

# Editorial

Welcome to Volume 38.1 of *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice*!

This issue consists of two thematic clusters both of which focus on intersectionality. The first cluster, edited and introduced by Corinne L. Mason (Gender and Women's Studies and Sociology, Brandon University) and Amanda D. Watson (Sociology, Acadia University), is entitled **What is Intersectional about Intersectionality Now?** The eleven articles featured in the cluster include:

- Manjeet Birk, "Things That Make You Go Hmmm: Unmaking of the Racialized Self in a Graduate School Classroom";
- Patrick R. Grzanka, Rajani Bhatia, Mel Michelle Lewis, Sheri L. Parks, Joshua C. Woodfork, and Michael Casiano, "Intersectionality, Inc.: A Dialogue on Intersectionality's Travels and Tribulations";
- Michele Tracy Berger, "Does Intersectional Training Endure? Examining Trends in a Global Database of Women's and Gender Studies Graduates (1995-2010);
- K.L. Broad, "Social Movement Intersectionality and Re-Centring Intersectional Activism";
- Tegan Zimmerman, "#Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community";
- Caroline Hodes, "Intersectionality in the Canadian Courts: In Search of a Decolonial Politics of Possibility";
- Khatidja Chantler and Ravi K. Thiara, "We Are Still Here: Re-Centring the Quintessential Subject of Intersectionality";
- Rhea Ashley Hoskin, "Femme Theory: Refocusing the Intersectional Lens";
- Karen Stote, "Decolonizing Feminism: From Reproductive Abuse to Reproductive Justice";
- Alexandre Baril, "Intersectionality, Lost in Translation? (Re)thinking Inter-sections between Anglophone and Francophone Intersectionality"; and
- Anna Bogic, "Theory in Perpetual Motion and

Translation: Assemblage and Intersectionality in Feminist Studies."

The second cluster, edited and introduced by Tammy Findlay (Political and Canadian Studies, Mount Saint Vincent University) and Deborah Stienstra (Disability Studies, University of Manitoba), features six articles that focus on the theme of **Intersectionality in Austere Times: Boundary Crossing Conversations**. These include:

- Deborah Stienstra, "DisAbling Women and Girls in Austere Times";
- Dan Irving, "Gender Transition and Job In/Security: Trans\* Un/der/employment Experiences and Labour Anxieties in Post-Fordist Society";
- Christina Gabriel, "Framing Families: Neo-Liberalism and the Family Class Within Canadian Immigration Policy";
- Bailey Gerrits, "An Analysis of Two Albertan Anti-Domestic Violence Public Service Campaigns: Governance in Austere Times";
- Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, "How do Real Indigenous Forest Dwellers Live? Neoliberal Conservation in Oaxaca, Mexico"; and
- Abigail B. Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Intersectionality and the United Nations World Conference Against Racism."

In addition, the open cluster includes two articles. Naila Kaleta-Mae's article, "A Beyoncé Feminist," draws on feminist, critical race, and performance studies and offers a close reading of Beyoncé's song "Bow Down / I Been On" and an analysis of Beyoncé's fusion of misogyny and feminist rhetoric in the song "Flawless." Kaleta-Mae also reflects on what bell hooks' description of Beyoncé as an "anti-feminist" suggests about the evolution of Black feminist thought. In "Clearing Space for Multiple Voices: HIV Vulnerability Among South Asian Immigrant Women in Toronto," Roula Hawa and Vijaya Chikermane draw on the findings of a community-based qualitative research study conducted with South Asian women living with HIV in Toronto.

Participants' narratives highlight specific vulnerabilities growing out of structural inequalities and gender-based power imbalances in their families and with their sexual and/or marital partners. As the authors emphasize, the participants' insights provide a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of HIV risk and support with important social justice and health program development implications.

The cover image is a painting by Toronto artist, Dianne Patychuk, titled "Red Dress Day Oct 4." and is a tribute to Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. It is one in a series of paintings based on layers of markings and tissue paper over a grid of 1200 squares in memory of the more than 1200 documented cases. It is inspired by the Red Dress Project, which was created by Winnipeg Métis multidisciplinary artist Jamie Black.

Enjoy the issue!

**Annalee Lepp**  
**Editor**

# What's Intersectional about Intersectionality Now?

## Cluster Editors

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**Corinne L. Mason** is an Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Sociology at Brandon University. She conducts transnational critical race feminist analyses of development discourses and popular news media, focusing specifically on representations of LGBTIQ rights, violence against women, reproductive justice, and foreign aid. Her work has been published in *Feminist Formations*, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Feminist Media*, *Feminist Teacher*, *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *Surveillance & Society*, and *Canadian Journal of Communication*. She is the author of *Manufacturing Urgency: Violence Against Women and the Development Industry* (May 2017) and the editor of the forthcoming collection *Queer Development Studies Reader* (Routledge).

