchasing home care outside the home. While she admits that “purchased services are only partial substitutes for personal services from a family member or friend ... the cost of purchased substitutes provides at least a lower-bound estimate of the value of socially important activities” (Folbre 2001, 66). Folbre acknowledges that the first step toward computing such information is to develop instruments other than opportunity cost to account for the time and energy women devote to caring for others. While Donath (2000) focuses on the broader issue of including women’s economic experiences, Folbre (2001) seeks to incorporate mechanisms from the market economy to explain women’s caregiving in terms of its market value. Folbre argues for greater integration of women in the market economy through “valuing” unpaid work while Donath argues that integration is not only impossible but undesirable.

A combined approach—one that simultaneously compensates care work in market terms and includes state support for an “other economy”—would balance out the hitherto unequal roles for the market and state, vis-à-vis care work. The starting point for such a shift is to assign care work a value in the National System of Accounts (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 14). My research will contribute to the broader goal of accounting for unpaid care by gaining insights from family caregivers on the kinds of activities involved in maintaining the home as a health care setting and the costs associated with such work when outside help is necessary. By making the full extent of family caregiver work visible, it is possible to bring the social structures that systematically oppress women into focus for the purpose of reform.

Neoliberalism and Familialization of Long-term Care

In the present Canadian policymaking context, neoliberalism prevails in public discourse and social-political organization. Politicians argue that public spending must be curtailed and offer the competitive market as the means to lower taxation levels while maintaining services. Moreover, the virtues of capitalism are promoted; competition is depicted as “natural” and ideally suited to maximize social good (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 8). Thus, the state receives its mandate not from citizens but from the market. Rather than the state staying out of the economy, “neoliberalism activates the state on behalf of the economy, not to undertake economic functions or to intervene in economic effects, but rather to facilitate economic competition and growth, and to economize the social (Brown 2015, 62).

The rationalization for inequality in the neoliberal era is expressed through “the assumption that what we get is what we deserve as a result of our efforts” (Armstrong and Armstrong 2010, 187). The neoliberal trend toward relying on families to provide social welfare, families who obtain financial means through the market, has consistently dominated Canada’s policies vis-à-vis women’s care work. The effect is the suppression of social citizenship rights for women in the name of individual responsibility. As Brodie and Bakker argue, “the language of choice elevates the goal of individual liberty—the right to choose—over all other goals, including gender equality” (Brodie and Bakker 2008, 34). State provision of social welfare has become less popular over time, based on what Armstrong and Armstrong (2010, 187) refer to as “privatization of responsibility.” In the citizen-as-consumer society, individual choice is considered not only a right but an imperative.

Welfare state scholars have fought tirelessly against downsizing government and against placing the onus on vulnerable populations to improve their circumstances. In more recent years, scholars have pointed out health impacts of social policies based on an individualized model of citizenship. As Polzer and Power argue, the technique of encouraging citizen-consumers “to maintain their health through their own ‘free choices’ and informed decisions” not only commodifies health but increases demand for health-related products as individuals must seek their own, market-based solutions for poor health and disease (Polzer and Power 2009, 4). The neoliberal backdrop of privatizing government functions has led health departments and hospitals to subcontract care services from agencies that operate like private businesses (Ferguson 2009, 168). Faced with declining levels of government funding, formerly publicly funded services in hospitals, like laundry and food preparation, have become privatized. Such a change is based on the thinking that care activities can be separated into those requiring trained health professionals and those who are low-skilled and whose work resembles services available in hotel and hospitality sectors.

Neoliberal approaches in the health sector—individualization and privatization—are inconsistent with the goals and nature of caregiving. Breaking up care into assembly-line units of activity has brought less care and poorer health outcomes, particularly for elderly and disabled individuals who rely on access to home care (Armstrong, Armstrong, Scott-Dixon 2008, 8). The current discourse around aging populations and the sustainability of public health care in Canada has supported the current model, one that is based on business practices in the name of efficiency. Yet, health care is “a relationship between health care workers and those with health care needs that cannot easily be reduced to a series of unspecified tasks and allotted to narrow time frames” (Armstrong, Armstrong, Scott-Dixon 2008, 8). By categorizing the work of caregivers as similar to the activities that take place in the home, governments have effectively found a way to keep pace with the neoliberal project of reducing the role of the state.

While scholars have acknowledged the increased burden on family members that accompanies private delivery of home care (Skinner and Rosenberg 2006; England 2010), the fact that their efforts are categorized in the same way as ancillary health work in an institutional setting suggests limited understanding of the way their work is socially organized. Invisibilizing the labour and costs of home care are hallmarks of a liberal welfare state.

Care at Home is Health Work, not Housework

The distinction between “health care” and “ancillary health work” articulated by Armstrong, Armstrong and Scott-Dixon (2008) illustrates the creep of privatization in health and long-term care at an institutional level. Mykhalovskiy and McCoy’s (2002) definition of “health work” captures the invisible labour involved in managing health at an individual level. The trend toward reprivatizing care to the home through aging-in-place home care policy frames the need for long-term care as an individual and family responsibility. England (2010, 141) describes the result as “a privatised safety net” that “reveals how neoliberalism is far from self-sufficient, and depends on cultural assumptions about home and the hard work of women in the private sphere.” Combining the critiques of feminist political economists on privatization in health care with critical geography of home provides a means of making visible not just the extent of “health work” involved in a rural setting but the gendered, neoliberal context that makes it so.

As illustrated in the rural findings from New Brunswick presented above, qualitative research with family caregivers and frontline staff demonstrates the complex nature of health work involved in care for older adults aging at home in an era of familialization. Family caregivers—particularly those who live-in—are tasked with navigating the material conditions of the home as well as its meaning, trying to preserve family relationships and traditions while operating within the constraints of everyday life. Such constraints are particularly challenging for family caregivers who are women and/or living on low income for whom the home can seem like a confined space, both literally and metaphorically.

Managing the home as a site of care involves a multitude of activities and constant coordination of space and relationships. The complex health work of family caregivers must be identified and counted rather than taken for granted. Recent debates on the future of long-term care in New Brunswick, as illustrated in the policy change from investing in the PICB to private home care agencies, focus on the need for higher levels of staffing. Yet governments are

aware that well-paid, unionized, full-time home care roles demand exponentially higher operating budgets for home care that can only be achieved through tax increases. The true costs of care, in other words, are human labour. Keeping those costs inside the home through familialization of home care has created new forms of health work for family caregivers who have few community and government resources to draw on.

Prospective Research: Long-distance Caregivers in Halifax, Nova Scotia

Location is central to my research in a number of ways. A number of scholars have provided insight into the unique relationship between caregivers and their physical surroundings, or workspace. Wiles argues that the geography of caregivers can provide researchers with “a sense of the physical, material and social constraints that operate on daily life and the strategies people use to negotiate these” (Wiles 2003, 1301). What is most significant about this line of research is that it will contribute to a more comprehensive view of the costs of home care—costs that are borne by family caregivers.