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**Amanda D. Watson** Ph.D. (Feminist and Gender Studies) is a Lecturer at Simon Fraser University. Her research examines the intersections of gendered and racialized citizenship, labour responsibility, paid and unpaid care work, maternal affect, and human and social reproduction. She is interested in critical pedagogy for university teaching, with a focus on how to interrogate issues of social justice and power in the classroom, particularly when teaching theory. Her most recent publications explore the maternal responsibility to generate good feelings in others.

Our desire to think through the authority of intersectionality in contemporary praxis in the field(s) of gender, women's, and sexuality studies was inspired by a number of thoughtful presentations at the "International Intersectionality Conference" hosted by the Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy (IIRP) at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver in 2014. IIRP was particularly interested in presentations that engaged "the uses and 'abuses' of intersectionality" (IIRP 2014). Our presentation focused on the challenges and possibilities of institutionalized intersectionality—on how intersectionality, as an invaluable critical lens, is an expected feature of feminist work and yet might be exploited by a privileged intellectual class to reinforce oppressive boundaries of belongingness in the academy through the wielding of intersectionality as a learned skill. As intersectionality is understood as the most important theoretical, analytical, and methodological tool in gender, women's, and sexuality studies and as its mainstreaming marks a paradigm shift in feminist praxis (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013; McCall 2005; Nash 2008), we wondered: what work is being done in its name and in what fields of inquiry and practice? And what are the implications of this work for those whose experiences intersectionality was designed to center, namely women of colour?

Following the coining of the term "intersectionality" by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, feminist scholars, educators, practitioners, and activists have aspired to do intersectional work. The popularity of intersectionality in the interdiscipline of gender, women's, and sexuality studies has allowed increasingly sophisticated analyses of systems of power that reflect the complexity of everyday lives and the ways in which identities are assembled on and through encounters of flesh. Yet, the institutionalization of intersectionality has, at times, led to the hollowing-out and de-politicization of the term. For example, we were, and still are, concerned with how intersectionality theory has emerged as a mainstay in introductory gender,

women's, and sexuality studies courses and how both students and instructors of diverse experiences and political orientations deploy the term "intersectionality" in pursuit of academic and, of course, financial reward without necessarily engaging with intersectionality's theoretical, analytical, and/or methodological models.

Such apprehensions about our own utilization of intersectionality at our home institutions and our desire to put together a special cluster on the topic as white scholars draws from critical work in the area, namely Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall's (2013) special issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* entitled "Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory." It in, scholars raise important questions about "the utility and limitations" of intersectionality. Inspired by Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall's (2013) special issue of *Signs* and the "International Intersectionality Conference" conference, we proposed this special cluster to *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* in order to collect some of the presentations from the conference and to invite other scholars into the conversation.

Asking "What is Intersectional About Intersectionality Now?" we are borrowing from David L. Eng, J. Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz's (2005) *Social Text* collection entitled "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" which takes stock of queer theoretical interventions into what they call "a wide field of social critique" (1). Here, we host a cluster of articles that take stock of intersectional interventions into a wide field of social critique to participate in, and expand upon, a burgeoning field of intersectionality studies.

A central concern in the field of intersectionality, which is taken up by this cluster, is the shifting focus of analysis from Black women and Black feminism to other subjects and subjectivities. As Catharine A. MacKinnon (2013) reminds feminist scholars in the special issue of *Signs*, intersectionality begins at the concrete experiences of classes of people in hierarchical relations and, as such, it is a "distinctive stance," an "angle of vision," that "reveals women of color at the center of overlapping systems of subordination" (1020). This simple prompt reinforces intersectionality as a political practice that can never be reduced to academic theory that is distanced from the experience of women

of colour. As many of the authors of this cluster expound, including Manjeet Birk's commentary on her own experience in feminist classrooms and Khatidja Chantler and Ravi Thiara's work on Black and minority ethnic women's experiences of violence, the risk of the institutionalization of intersectionality alongside conventional critical theory, methods, and advocacy is that organizing modes of identity along axes too often "ignore the social forces of power that rank and define them relationally within and without" (MacKinnon 2013, 1023).

Another central concern of this cluster, shared by Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), is the field's continually shifting and expanding scope. As Cho, Crenshaw and McCall note, intersectionality theory emerged in legal studies, which means that intersectionality theory, even as it shows up in gender, women's, and sexuality studies—where it has found an institutional "home,"—has already moved away the original subject of the field. They term this travelling of intersectionality the "centrifugal process" and warn that the travelling of intersectionality in and through disciplinary fields both opens and binds what intersectionality can do in those disciplines (793). One such example of this expansion of intersectionality theory in this cluster is Rhea Hoskin's work on femme identities and the social power of femmephobia, which has, to this point, been a gap in intersectionality studies. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall consider this kind of expansion a sign of the creativity of scholars and the open possibilities of inquiry in the field.

The eleven contributions in this cluster unfold the failures, successes, gaps, possibilities, questions, and concerns at the heart of intersectionality studies and plot the constitutive functioning of the political, economic, and social at this historical moment. The papers represent a range of approaches to understanding the contemporary workings of intersectionality theories, analytics, and methods through a diverse context of social critique. Articles in this cluster reflect upon the state of the field as intersectionality is institutionalized and popularized, paying particular attention to the utilization of intersectionality theory, analytics, and methods and the centrality of Black feminism and women of colour to the field. Contributors also participate in the "centrifugal process" of intersectionality studies by broadening the scope of the field—filling gaps in

scholarship and allowing intersectionality to travel to new spaces of inquiry.

This cluster covers four major themes in the ongoing debates and dialogues of intersectionality studies: 1) institutionalization of intersectionality; 2) “doing” intersectionality; 3) subjects of intersectionality; and 4) the translation of intersectionality. The first three themes engage in theoretical and practical conversations about the state of the field and related activism. Each contributor pushes at the barriers, boundaries, gaps, disjunctures, and fissures of intersectionality studies. The final theme on the translation of intersectionality (and assemblage) between French and English is one that is new to the scholarly conversation and we are particularly pleased to publish these two important articles on the “uses and abuses” of the language of intersectionality.

### ***Theme 1: Institutionalization of Intersectionality***

This cluster begins with Manjeet Birk’s commentary on three separate “symptoms” of institutionalized intersectionality in undergraduate and graduate classrooms. Referring to such instances as “things that make you go hmmm,” Birk carefully recounts her experiences as a woman of colour where intersectionality was being taught, and also deployed, by classmates and colleagues.

Patrick Grzanka, Rajani Bhatia, Mel Michelle Lewis, Sheri L. Parks, Joshua Woodfork, and Michael Casiano’s “Intersectionality, Inc.: A Dialogue on Intersectionality’s Travels and Tribulations” is an abridged transcript of a two-hour conversation organized around intersectionality’s institutionalization. This dialogue offers insight into the ways in which intersectionality is incorporated and co-opted in the academy and other social justice sites.

### ***Theme 2: “Doing” Intersectionality***

Michele Tracy Berger’s “Does Intersectional Training Endure? Examining Trends in a Global Database of Women’s And Gender Studies Graduates (1995-2010)” presents the findings of an online global survey of 571 Women’s and Gender Studies graduates, which was designed to assess how graduates applied intersectional thinking in their professional and/or personal lives. She maintains that “understanding intersectional thinking as constituting a skill and/

or enabling the facilitation of other skills...would potentially serve students better, encourage increased curricular coherence about intersectionality, and suggests a maturation of intersectionality’s importance in the field.”

K.L. Broad’s article “Social Movement Intersectionality and Re-Centering Intersectional Activism,” complicates how social movements practice intersectionality. Arguing that movements need to re-centre activist knowledge in intersectionality studies, Broad explores the complications and challenges of “doing” intersectionality.

“#Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community” by Teagan Zimmerman examines “doing” intersectionality online. Zimmerman analyses #solidarityisforwhitewomen and suggests that such intersectional practices offer necessary dialogue on race, feminism, and online representation in the fourth wave of feminism.

Caroline Hodes’ “Intersectionality in the Canadian Courts: In Search of a Decolonial Politics of Possibility” focuses on Canadian anti-discrimination law and examines the Lockean foundation of the concept of identity. Ultimately, Hodes argues that unless intersectionality is taken seriously in anti-discrimination law, it will continue to reproduce essentialisms and epistemic violence.

### ***Theme 3: Subjects of Intersectionality***

Khatidja Chantler and Ravi Thiara’s “We Are Still Here: Re-Centring the Quintessential Subject of Intersectionality” focuses on violence against women in Black and minority ethnic communities in the UK in order to argue that centering the experiences and knowledges of women of colour is essential to intersectionality. Troubled by the travel of intersectionality into various subjects of study, they argue that the focus on race and racism should not be displaced in theory, policy, and praxis.

Excavating the gaps of intersectionality studies, Rhea Ashley Hoskin’s “Femme Theory: Refocusing the Intersectional Lens” investigates the erasure and silence of queer feminist theorizing of femininities. Arguing that, while there is substantial literature on masculinity and, in fact, an entire field of study devoted to the subject, femininities have been given much less space. Hoskin maintains that understanding femme identities and the

functioning of femmephobia across lines of difference is essential to the field of intersectionality studies.

Further pushing the boundaries of intersectionality studies, Karen Stote's "Decolonizing Feminism: From Reproductive Abuse to Reproductive Justice" outlines a decolonial and intersectional approach to reproductive justice that centres the lived experiences of Indigenous women in Canada. Arguing for a revolutionary transformation of reproductive rights toward reproductive justice, Stote claims that a grounded commitment to intersectionality is key.

#### **Theme 4: The Translation of Intersectionality**

The last theme focuses on language and translation. Alexandre Baril's "Intersectionality, Lost in Translation? (Re)thinking Inter-sections between Anglophone and Francophone Intersectionality," suggests that Francophone academics are more likely to discuss language issues in their work on intersectionality while Anglophone studies of intersectionality problematize other topics, including transphobia and cisgender normativity. Baril maintains that Anglophone studies should take language more seriously while Francophone studies of intersectionality must pay attention to trans identities and experiences.