Place-based responses to aging assume the availability of a) a safe home environment and b) human labour to support healthy aging in the home space. Such requirements are often met by the adult children of parents living in a city or country that is far from the care recipient. While considerable scholarly attention has been directed at caregivers and their “burden” of providing assistance to a loved one living with chronic illness or disability, less has been devoted to the forms of health work long-distance caregivers are involved in that ensures the home is maintained as a site of care. Such forms of health work go beyond administrative and emotional support and can include the maintenance of culture, family relationships, and memories—vital aspects of health that are invisible in neoliberal (e.g., Canada) and authoritarian (e.g., China) welfare states.

Long-distance caregiving to aging people has been a common phenomenon in modern society. In Canada, according to Vézina and Turcotte (2010), 22 per cent of caregivers provide help for a parent living more than an hour away. Research has documented the caregiver “burden” (Adelman et al. 2014) emphasizing the physical, emotional, and financial strains faced by those who care for relatives with chronic illnesses or disabilities (Pinquart, Sörensen, Light 2003; Sambasivam et al. 2019). A secondary data analysis by Li and Wister (2023) shows that in Canada, greater caregiving intensity leads to more restriction to social life of family caregivers, causing worse social isolation.

In order to build on research of long-distance caregiving in Canada, I have designed a qualitative study to provide a comparative analysis between Halifax residents who are Canadian citizens caring for a loved one at a distance (over 1 hour away) in Canada and residents who are Chinese immigrants/newcomers caring for a loved one in China. The purpose of the comparison is to further develop an understanding of the types of health work related to supporting a loved one at home, albeit from afar. The difference between caregiving traditions in Canada, which emphasize individual responsibility for caregiving, and that in China, where adult children caregivers hold more responsibility (Lai 2008) poses unique challenges and coping strategies for the caregivers. Compared to caregivers who are taking care of

their loved ones in Canada, Chinese-Canadian long-distance caregivers may face cultural differences and language barriers affecting long-distance caregiving, as well as societal expectations to avoid formal caregiving services, due to a strong adherence to traditional values, such as filial piety, and the pressures of immigration (Lai and Surood 2008).

Using semi-structured interviews with long-distance family caregivers residing in Halifax, Canada, while caring for a loved one in Canada or China, the prospective research project will respond to the question: What does family caring entail for long-distance family caregivers and how are they supported? The research will provide a comparative analysis of two distinct experiences of sociocultural norms, citizenship status, and caregiving responsibilities.

The objectives of the research are to: (1) Identify invisible forms of health work involved in providing care at a distance; (2) Compare/contrast the feelings of familial responsibility in China and Canada; (3) Determine how Halifax-area family caregivers can be better supported in managing their role.

As discussed above, significant rationale for the study is that earlier research on family caregivers did not lend itself to gaining an understanding of the diversity of experiences of family caregivers. Rural areas of New Brunswick in the studies discussed above were demographically homogenous, with the exception of linguistic/cultural differences between Anglophone and Francophone populations.

For the prospective study, long-distance caregiver participants will be recruited through social media posts. However, to ensure recruitment materials reach marginalized communities, outreach emails will also be sent to organizations representing specific populations, including caregiver support groups (Alzheimer's Association) and marginalized communities such as urban Indigenous people (Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre) and Black Nova Scotians (Health Association of African Canadians) and Nova Scotia Community Health. With a diverse immigrant population from within and outside of Canada, Halifax provides a unique setting to study these differences.

By analyzing the experiences of caregivers in different cultural backgrounds, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between culture, family dynamics, and caring practices. It will also build out the scope of research on the health work of family caregivers to include those providing care from afar, both in another country and across Canada. As such, it has the potential to benefit both the scholarly community and long-term care practitioners. The research also has the potential to increase knowledge of the resources used to support long-distance caregivers living in Halifax and in the area in which the study participants provide care (China and Canada).

Conclusion

At the conceptual level, there is work to be done in making visible the “invisible heart” of the care economy. Folbre argues this is possible through a commitment to measuring the value of care work and promoting our success as a society on the basis of how that number reflects “the kinds of success we care about,” including the values of caring, sharing, duty, and responsibility (Folbre 2001, 79). State support for policies that reward caregivers and, in particular, the sharing of care commitments between genders, would be a way to begin to shift the balance away from individualization and toward the state ameliorating the effects of patriarchy and capitalism on health care at home. The contributions of long-distance family caregivers in Canada remain invisible because it occurs beyond jurisdictions (municipally, provincially, and federally). Family caregivers require recognition and encouragement to mitigate distress and burnout. Whether they are providing meals, administrative support, care coordination, or home maintenance, family caregivers are “critical to care.” The needs of caregivers should be addressed regardless of where they live in relation to the care recipient due to the fact that the work they do is time-consuming, financially and emotionally burdensome, and beneficial to a health/social system elsewhere that faces reduced costs.

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Institutionalizing Women Empowerment in Nigeria: The Contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to Sustainable Development

by Adebola Esther Osegboun

Abstract: Women empowerment is an indicator of social change and an important goal in achieving sustainable development worldwide (United Nations n.d.). Historically and across nations until today, men have had greater access to power and resources and more socio-politico-economic opportunities. In Nigeria, the plights of women are becoming more appalling as men are properly positioned to benefit and advance professionally and socially. Women in Nigeria need to be empowered because their contributions to national development is far too significant to be ignored. While literature abounds on women empowerment in Nigeria, there is a dearth of research on the contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) to women empowerment. It is against this background that this article examines the contributions of the FMWASD to sustainable development in Nigeria through its various women empowerment efforts from 2011-2021. This work is expected to contribute to the efforts to raise public and government attention to the need to foster women's agency and for the government to be able to deliver on its mandate.

Keywords: women empowerment; empowerment theory; sustainable development; Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Development; Nigeria

Résumé : L'autonomisation des femmes est un indicateur de changement social et un objectif important pour atteindre le développement durable dans le monde entier (Nations unies, s. d.). De manière historique et jusqu'à aujourd'hui, dans tous les pays, les hommes ont eu un meilleur accès au pouvoir et aux ressources et ont bénéficié de davantage de possibilités socio-politico-économiques. Au Nigeria, le sort des femmes devient de plus en plus épouvantable, car les hommes sont bien placés pour en tirer profit et progresser sur le plan professionnel et social. Les femmes du Nigeria doivent être autonomisées, car leur contribution au développement national est bien trop importante pour être ignorée. La documentation sur l'autonomisation des femmes au Nigeria est abondante, mais il y a peu de recherches sur les contributions du ministère fédéral de la Condition féminine et du Développement social (FMWASD) à cette autonomisation. C'est dans ce contexte que cet article analyse comment le FMWASD a contribué au développement durable au Nigeria, par ses efforts en faveur de l'autonomisation des femmes entre 2011 et 2021. Ce travail devrait contribuer aux efforts visant à attirer l'attention du public et du gouvernement sur l'importance de renforcer l'autonomie des femmes et de permettre au gouvernement de s'acquitter de son mandat.

Mots clés : autonomisation des femmes; théorie de l'autonomisation; développement durable; ministère fédéral de la Condition féminine et du Développement; Nigeria

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Introduction

Popular thinking in Nigeria contends that women belong to the disadvantaged group in society when compared to their male counterparts, mainly because they are often not treated equally to men. Men possess a stronger ability to utilize force, exert control over resources, have less societal obligations to fulfill, and benefit from positive cultural

ideology compared to women (Huis et al. 2017). The woman is disadvantaged in many areas of life and is seen as one who should be focused on unpaid care work in the home, such as childbearing, cooking, cleaning, as well as taking care of the children, elderly, or physically challenged. According to the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development, women, globally, carry out 76% of the total amount of this work which is a key dimension of gender inequality and a major constraint to women empowerment (OECD 2019). While this is a global problem, it is particularly worrisome in developing African countries. Despite evidence that empowering women can benefit the society at large, women's empowerment particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa has been far too slow and will require concerted effort to achieve (African Union 2020).

In Nigeria, the plight of women is worsening because men are properly positioned to gain maximum benefit from social opportunities, government facilities, and infrastructure (Adeleke 2004). While Nigeria does not have an explicit policy of gender discrimination, certain detrimental traditions, customs, and beliefs regarding women impede their advancement and active involvement in national matters (Ovute, Dibia, and Obasi 2015). Women's marginalization has elicited different policy interventions at the national, regional, and global levels over the years. The United Nations General Assembly, African Union, and national governments have adopted a number of treaties, conventions, and policies aimed at promoting human rights and the advancement of women. Some of these include the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), and the African Charter's Women's Rights Protocol, National Gender Policy, and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), among others (Ntiwunka 2013). In September 2015, world leaders adopted Agenda 2030 and its new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations to replace the MDGs, which ran their course at the end of 2015. A major milestone is the inclusion of a stand-alone global goal, SDG 5, dedicated to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (Rorsche 2015).

Nigeria has ratified all the UN Conventions on women, with the aim of eliminating all types of discrimination, particularly those based on gender, as well as violence against women (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs 2006). To demonstrate its commitment towards this goal, Nigeria in 1998 designed a national policy on women to protect women against all forms of discrimination (Nwagbara and Ering 2007). In 2006, a national gender policy was made to replace the national policy on women, and, to implement these agreements and policies, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) has been charged with the overall responsibility for this goal.

Literature on women empowerment in Nigeria (Ntiwunka 2013; Lawal, Ayoade, and Taiwo 2016; Dibia, Sam-Okere, and Dibia 2018; Jooji 2021) is plentiful. However, the specific contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) to addressing issues relating to women empowerment as well as the budgetary allocation to the ministry are yet to receive adequate scholarly attention. This is a gap that my work seeks to fill. The main objective of my work is to examine the contributions of the FMWASD to sustainable development, particularly through its various empowerment projects between 2011 and 2021. In order to achieve this objective, this article is divided into seven sections. Following this introduction, the second section focuses on the paper's conceptual clarification and theoretical framework. The third section explores the socio-economic and political conditions of women in Nigeria. The fourth section presents the budgetary allocations of the FMWASD. The fifth section examines the various empowerment projects by the ministry from 2011-2021. The sixth section highlights the problems associated with women empowerment in Nigeria. The last section is the conclusion of the paper which states that, despite ongoing efforts of the FMWASD, the ministry's limited resources and poor outreach, as well as lack of political will, hinder Nigeria's progress toward gender equality and the achievement of SDG 5.

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework

Here, I explain the concepts that are central to the study: empowerment, women empowerment, and sustainable development. I also explore the theory driving this research effort, which is the empowerment theory.

Empowerment

The term empowerment has been defined and expressed in several ways by different scholars. Wallerstein (1992) explained empowerment as a process in which people acquire social, economic, and political power to liberate themselves from injustices in society. Empowerment refers to the process of granting individuals or groups the ability to effectively utilize their personal or collective power, authority, and influence when interacting with others, institutions, or society as a whole (Dibie 2018). Taking a look at these explanations, one can say empowerment has to do with gaining power (in all areas), building capacities and capabilities of clearly disadvantaged people or groups to be able to do what ordinarily they could not have done of their own accord. Put differently, Gajanayake (1993) noted that empowerment involves supporting individuals to comprehend their situation's reality, analyzing the factors influencing it, and, crucially, taking action to enhance it. Similarly, Page and Czuba (1999) describe empowerment as a complex social process that enables individuals to take charge of their lives. These two positions see empowerment as a thing of the people, by the people, and for the people. That is, a person or people empowered must first be aware of their situation (consciousness), be ready to improve such situation, and must be involved in the process or policies to effect such changes. It is their lives after all.

Kapitsa (2008) states that empowerment consists of two interconnected components: resources (which can be both tangible and intangible) and agency. Tangible resources refer to assets that have a physical form and can be measured in terms of their financial or material value. Examples include money, property, and equipment. On the other hand, intangible resources are non-physical assets that cannot be easily quantified. These include knowledge, skills, abilities, and involvement in political and social endeavours. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to establish their own goals and objectives and successfully accomplish them. Clearly, without resources, there cannot be empowerment, and without an agency such empowerment policies and projects cannot be duly pursued and achieved. In sum, every person that has hitherto been discriminated against based on disability, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and/or economic status needs to be empowered to attain equity.

Women Empowerment

The concept of women's empowerment emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a radical approach aimed at changing power dynamics in order to promote women's rights and achieve more gender equality (Batliwala 2007). Women empowerment has become one of the central themes in global treaties, covenants, conventions, and declarations. The thinking is that it is

a catalyst to clear-cut development strategies which is targeted at poverty reduction, improved living standards, good governance and profitably productive investments that are critical to the creation of an enlarged capacity that provide men and women equal opportunity and unrestrained access to decision-making and policy implementation institutions and processes. (Mahmud 2019, 350)

Women's empowerment refers to the process by which women gain the capacity to make important life decisions in a situation where they were previously denied this capacity. It is built upon three interconnected elements: resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer 1999). According to Lasiele (1999), women empowerment refers to the provision of sufficient possibilities for women to enhance their abilities and make contributions to the development of their country and the globe. Fadeyiye and Olanega (2001) see women empowerment as the process of facilitating women to cultivate the ability to realize their full potential. Okemakinde (2014) asserts that women empowerment serves as an effective means to enhance women's competencies, their authority over resources, and their influence in making decisions that impact their lives. It entails the process of enhancing the position of women by promoting literacy, edu-

cation, training, entrepreneurship, and increasing awareness (Alvarez 2013). The primary objective of women empowerment is to achieve a balanced allocation of power between genders, ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunity for economic, social, legal, and political advancement (Sohail 2014).