Anna Bogic's "Theory in Perpetual Motion and Translation: Assemblage and Intersectionality in Feminist Studies" explores the re-reading of intersectionality as assemblage and calls for a further examination of assemblage as a theoretical concept, including its translational history from French to English. Bogic argues that the translation of *agencement* to *assemblage* has particular impacts in the field of intersectionality studies that must be fully assessed and understood.

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# Things That Make You Go Hmmm: Unmaking of the Racialized Self in a Graduate School Classroom

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**Manjeet Birk** has been living on the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish people most of her life. She has worked, studied and played across the world but a piece of her always remains on the west coast. Manjeet completed her Bachelors of Arts degree from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario in Philosophy and Women's Studies and went on to complete a Masters of Arts degree from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She is currently a PhD Candidate in the Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests focus on women's organizing, racialized and Indigenous girls and social justice. With a lifetime of experience organizing, troubling and challenging systems, Manjeet is always looking for new ways to re-conceptualize a more beautiful world.

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## **Abstract**

Using critical race theory's notion of counter storytelling I use three situations within my life as a racialized woman in the academy to exemplify the practices and symptoms of institutionalized intersectionality. Using my stories and the many useful critiques of intersectionality, I discuss how institutionalized intersectionality is failing marginalized women because institutions are co-opting "outsider" language and imposing it on bodies of their choosing.

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## **Résumé**

À l'aide de la notion des contre-récits de la théorie critique de la race, j'utilise trois situations au sein de ma vie en tant que femme racialisée dans le monde universitaire pour illustrer les pratiques et les symptômes de l'intersectionnalité institutionnalisée. À l'aide de mes expériences et des nombreuses critiques utiles de l'intersectionnalité, je discute de la façon dont l'intersectionnalité institutionnalisée trahit les femmes marginalisées parce que les institutions cooptent le langage « marginal » et l'imposent aux organes de leur choix.

Factory (1991)—was my first exposure to antiracist theory, counter storytelling, and political action.

In a recent opinion piece for the *Washington Post* entitled “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait,” Crenshaw (2015) noted discrepancies between the modern-day version of intersectionality and her intention when she coined the term:

Intersectionality was a lived reality before it became a term. Today, nearly three decades after I first put a name to the concept, the term seems to be everywhere. But if women and girls of color continue to be left in the shadows, something vital to the understanding of intersectionality has been lost. (1–2)

Using my stories and some of the many useful critiques of intersectionality (Brown 1997; Nash 2008; Puar 2007), in this article I discuss how institutionalized intersectionality is failing women of colour, Indigenous women, and other multiply marginalized women because institutions are co-opting “outsider” language and imposing it on bodies of their choosing. This in turn appropriates the knowledge of racialized women, yet leaves them in the margins of academic spaces, all while maintaining institutionalized whiteness. Contrary to Crenshaw’s original intent to make visible the intersecting systems of oppression within the lives of Black women, intersectionality is now used as a method of identity politics where we all become part of the traffic in Crenshaw’s (1989) intersection metaphor, with little understanding of how these systems impact certain, namely marginalized, bodies. Despite Crenshaw’s intentions, institutionalized intersectionality most negatively affects racialized bodies.

### **Telling Stories**

In sharing my stories here, I am using the principles of critical race theory’s counter storytelling (Delgado 2000) and Sherene Razack’s (1999) notion of storytelling for social change to highlight the limitations of intersectionality. These stories, as well as the countless other stories of racialized women, remind us that intersectionality was inspired by and continues to be a lived experience. It is important to theorize racism and marginalization, but when we illustrate them through our lived realities, we can begin to understand how they have real effects on the lives of women of colour. Razack

reminds us that stories can hold a tremendous potential for change, but in order to achieve that change, we must first think critically about which stories we tell, and why. The stories I share in this article are not told only for the sake of telling stories; they are a way to showcase alternatives to the mainstream understanding of marginalized bodies, to shift our attention in a manner focused on meaningful change.

I share these stories with a serious commitment to ending what Eve Tuck (2009) calls damage-centred research. In her open letter to communities, Tuck urges researchers to stop sharing stories of damaged racialized peoples, stories that promise social change but which only serve and support the mainstream. She encourages us to complexify damage-centered research through desire. The stories I tell in this article should not be understood as exemplars of women of colour struggling in classrooms with their peers. These stories illustrate my desire to be a complete person in the classroom, one who is not exposed to systemic racism and violence in the name of institutional innocence. I will not be your woman-of-colour diversity badge. I am not asking for equality—a broken equality—with my peers, but for an understanding that if you want diversity in the classroom, you will be expected to change the structure of the classroom to accommodate it.