Sustainable Development

The notion of sustainable development arises from an increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of global environmental challenges, socio-economic disparities related to poverty and inequality, and apprehensions over the well-being of future generations (Hopwood, Mellor, and O'Brien 2005). The concept originated from the publication of *Our Common Future* by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. This publication presents the widely referenced definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the current generations without compromising the needs of future generations" (United Nations 1987, 11). It emphasizes that sustainable development must encompass the pillars of social, environmental, and economic sustainability. Sustainable development is often considered as varied interaction between social, economic, and ecological dimensions of development (Lawal, Ayoade, and Taiwo 2016). The major goal of sustainable development is to achieve reasonable and equitably distributed economic well-being that can be perpetuated continually for many human generations. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. These goals and targets became effective on January 1, 2016, and are applicable to all countries. The text introduces two fundamental ideas: the notion of "needs," specifically the crucial needs of impoverished populations, which should be prioritized above all else; and the concept of limitations imposed by the current state of technology and social structure on the environment's capacity to fulfill both current and future needs (UN World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

Theoretical Framework

Several theories have been adopted to explain women's empowerment. However, this study adopts empowerment theory as a framework for explaining women empowerment for sustainable development in Nigeria. Empowerment theory grew out of the social and self-help movements of the 1960s and 1970s and later gained prominence around the 1980s and 1990s in the discourse of political science, social psychology, feminism, and development studies as an alternative theory of development. The proponents of this theory include Rappaport (1985), Friedman (1992), Zimmerman (1995), and Rocha (1997) among others. Empowerment theory connects individual well-being with the larger social and political empowerment and suggests that people need opportunities to become active in community decision making in order to improve their lives, organizations, and communities (Zimmerman 2000). Friedman (1992) argues that empowerment must not only lead to a clear improvement in the conditions of life and livelihood of ordinary people but must bring about the rectification of existing imbalances in social, economic, and political power.

Different levels of analysis of empowerment have been identified by proponents of this school of thought. Rocha (1997) for instance came up with five types of empowerment: political empowerment, social-political empowerment, mediated empowerment, embedded individual empowerment, atomistic individual empowerment. Rowland (1997) identified three dimensions of empowerment namely, personal empowerment, relational empowerment, and collective empowerment. Zimmerman (2000) also gave three levels of empowerment viz, individual empowerment, organizational empowerment, and community empowerment. These scholars disagree, however, on which type of empowerment should come first. While Zimmerman emphasizes the individual level, he explicitly states that this focus does not imply it is more important than the other levels. Friedman emphasizes community empowerment rather than individual empowerment. Rocha (1997) suggests movement from individual empowerment to community empowerment. Irrespective of these differences in empowerment levels, the central theme is that empowerment involves processes, and the outcome of such processes results in a level of being empowered. Empowerment is context and population specific and, as such, no single standard can fully capture empowerment for all people in all contexts (Rappaport 1985; Zimmerman 1995). This is where the strength of the theory lies as it recognizes the complex interaction

between multiple agents like poor citizens, grassroot organizations, non-governmental organizations, the state, and international agencies.

The theory has most often been applied to women and has addressed two types of needs namely, practical and strategic needs. The practical needs include food, clothing, shelter, health care, etc., while the strategic needs include structural transformation of the society to remove women from their subordinate social position. As Moser rightly argued, the empowerment policy approach seeks to reach strategic gender needs indirectly through practical gender needs (Moser 1993). The FMWASD budget from 2011-2021 has continued to cater more for the practical empowerment needs of women in Nigeria with the hope of reaching that strategic needs of women in the country.

Socio-economic and Political Conditions of Women and Girls in Nigeria

The socio-economic conditions of women and girls in Nigeria is worsened by various factors including variations in educational opportunities, child labour, disparities in employment opportunities, and unequal decision-making capacities in personal and family matters and in public affairs (World Bank 2022). Based on data extracted from the World Bank's (2022) dataset, World Development Indicators (WDI), Nigeria as of 2021 has 104,250,709 females, which constituted 49.3 per cent of the country's total population. In terms educational opportunities, compared to about 71.3 per cent for males, 52.7 of the female population age 15 and above are literate in Nigeria. Although this represents a considerable increase in the female literacy rate from 2003 (43.3 per cent), the gender-gap remains significant. In 2019, 31 per cent of young women were neither engaged in education, employment, nor training. It is important to note that the prospect of female education in Nigeria has been significantly undermined by culture and traditions, poverty, inadequate public advocacy and investment, and insecurity. Recently, targeted attacks against girls and associated education institutions have become a political agenda, campaign strategy, and economic tactic for terrorist, insurgent, and bandit groups in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country.

Child labour is another dark side of women's affairs in Nigeria, as many underage women and girls struggle to survive and/or support their families through street hawking, agricultural labour, domestic work (house helps) etc. The World Bank (2022) showed that working female children between ages seven and 14, declined from 41.1 per cent in 2007 to 18.7 per cent in 2010, and then rose to 36 per cent in 2011. More alarming, female children have been increasingly exploited in the underworld by baby factories, bandits, terrorists, insurgents, traffickers, and ritualists that have engaged many kidnapped young girls and women as sex slaves and objects of sacrifice, as well as rebel spies, domestic servants, fighters, suicide bombers, and human shields against counterinsurgency forces (Oyewole 2016).

Female unemployment in Nigeria rose from about four per cent to nine per cent in the last two decades. Accordingly, female education tends to be less appreciated in labour market, considering that 21 and 16 per cent of those with advanced and intermediate educations respectively are unemployed, while only 9 per cent of those with basic education are unemployed in 2019. Meanwhile, the percentage of firms with female participation in ownership declined from 20 to 16 between 2007 and 2014. The female share of employment as senior and middle management was about 31 per cent in 2019, while firms with female top manager were only 14 per cent in 2014 (World Bank 2022). These figures, among others, reflect the limited economic capacities of most Nigerian women, with significant implications for decision-making capabilities in personal and family affairs as well as in public spaces.

The education and economic conditions of Nigerian women and girls provide considerable indicators of the health and lifestyle of the population. Female life expectancy at birth remains low, even as it rose from 47 to 56 years between 2001 and 2020. Seventeen per cent of annual female mortality between ages 30 and 70 is caused by cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory disease in Nigeria (World Bank 2022).

The percentage of women between ages 15 and 49 that are participating in decisions regarding their own health care, major household purchases, and visiting family rose from 14 to 34 per cent between 2003 and 2018. The percentage of women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife also declined significantly from 64 to 28 between

2003 and 2018. Equally, female-headed households rose slightly from 17 per cent in 2003 to 18 per cent in 2018. Yet, women's representation in politics and public policy remain low. Between 2000 and 2021, women held only three to seven per cent of the seats in national parliaments (World Bank 2022). Similarly, women candidates ran in only about six per cent of all the governorship races across the 36 states in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019, and none won.

The above analysis reveals that, despite constituting almost half of Nigeria's population, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, underserved in education, face unequal access to employment opportunities, and are disproportionately affected by poverty and violence. Evidence shows that empowering women is one of the most effective ways to accelerate economic growth, improve social outcomes, and achieve sustainable development. It is against this background that different policy initiatives aimed toward women empowerment cannot be ignored or underestimated in Nigeria's quest for sustainable development.

Budgetary Allocation of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD)

FMWASD was created as a response to the United Nations agreement to establish institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and associated matters. The ministry started out as a National Women Commission in 1989, which was an initiative of the wife of the then Head of State, Mrs. Maryam Babangida. However, in 1995, the National Women Commission was upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which meant that the country had achieved one of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. The ministry has the mandate of advising the government on gender- and children-related issues as well as issues pertaining to persons with disabilities and the elderly (UN Women 2016). In addition, the ministry has within it an agency called the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD), which has a mandate for gender training and capacity building, research, and documentation as well as addressing other relevant concerns of Nigerian Women.

The ministry has received considerable budgetary allocation in every fiscal year to pursue its objectives. However, the question that begs for answers is whether the ministry has the prerequisite institutional identity and resource base to pursue its gender mainstreaming objectives. On the average, the FMWASD budget represents 0.07% of the national budget. This marginal allocation reflects the level of government's commitment to gender-focused programs and services in Nigeria's national development agenda. Given the ministry's role in addressing systemic gender inequities, and the fact that women make up to half of the country's population, these figures are strikingly inadequate. This budget reflects the government's tokenistic approach to addressing women's issues. Women empowerment requires adequate funding, yet the FMWASD lacks sufficient resources to lead this effort within the government. Also, the budget of the ministry has experienced notable fluctuations over the years. For instance, between 2015 and 2017, the ministry's budget saw a decline. However, in 2018, the budget allocation more than doubled, offering a significant boost to the ministry's capability for implementing programs. This progress was short-lived, as the allocation was reduced again in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, the ministry's budget saw a substantial increase, marking the highest allocation within the decade, and invariably an increase in its capital expenditure. For instance, the ministry's capital expenditure doubled in 2021. Nonetheless, these trends show the lack of substantial investment in the ministry and the critical need for consistent and predictable funding to ensure long-term impact.

Table 1: Total Budget of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2011-2021

Year	Total National Budget (₦)	Total Ministry Budget (₦)	Total Budget of the NCWD (₦)
2011	4,226,191,559,259	2,810,641,366	325,800,791
2012	4,749,100,821,170	4,184,514,997	
2013	4,987,220,425,601	4,624,437,917	834,376,390
2014	4,695,190,000,000	4,530,575,191	746,909,804
2015	4,493,363,957,158	3,093,073,863	1,121,004,836
2016	6,060,677,358,227	3,555,252,814	916,014,073
2017	7,441,175,486,758	3,629,888,264	2,087,377,937
2018	9,120,334,988,225	7,409,748,628	2,295,800,779
2019	8,916,964,099,373	5,566,696,400	2,255,515,443
2020	10,594,362,364,830	8,193,235,758	3,123,577,696
2021	13,082,420,568,233	12,919,466,492	5,627,382,287

Source: Compiled by the author with data extracted from Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill (2011-2021)

Another notable trend in this budget is the consistent drop in the ministry's allocation during election years, specifically in 2011, 2015, and 2019. Although the data in Table 1 does not include allocations for years prior to 2011, the significant declines observed in 2015 and 2019 strongly support this pattern. The implication of this is that the ministry is unable to sustain some of its major projects during election years.

The ministry is one of the least-funded ministries in the federation, partly because it is not considered on par with other departments such as the ministry of defence, ministry of police affairs, ministry of interior, ministry of health, and ministry of education, among others. The priority sectors in the national budget over the years have been defence and security, education, health, infrastructure, and social investment. While these areas are important, women are unlikely to benefit maximally from these sectors because these sectors are not subject to a gender-based analysis. In

terms of resources, it appears that the FMWASD needs to be empowered as an institution in order to deliver on its mandate. The women ministry's budget should be prioritized if the government is really serious about empowering women and attaining gender equality.

Women Empowerment Programs by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

The empowerment programs elucidated here are from the FMWASD projects as found in the Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill during the period under study. From my study, I discovered that the ministry, over the years, has had quite a number of commitments including advocacy and sensitization programmes, support for women-focused NGOs, girl-child education, economic empowerment, establishment of skill-acquisition centres, agriculture, supports for women and girls with disabilities, technology and innovation, and women's political empowerment, among others.

Economically, the ministry has implemented economic empowerment projects that either take the form of training/skill acquisition and distribution of materials/equipment to women. From 2013-2015, the ministry implemented a nationwide project to support women cooperatives under the initiative called the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) and a women small- medium-scale entrepreneurs support programme under the Business Development Fund for Women (BuDFoW). Also, in 2017, empowerment materials/equipment were provided for women and youth in 23 states of the federation. This project was continued in 2018 and 2019 with 26 and 10 states respectively as beneficiaries. Another major empowerment project by the ministry was the cooking gas projects advocacy and community mobilization of women in the 774 local government areas in Nigeria in 2020 and 2021. Through this cooking gas project, 331,000 cylinders with burners (6kg) were procured in 2021 for distribution to women in 15 states of the federation. There were also some empowerment projects targeted at specific local government areas and senatorial districts, which involved the distribution of sewing accessories in places like Anambra central senatorial district (2020), Ndokwa/Ukwuani federal constituency, Delta state (2020), Aguata, Anambra state (2018) etc. The ministry also empowered women in the agricultural sector by training them and providing farming tools and machines. Some of the major agricultural projects were a cassava processing integrated industry for women in Ado/Otta LGA, Ogun state in 2013; a rice-milling factory for women in Yewa North, Ogun state in 2013 and 2014; and a palm oil-processing cottage industry for women in Ipokia local government, Ogun state in 2013 and 2015. One major shortfall of these empowerment projects is that they do not have a wider reach. They also lack continuity and inclusiveness. Moreover, the rationale for picking some of these states or local government for empowerment projects is not clear.