These stories are challenging, partly because they highlight prickly situations, but mostly because they showcase the inherent structural racism that racialized peoples encounter within systems every day. The focus on systems is intentional because it reminds us that these structures are responsible for the injustices they perpetuate: They are developed to support certain bodies and not others. The systems and their history in racist ideologies, not individual people of colour, must be held accountable for perpetuating uneven access to the academy and other institutions of power. There is a reason why certain bodies are able to effortlessly navigate systems: The systems were made for them to navigate, are geared for the ways in which they think. This is not a coincidence.

It is important to discuss my process in collecting these stories. My memories, in some cases years after the events occurred, are limited to what and how I remember. I acknowledge that all stories can and do have multiple and sometimes conflicting truths. Memory adds another layer. In “The Ambivalent Practices



of Reflexivity,” Bronwyn Davies and her colleagues (2004) explain that what and how we remember are interesting aspects of qualitative inquiry that can lead to rich information in addition to the memory itself. Memories are complicated and should not be assumed to be neutral, thus the processes of memory recall can tell us a lot about the people and situations involved. These stories are the way I remember them at the time of writing. In no way is my version of the story expected to be the truth for everyone involved. I am well aware of the limitations of stories, and again, my aim is not to tell the perfect story but to showcase the systems at play within these stories and, more importantly, the lived experiences of women of colour. Although my stories are unique to my experiences they shed light on institutions (and the limitations) that affect many others in similar ways.

The process of remembering what happened in a university classroom can be tumultuous. Challenging dynamics at play in classrooms lead to tense interactions. These dynamics are particularly evident in moments of disagreement. Many risks are involved for all who speak in class, but I argue that these risks are compounded for multiply marginalized bodies. Incomplete curricula and a “single story” (Adichie 2009) of people of colour force the responsibility of teaching diversity onto the folks in the classroom who experience this diversity. This becomes the more complicated iteration of the white teacher asking the racialized other to explain “the perspectives of people of colour.” Typically, in these cases it is not a flat-out question: Information is “volunteered” but also coerced because the university systems, such as admission, funding, and privilege, force a few to speak for the “others.” In my own experience, this information is on occasion accepted and on occasion rejected by my peers. I’d like to share an instance of each.

### **Things That Make You Go Hmmm #1**

I was enrolled in a small graduate writing class predominantly focused on the power of storytelling. As a group, we looked at a variety of different authors who shared their perspectives on how to tell the “perfect” story. The class composition was much like others I have experienced. Of the 12 students, four were racialized women, one was a white man, and the remaining seven were white women. We were led by our professor, also a white woman.

On this particular day we were watching Brené Brown’s TED talk on “The Power of Vulnerability” where Brown discusses the importance of vulnerability and how this vulnerability makes you beautiful. My professor took Brown’s statements further and explained that to tell a good story one needs to share their vulnerable side. Although for the most part I agree with the notion of vulnerability expressed by my professor and Brown, I think they both oversimplify who is expected to share it. In a fit of frustrated rage I shouted, “Who is expected to be vulnerable? Vulnerability is not a neutral term imposed on everyone!” The class turned to look at me, surprised by my “overreaction.” The professor thoughtfully looked over and gave me a quiet “mm-hmm,” signalling me to go on. Trying to compose myself, I calmly explained, “There is an expectation of who is supposed to be vulnerable. People of colour are expected to share their stories of racism, their stories of systemic struggle. It’s an expectation that these folks share the violence imposed on their lives as a way for white people to watch and “understand” the other. Violence impacts white bodies, too, but they are under no expectation to share this pain. Nobody expects a white woman to share her story of rape or sexual assault. No one expects a white man to talk about his abusive parents or how this violence now impacts him as a father. This has been evidenced in this class.” The classroom fell silent. I looked over at the other women of colour in the class and their gazes uncomfortably and actively avoided mine. I could tell I had inadvertently broken our honour code and let the others in on a secret only we knew.

The stories of racialized others have been shared time and time again in the classroom, on the pages of books, and in movies, yet somehow there is still a need and desire to “eat the other,” as bell hooks (1992) would say. This voyeuristic expectation results in the consumption, commodification, and appropriation of Black and Brown bodies. Even within our class, racialized students were encouraged to share stories of challenge, such as immigration experiences to Canada, the violent imposition of anglicized names on our bodies, and racist encounters. Alternatively, our white counterparts were encouraged to share inspirational stories about the impact of a beautiful nature hike, for example, or fictional stories of fantastical monsters. I am not sure what led to this dynamic. Perhaps there was an understanding that

white students didn't have stories of challenge. Perhaps it was understood that those stories were too personal to share with the class. Not exceptional within the academy, the culture of our class imposed the burden of the teaching stories on the marginalized bodies for the consumption of the mainstream.

After an appropriate amount of silence, a classmate who had attentively listened to my concerns about vulnerability spoke. With tentative consideration she shared this platitude: It is not always risky for the underdog to take centre stage. As a matter of fact, with great risk comes great reward, and sometimes it is your only option. She went on to explain that she had seen a video on YouTube about a little dog in the Arctic that was tied up outside. It was freezing and the dog's owners were nowhere to be found. A giant hungry polar bear came up to the dog, and it looked like it was going to attack. Clearly the dog was no match for the bear. But instead of giving up, the dog decided to jump around and dance. At first the bear was confused, then it decided to join in the dance. The dog managed to engage the bear, and in that way rescued itself from death.