The ministry also provided technical and financial support to women non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women cooperatives in order to boost their economic standing in the country. For instance, in 2011, 2013 and 2014, the ministry provided grants to women-focused NGOs across the federation. In addition to these, the ministry has established and continues to fund skill-acquisition centres across the federation. The ministry has responded to the issue of Chibok girls (who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014 from their school in Chibok, Borno State) which sparked global outrage and the #BringBackOurGirls (BBOG) movement. It sponsored a specialized education programme for the rescued Chibok girls in 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2021 costing over a billion naira (Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill (2017-2021)). The ministry has also implemented initiatives to increase girls' enrollment and retention in schools by sponsoring programs on girl-child education. The campaign against gender-based violence appeared 11 times covering years 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020 and 2021. The ministry is also committed to the provision of quality and affordable information, commodities, and sexual and reproductive health services to women and girls with disabilities.

Table 2: Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development Empowerment Projects, 2011-2021

Project Name	Number of Project
Advocacy & Sensitization	30
Women NGOs	13
Vulnerable Groups	32
Education	33
Economic Empowerment (Training & Materials)	80
Legislation/Policies	21
Women Cooperatives	4
Centres(Skill acquisition, children resource, rehabilitation, women development, etc)	75
Women Political participation	5
Agriculture	14
Girl-Child Education	5
Council on Women Affairs	8
Conventions/Conferences	17
Chibok Girls	4
Women Shelter	2

Source: Data extracted from Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bills (2011-2021)

Politically, the ministry has organized several advocacy projects on gender equality. A major achievement of the ministry is championing the National Gender Policy, which aims to eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality in all sectors of society. Also, the ministry organized nationwide advocacy and sensitization activities to promote the livelihood of women and children in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Notably, the ministry has had five major projects on women's political participation. It has also continued to pursue and review substantive legislation and policies that affect women in Nigeria. In addition, it has continued to pull its weight behind international convention related to women and has sponsored women focused conferences, such as the national conference on women and political participation in Nigeria in 2019.

The above analysis shows that the FMWASD understands its mandate and wants to promote as many empowerment projects as possible. However, the frequency and consistency of these projects over the span of 11 years remain insufficient. Many initiatives were one-time interventions, lacking the continuity for widespread impact and inclusion. This inadequacy cannot be separated from the financial constraints highlighted in the previous section. The next section will focus on the challenges facing the ministry.

Problems Associated with the Institutionalization of Women Empowerment in Nigeria

The FMWASD undoubtedly has made some progress on its mandate of promoting gender equality and the attainment of sustainable development through women empowerment projects at various levels. However, the ministry has been faced with some constraints that has continued to limit its activities, one of which is lack of adequate budgetary provision. Women constitute almost half of the country's population, hence proper revenue should be allocated to the ministry that cater to this group of people. These financial constraints indicate the lack of political will to prioritize resources for gender-specific issues. As presented in Table 1, the FMWASD's budgetary allocation on the average represents 0.07% of the national budget. Moreover, the ministry's budget, if pitched against the population of women on a yearly basis, will show how insignificant the contribution of the ministry is to sustainable development. That is why women are still socially, economically, and politically marginalised in Nigeria. Taking a close look at the expenses of the ministry on women empowerment between 2011-2016, there were only two major nationwide economic empowerment projects: Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) and Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), while other projects/programs were implemented at specific locations.

Another challenge is the issue of inclusion. Noticeable in these empowerment projects is the insufficient inclusion of states such as Yobe and Bayelsa. The implication is that many women want to be empowered but, sadly, they don't have access to many of these programmes. As a matter of fact, a lot of women across the country are not aware of these programmes and therefore not benefit from them. This raises a question of whether the ministry has lived up to its mandate.

Lastly, most of the empowerment projects of the ministry revolved around meeting the practical needs of women, such as the distribution of sewing and grinding machines, hairdressing salon kits and equipment, motorcycles, empowerment materials, popcorn machines, ice block machines, cooking gases, etc. While these are worthy and needed projects, considering the level of poverty among women in the country, the approach is usually short-term and does not integrate women into all facets of national life. The cooking gas project, as a case in point, can improve the livelihood of women. However, what happens when the recipients cannot afford to buy Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to put these cooking gases to good use? They will likely go back to the use of charcoal and wood. This shows the importance of more sustainable, long-term empowerment strategies to address structural economic barriers among women.

Conclusion

The FMWASD has continued to work towards its vision and mission in various capacities, through economic empowerment, political empowerment, advocacy and sensitization, grants to women-focused NGOs, agriculture, education, etc., even though these programmes are underfunded. From 2011-2021, the ministry's budget has been consistently meagre, representing just 0.1% of the national budget. This shows lack of political will—which cannot be divorced from patriarchal norms that undermine the prioritization of resources for gender-specific issues. The empowerment programs of the ministry within the period of study also reveals that, though the ministry has many commitments, most of these programmes do not have a wide coverage and not inclusive.

The 2022 fiscal year is eight years to the expiration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and an evaluation of the current state shows that Nigeria is not on the path to meeting the SDG 5 targets. This can be confirmed by the Global Gender Gap Index report in 2022, which shows that, out of 146 countries, Nigeria ranked 50 in economic participation and opportunity for women; 134 in educational attainment; and 141 in political empowerment, leaving just Iran, Qatar, Brunei Darusalam, Kuwait and Vanuatu behind. This huge gender gap has serious implications for the attainment of sustainable development, which, halfway to the 2030 target, is unlikely to be achieved. A ministry that is meant to cater to women, who represent almost 50 per cent of the country's population, needs enough resources to have both short- and long-term impact on women empowerment. The vision and mission statements are clearly stated, but the capability of the ministry in terms of resources is low. Ironically, the institution that is meant to serve as an agent to achieving SDG 5 clearly needs empowerment.

As recommendations, the federal government needs to be more decisive in lifting Nigerian women out this miry clay called inequality, and one of the ways to do that is to invest in the women's ministry. Also, the ministry should also seek funds from international bodies that can sponsor projects on a larger scale. Additionally, the ministry should partner with state ministries of women affairs and women-focused NGOs to complement its efforts. Lastly, the ministry should promote grassroots engagement by expanding outreach to rural areas. However, beyond the role of the FMWASD, women empowerment requires collective action from every individual committed to building a just and equitable society. Women should not just be beneficiaries of empowerment programs but also become active architects of sustainable development.

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Continuing the Conversation: Intergenerational Student Feminist Activism

by Sam le Nobel and Julie Glaser

Sam le Nobel (she/her) is a student, a feminist, and a social justice activist. She is the co-founder and President of the Women's Studies Student Society at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) where she is completing her Master's of Women and Gender Studies graduate degree. Her research concentrates on feminist social movements and bridging the gap between feminist theory and feminist practices.

Julie Glaser (she/her) is a feminist and human rights advocate working in the film and cultural sectors. She also consults and engages with communities in social change on issues of homelessness, sexual and gender identity, diversity and inclusion, the environment, and accessibility. She is published in numerous anthologies including *This Wasn't on the Syllabus*, *Fireweed*, *Tessera*, *Bent on Writing*, *Womanisms & Feminisms*, and *Filling Station Magazine*. When not on horseback, she can be found in the garden, furiously trying to finish a novel.

Introduction

In March 2025, Julie was featured as a panelist in a discussion on gender-based violence at Canadian universities, co-hosted by the Alexa McDonough Institute for Women, Gender, and Social Justice and the Women's Studies Student Society at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Drawing from her own lived experiences as a student activist in the late 1980's, Julie offered valuable advice to current students undertaking similar advocacy.

Between the second and third waves of feminism, in 1989, Julie was a student at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. She was among the influential group of women who protested rape culture on campus, refused to be silenced, and demanded institutional accountability and protection from gender-based violence and sexual harassment. From sit-in protests in the principal's office, to disrupting previously unquestioned hazing rituals, Julie, and her fellow activists, successfully advocated for institutional protection against sexualized and gender-based violence. They created what has become the foundation of the sexual violence prevention and response policies that students benefit from today. This dedicated group of feminist-student activists adopted the name *Radical Obnoxious Fucking Feminists (ROFF)* as an act of self-empowerment after a group of male engineering students harassed them with this name after a protest on the misogyny and sexual violence that was occurring on campus. Julie explains in more detail how the group got their name in her contribution to the anthology *This Wasn't On the Syllabus* (2024, 100).

Julie's commitment to feminist and social justice advocacy is influential and inspiring. Her work rests on the contributions of the feminists who precede her and will continue to be built upon by the feminists who succeed her; social justice is a continuous, collaborative endeavour that relies on prolonged, multi-generational efforts. The following interview is inspired by Julie and the feminists who have worked diligently, tirelessly, and thanklessly to develop a safe and inclusive society for all and is intended to continue the conversation, collaboration, and support among generations of feminist activists.

Interview

Sam le Nobel: When do you consider to be the beginning of your feminist-activist journey or career? Is there a moment in particular that stands out to you as your starting point, or, perhaps, when you came into feminist consciousness?

Julie Glaser: Feminist consciousness blew my mind open in 1986. I took a course called Women in Literature that led me to Women's Studies 101. No doubt, both of these courses would look much different today than they did back then, but the experience opened me to a reality that, all of a sudden, I realized I was living, although unconsciously, without the words to explain the experience. Consciousness shone a light upon injustice, inequity, bias, discrimination, and systems of oppression designed to keep some of us down while sending others to the front of the line. It's startling when it hits, and it hits hard. Nothing is ever the same afterwards.

SLN: What does activism mean to you?

JG: Activism is the ability to act on injustice in all of its forms. It's the opportunity to improve upon humanity, to create new systems to lift us all up, and to honour life in all its forms on this earth. We must act for kindness, for each other, for the planet, and for a future that we imagine and that we must believe can exist.

SLN: What was your experience as a student feminist activist at Queen's University in 1989? What did you learn during that time?

JG: The experience was filled with friendship, fraught with incredulousness, and led with bravery and ingenuity. It was a time of exchange, openness, righteousness, foolishness, and belligerence. There was a lot of affection, dancing, tears, cheers, many potlucks, laughter, lovers, and late nights. Activism leads to finding your voice, your power, and filling your timeline with deep bonds by doing all the things to make a difference in this life, for oneself, but mostly for others.

SLN: What can contemporary feminists learn from their predecessors? What does it take to be a feminist activist? What skills or resources does one need?

JG: Creativity and humour must have a seat at the table. Our predecessors were goddess icons out of reach - Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Simone de Beauvoir, Gloria Steinem, Audre Lorde, Frida Kahlo, Maya Angelou—and we ate them up while screen-printing t-shirts and placards for our next rally. Their creativity and tenacity inspired ours; we were fired up with banter, critique, exploration of new ideas that blew our minds but made so much sense. Our feminism was party to a party.

We have to be able to be open and bend our minds to reshape our beliefs. We also need humour, heart, tenacity, and the willingness to know you'll get knocked down, but you can get back up again and the compassion to know when you need to retreat, recharge, reset.

SLN: What do feminists of 1989 and contemporary feminists have in common? What are some of their differences? What did you wish you knew when you were a student feminist activist?

JG: We're still fighting the same fight, only today, the issues are more complex and we have a more developed understanding of intersectionality than we did in 1986. That makes things more interesting and beautiful. Moreover, the crime of misogyny has grown in its heinousness since 1989—a year forever etched in my soul. Just when you think it can't get any worse, it does.

Contemporary feminists have to spend more time uncovering the dark depths of misogyny, which apparently know no limits. I often wonder what we'd all be doing for ourselves and others if we didn't have to exert so much energy

dealing with morally reprehensible behaviour and exposing misogynist networks. What beautiful things would we create? How would we spend all that extra time not fighting for equity and peace? What I never imagined is that 35 years later we'd still be having to do this.

SLN: Being a student activist often means resisting the authority that you rely on to grant your degree. How do you navigate the power imbalance as a student challenging an institution such as a university? How can students prepare themselves for the inherent opposition that they will face from university officials?

JG: I don't think you're ever prepared for the injustice you're about to face while fighting injustice. In 1989, we weren't using the word "gaslighting" and we were pretty gob-smacked by the lack of attention and complete inaction of the administration to the "no means kick her in the teeth" backlash to our consent education campaign. Having a really good therapist is probably the best advice I can give to endure and grow from the experiences and to develop the skills to make decisions in the moment that you can live with.

SLN: In your contribution to the anthology *This Wasn't on the Syllabus*, you mention that your fellow activists had some conflicting opinions about next steps during your sit-in protest in Principal David Smith's office. How did you and the ROFFs manage this conflict? How did you stay aligned and unified? What advice do you have for students who experience internal disagreement?

JG: This was an interesting and unexpected outcome of the activism: that we would grow so big as to splinter in our rapid expansion. We tried to manage the conflict with consensus (it didn't work; we didn't have enough experience among us to pull that off successfully), with what we, the original ROFF group, saw as reasoning (which also didn't work as others saw things an entirely different way), and attempts at pulling rank—"We started this, therefore we should finish it and everyone else should fall in line"—(this also didn't work, as everyone else was now a bigger group than our small core, and this larger group was energized by their newfound activism and power).