Perplexed about the relevance of this story to my concerns about the risks of sharing vulnerability as a racialized woman in the academy, I asked, "Are you comparing me to a dog?" My classmate replied, "Well, I didn't mean it that way, but yes, I guess."

My jaw gaped in silent amazement. My classmate's blonde hair and blue-eyed whiteness stared me in the face and pierced my stunned body. Her story reduced risk taking to a natural survival response rather than an action that requires consent among respectful peers. Her response assumed it is the sharing I fear, but in fact it is the expectation. In making this assumption, she read my vulnerability as a permanent condition of racialization rather than an expectation created by her own white privilege. Inadvertently my colleague had trivialized my experience and expression of marginalization within the academy. Furthermore, the silence of the classroom made it clear that the academic system allows and possibly even encourages the muzzling of certain bodies. Institutionalized intersectionality has forced my experiences—a Brown woman—as a commodity to share, with little understanding of how this expectation affects my body. In turn it privileges those with an understanding of the institutionalized language and equalizes our experiences as the same.

This hmmm-worthy scenario threatens to silence me within the classroom.

### **The First Lesson**

This story is about institutions and the people within them: the institution of the academy, of the classroom, and of the people and the perspectives they contain. For many reasons, classroom dynamics work to protect the bodies and ideas of some while risking those of others. My colleague felt no threat in speaking her mind, just as no one, myself included, felt it necessary to explain how it might be inappropriate for her to compare me to a dog. I want to make it clear that my issue is not with any of the particular bodies who were in the classroom with us, but with what the classroom represents. In my department and in my field, certain bodies and ideas are prioritized over others. At its most simple, there is evidence that certain bodies do better than others in academe in terms of who gets in, who gets funding, and who gets jobs (Henry and Tator 2012; Smith 2010).

Intersectionality also seeks to legitimize the theories that help to explain marginalized identities and make visible the invisible within our lives. As intersectionality has become institutionalized, however, it aims to make a case for everyone. There is a tendency on the part of the institution to remove marginalized voices from the margins through fear that it will ghettoize them. As an application, intersectionality has been taken up as a way to understand that everyone, not only those who occupy the margins, has an intersecting identity. Although this is of course true, it fails to acknowledge the ways that systems are at play in intersectionality. As a result, everyone now feels ownership over the language of intersectionality, especially when it involves discussing the bodies in the margins. Everyone has an intersecting identity that places them in relation to others, but what this fails to acknowledge is that intersectionality is rooted in law, specifically in the case of women of colour who were unable to merge their claims of gender and race discrimination (Crenshaw 1999, 2015). Intersectionality is intended to shed light on systemic exclusion.

Within our class together it became clear that my colleague understood the language of intersectionality and multiple marginalization. Perhaps she has even been marginalized herself. I have come to real-

ize, though, that she took ownership over my language of experience. Inadvertently she told me, “You are not special. Everyone feels marginalized sometimes, and strength comes from getting over that marginalization.” She centered her experiences and equalized mine to those around her. This is the power of institutionalization, we can all take a piece of the pie. We are all the same. I have hardship, she has hardship, we all have hardship—so get over it. This is how she is able to take ownership over intersectionality, by claiming that she too has an intersecting identity. We all do. And through her benevolent whiteness, she was trying to empower me—the broken Brown girl—to save myself by exemplifying how others (whom she deemed “worse off”) were able to save themselves. It is a classic white feminist’s story of “empowerment” and of “saving” an underdog with a problem, without any understanding on the part of my colleague of how she was further marginalizing me in the classroom. This is the problem with this so called pie—she can have any piece that she wants and she gets to allocate my slice too. I have to settle for the leftovers—the broken Brown girl that needs saving pieces. Through this interaction she was telling me, “If the dog can get over it, so can you.”

### **Things That Make You Go Hmmm #2**

Clustered in a “like-minded” group of graduate students, each of us was asked to describe the ethical implications of the work that we hope to do. One particular graduate student, a white woman of similar age and experience to me, expressed her intention to work with a marginalized community with which she does not self-identify. In a previous research project she had helped conduct, she had collected, with a larger group, a series of interviews which she felt “tell the stories” of this community. In her graduate project she wanted to expand on these stories. Irritated by the number of graduate students who assume it is their responsibility to tell the stories of other communities, I questioned her on her motives. As I posed questions aimed at prodding my colleague to self-reflect, almost instantaneously the “evil two-headed monster of guilt and shame” reared its hideous face, as it almost always does in these challenging interracial dialogues in the academy. In the presence of this monster and my perceived threat, my colleague’s body began to stiffen and she sat taller, her posture making her physically larger. She

explained that the racialized members of the original research group had left the academy to pursue other endeavours, and she felt that as one of the remaining members it was her obligation to do something with the data. I saw tears of justification and anger well up in her eyes. Upon noticing the impact of my comments on her body, my body also tensed with exhaustion at the thought of having to wipe up another white woman’s tears. As a recovering women’s studies student, wiping up white women’s guilt and shame tears became my full-time job, and I was not prepared to engage in this behaviour any longer. Our conversation went from constructive feedback on our project epistemologies to a multisyllabic academic joust to see who could stab the other first and prove their “ultimate right” in this situation.

I did not want to get into a conversation of who was racialized enough to do this work. I wanted to know if she thought it was a coincidence that her racialized colleagues had left academia. I wanted her to ask herself if her telling these stories was preventing someone else from telling them. I wanted her to question her privilege as much as she questioned the marginalization of the stories she possessed.

We both left the match hurt and angry. I later discovered that our conversation had inspired her to “change” through self-reflection. In true academic style, she wrote and published an article on how, at my unidentified expense, she had learned the error of her ways. Within this article she explained her intersections as a white woman “interested” in the challenges of marginalized communities and her desire to “help.” Taking up my ideas without crediting me, she built a case that painted her as both a marginalized white woman and a supportive, helping white saviour. There was no critical engagement with why she was interested in this project, this community, or the ethical and moral implications of her white body doing this work.

In publishing this article, she trivialized our counter stories—the ones I shared with her, the ones others have shared with her. She viewed this storytelling as something we all have access to, with little understanding of how systems take up our stories differently. When I read her story, it felt like she took the power of storytelling away from me and banished me back to the world of the broken Brown girl who struggles in school. The only problem is, I am not. My stories are involute

unravellings of systems that interpret me in particular ways—not simple “aha” moments but revelations that shake my very core. This complicated identity is what my “damaged self” can never access in the classroom in the presence of others who steal my language and strip all power from terms like intersectionality.

Again and again these challenging scenarios are used as the juicy parts or inspiring self-revelatory moments where my white colleagues are enlightened about their racism and, upon further reflection, swear they will never be racist/sexist/colonialist (insert ism here) again—of course with no serious consideration of how they profit from the same racist systems that create this marginalization. You will see them widely reflected in academic journal articles, and you may even recognize me in these publications as “a woman of colour,” “my racialized colleague,” or even “my racialized friend.” This is not an isolated incident.

In a field where publication is currency, my ideas are embraced and accepted, but without publication credit. The interlocking oppressions (Razack 1998) within the academy are what substantiate and sustain racist, classist, ableist, colonizing privilege, and by virtue of this experience make my body the racialized other in the classroom—the source, but not the articulator, of data. Again, my body, like so many others before mine, becomes the nameless, faceless, and ultimately invisible racialized body of the researched other. The power of institutionalization is that we no longer see the systems that determine and overpower our experiences. Institutionalized intersectionality has empowered everyone to tell their stories of oppression with little understanding of how they are attached to systems of power.

This hmmm-worthy moment silenced me on the pages of the journal that published my colleague’s article and on the pages of all the others that publish stories of redemptive self-discovery.

### **The Next Lesson**

The incident I described above is a common scenario in alleged social justice spaces where people are dedicated to working in marginalized communities. In my experience, overwhelmingly the desire to help is a mask people use to hide their stuff—be it racism, privilege, guilt, etc. Through the use of this helping mask we fail to understand how systems of power intersect and how, as a result, each of us is at once privileged and op-

pressed. When we neglect to consider institutionalized intersectionality as a system, we understand these two ideas—privilege and oppression—as mutually exclusive when, like other systems, they rely on each other to function. In this scenario, my colleague went from oppressor to oppressed with a single tear and her identity shifted again to benevolent saviour with only a publication credit.

I have observed mainstream bodies use the language of intersectionality much as my “helping” colleague used it: “I am a white middle-class woman; I acknowledge this; now I can do whatever I want. I work with ‘others’ because I am able to say this to them. I am therefore absolved of my responsibility for maintaining this oppressive system.” Not only does the university allow for this appropriation of intersectionality, I would suggest that social justice programs demand it. For example, locally it is an expectation at progressive events that one will acknowledge the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples where we gather with little to no understanding of what it means to occupy stolen territory or decolonize land in meaningful ways, as per Tuck & Yang’s (2012) important article. The acknowledgement absolves responsibility and frees one to follow up with anything. The acknowledgement and subsequent inaction are the power of institutionalized intersectionality. This works in similar ways to the white woman who self identifies her social location. The resulting positionality allows and even encourages white women to centre their own experiences—again—and to sideline those who have a different reality. Let me be clear, this manoeuvre removes women of colour from the margins and somehow finds a way to equalize all experiences. White is a social construct too, I am told. Yes, of course it is, but that does not erase how white is privileged within a white settler system. This call for understanding the self in effect institutionalizes (makes official) intersectionality and, in doing so, perpetuates systemic racism. As a result, the only systemic change is the presence of bodies of colour in the classroom to witness the exclusion.