Today, I suspect activists would be much better equipped to deal with conflict, having been exposed to more opportunities for conflict resolution, consensus building, and learning to facilitate difficult conversations. We just jumped into everything without a solid foundation of skills. We were babes, really. When our group was small this worked for us; when we grew with enthusiasm and numbers, we lost control of the message and the plot and had a hard time getting it back.

SLN: As you are aware, gender-based violence disproportionately impacts women, with men over-represented as the "doers" of violence. Many argue that it is not women's behaviour that needs to change, it's men's. They warn that it is essential to involve men in feminist conversations if there is to be any real and sustainable change. What do you believe is an effective way to involve men in feminist activism? How can men be feminist activist allies without becoming the dominant presence or voice in a female-centric space?

JG: If men truly want to disrupt the cycle of male violence against women, there needs to be a much larger, organized, and strategic movement of men working together to change the legacy that has been passed from one generation to the next, once and for all. I truly believe that this is their work, not ours, and it goes beyond allyship to ownership.

SLN: What can non-students do to support student feminist activists? What can parents of university students do to be supportive allies? How can community members be involved?

JG: Stay in touch with what's going on, show up, speak up, help out. Bring food to the potluck.

SLN: Do you have any advice for young feminist activists who wish to remain involved after they graduate?

JG: Never stop. Your circle of sisters will continue to grow your whole life, there will be an ebb and flow to the activism, and the subjects will evolve and be remastered. You'll be hurt by the process and elevated by the outcomes. Envision what you know is possible and believe it into being.

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A World Nothing Like Mine

by Mariana Martinez Caloca

Maybe her curfew won't be until nine

Maybe she will walk the streets when it's awfully quiet

Maybe she won't pretend to be on the phone, when a tall man is walking by her, when she is all alone

She won't get unsolicited, unnecessary, and inappropriate commentary from older men

She won't get "maninterrupted" over a senseless rant

She won't get catcalled as she walks by, a car won't stop to kindly offer her a ride

Her mom won't justify his step dad's sexist and misogynistic jokes; inappropriate indiscretions won't be taken all in good fun

Her 7th grade math teacher won't have to watch her from beyond; she will be served justice for those lives, that are now gone

Her body and soul won't belong to those men who only leave behind their wallets and bones

Woman won't disappear every day; their mothers won't be tearing, tears of despair

They won't be punished for walking outside, for having opinions or driving a car

They won't be forced to cover their hair; they won't be beaten until they lay dead

Woman will get to live, and not just survive

This world that I hope for, looks nothing like mine

Maybe her "NO" will be actually taken as a "NO" and not as an invitation to force her to say "Yes"

Maybe her world isn't focused around protecting daughters, rather it will educate their sons

Maybe her eyes will look just like her mum's; I hope this new world I dream of does her no wrong

She will hear the screams of our rage, the loud noises we made just for her

She will be believed, unlike I was

She will live in a world that looks nothing like ours

Her mind won't even recall what the patriarchy took from us all

Her opinion will be loud to all, and very clear, though I'm proud of her I'll try not to tear

Her ears will only seem to hear the echoes of us who first lived here, in order for her
new world to appear

Being a woman won't be a liability, won't be a crime

The life she is living looks nothing like mine.

Mariana Martinez Caloca (she/her) was born in Mexico City. She is the daughter of Jose Luis Martinez Perez, an employment lawyer and a notable activist for labour rights. Mariana's involvement in feminist activism started from a young age. Her first direct contact with femicide was at age 14 when her math teacher Susana Garrido was brutally stabbed to death by her ex-husband. This moment marked Mariana's life as she hopes to obtain justice for her beloved teacher. When Mariana moved to Canada in August 2021, she vowed to continue with her work in the feminist movement and to bring attention to the unfortunate reality of many Latin American women.

To be brave

by Sam Sinclair

They are brave:
Words coarse with opposition
Mighty facing majority
A fervid cry to be saved.

He is brave:
He stepped past the supposed perimeter,
The first to journey onwards to
The new land.

She is brave:
Their barbaric taunts,
Jeering and leering,
Her bubble is a looking glass.
And oh how she is brave.

Not by her steel sword,
By her fierce tongue,
By her shameless elegance,
No.
So much more than that
She sleeps
And dreams of dawn,
Of doves and lilies and the sunrise
In lieu of the flames.
The ones from which her phoenix heart rises.

Samantha Sinclair (she/her) is a high school student whose passions include creative writing, music, and baking. She runs her own home bakery, Sweets by Sam, and works at Martinique Desserterie, where she crafts pastries, cakes, and confections. Musically, she pursues piano through private instruction and performs on trumpet in both concert and jazz bands. Through poetry, she expresses her views on beauty, love, and hope, and aims to capture the world as she sees it. Sam dreams of travelling the world but is even more eager to understand the people and places right at home.

A Woman's Burden

by Jyotsana Balasubramaniyam

She wakes with a weight upon her chest,
A society that judges her, even at her best,
Her worth, her weight, her every move,
Constantly, relentlessly, but she tries to improve,

She is faced against expectations high,
To conform, and to comply,
To be sweet, to be serene,
To hide her strength, let it be unseen,

Try and try is all she does,
But still, will she ever be enough?
In a world that grins when women fail,
The echoes of her doubts begin to prevail,

She refuses to let this harsh world win,
Finding strength in struggle, even sporting a grin,
Eventually she finds her skin,
And she stands tall, unapologetically herself.

Jyotsana Balasubramaniyam (she/her) is a grade ten student who loves reading and exploring new ideas. She also enjoys taking walks as they help her to relax and clear her mind. Jyotsana believes that words are powerful and can make a real difference in the way we see and understand the world around us.

I'd Like To Meet Her

by Catherine Khaperska

I'd like to meet her
She who is the gentle waves
That, given the power
Are bound to crash against the shore
She who controls the tides
She whose dreams are just within reach
If she took but just one step

I'd like to sit her down at a table
In a quaint little cafe
And listen to her gush and ramble
About her hopes
Desires, loves, aspirations, and interests

I'd like to hold her hand and tell her that she is strong and capable
Her brain is a marvel
The road before her clears of weeds
And dries of mud
Her future is her own
I'd like for her to know that

I'd like to look her in the eyes and see the stars
Her vision going further than she ever thought she could take part
I'd like for her to realise
The true power of an ambitious girl's mind

I'd like to see her flourish
I'd like to see her succeed, fulfill
Her every need
And stand on top of the world with a smile

I'd like to meet her, one day, and ask her
"Do you understand what I'm saying?
Take a second, breathe it in
If you don't believe me
I'll read this poem
To you
Again"

Catherine Khaperska (she/her) is a poet and novelist from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her poetry features themes of transformation, hope and ambition, and her novels for young adults (mostly in the fantasy genre) include themes of family, love, and resilience. Her debut novel *Scarred* was published in early 2023 and its sequel *Scattered* was published in late 2024.