Crenshaw’s intention with a theory of intersectionality was to centre the experiences of women of colour, specifically Black women, and the ways that systems exclude them because they are both women and of colour. This scenario shows us again that the language of intersectionality and, more importantly, the rheto-

ric of responsibility/helping have been co-opted so that anyone can use them. An academic comprehension of intersectionality as a term does not mean understanding the lived experiences that give life to the term. This severing of the term from the lives is the institutionalization of intersectionality—similar to the non-doing of Sara Ahmed’s (2012) diversity work. When critical methodologies and theories become mainstreamed within systems, the knowledge is intended to be accessible to all, and in the process it loses its teeth. The knowledge lacks relevance to the people it was intended to serve, and thus it fails to be applicable.

This particular moment also highlights the fight I have had with white women who desire to equalize our experience. My colleague’s tear was her trying to show me that she was just like me: She hurts, too, and it was her responsibility to “do” something with this work. She wanted to prove to me that we are the same. What she failed to see is that although we both have intersections and stories and lived experiences that impact the work we do, systems will always play out differently when our bodies interact within them. We all—feminists, those who use intersectional theories, my colleague, myself—need to complicate our desire for this binary of we are all the same/we are all different. We are both neither the same nor different.

### Things That Make You Go Hmmm #3

The third story I want to tell is a self-reflexive moment. Writing this paper and telling these stories became a nearly impossible experience for me. Over the weeks as I prepared to write and bounced ideas off others, I became greatly concerned about how to convey the systemic challenges I encounter every day. I am afraid. I have been paralyzed under the pressure of telling stories that would be understood not as isolated anomalies but as repeated incidents of structural racism. How do I tell my stories without creating a series of monolithic characters with no depth or complexity, all within a strict word limit? Furthermore, how do I do it without alienating others and leaving myself isolated as the angry woman of colour?

Feeling overwhelmed, my first instinct was to flee. I will not write this paper. I will just run away. I could really use a vacation anyways. One by one I was looking through the lexicon of horrifying “hmmm” moments that had become normalized within my life

and I became struck with an overwhelming sense of responsibility. For decades, I felt like I was going crazy. I was experiencing things it seemed like no one else experienced (at least no one talked about it) and it was not until I read Patricia Williams’s *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (1992) that I saw how “crazy” becomes imposed and institutionalized within experiences of racism. If I could prevent at least one person from feeling crazy, I had to share these institutionalized stories.

My next instinct was to wordsmith the stories to make them sound better. When I took the first draft of these stories to my peers, they asked, “Manjeet, why are you letting everyone off?” I was worried that my white peers would be made uncomfortable by my stories, but instead, they called me on sugar-coating my experiences. Although my career as an activist, a feminist, and an educator has mostly been built on shaking the comfortable, it felt different disturbing the ivory tower. I wanted to stir things up, but not too much. Unlike my colleagues in the stories I shared, I did not feel free to confront the institution, because I know it will not protect my body and my ideas in the same way it protects theirs. Yet still, what is the point of telling these stories if I am not going to do it honestly and freely?

I was then left to sit with the truth of these stories. Knowing this delicate dance of colonization and marginalization, I feel both safe and unsafe in its capacity to control the institutions I access. Furthermore, I am engaging in and attempting to deconstruct an institutional pedagogy where my thoughts and experiences are welcome, but only in a certain way and at a certain time. What will happen if I disrupt this dance? This fear of change within those of us who have finally found ways to navigate impossible institutions is what maintains this system. The truth is that my stories can and will make people uncomfortable, including myself. My instincts to flee or to use a selective, euphemistic memory are in essence my unconscious desire to replicate and re-centre whiteness. This experience has become another “hmmm” moment, this time involving myself and the structural oppression I have internalized through the years.

This hmmm-worthy moment threatens to silence me every day.

## The Problem with Intersectionality

As evidenced through these stories, I cannot help but agree when Nancy Hirschmann (2012) offers that “we are sometimes better at calling for intersectionality and proclaiming its importance than we are at actually doing it” (401). Several critiques of intersectionality have demonstrated its institutionalized failures. Both Wendy Brown (1997) and Jasbir Puar (2007) have explained how this theory has become a mainstay within feminist studies and, as a result, has failed to live up to its intentions. Robyn Wiegman (2012) believes that intersectionality is doomed to fail since the desire to engage intersectionality is bigger than the theory’s capacity to enact social justice. Jennifer Nash (2014) explains that the “problem of intersectionality...is that its attention to particularity never challenges the structures of domination that incessantly reduce subjects to fictive categories” (57). It has become clear that intersectionality, with its tendency to overfragment identities, has become a way to understand subject position. As a result, it fails to consider systems. We need to reconsider the roots of intersectionality within the law to grasp how we can effectively take up and decipher systems through comprehending intersectional identities, as opposed to overly fragmented individuals trying to define themselves. These hmmm-worthy moments are happening because the language of intersectionality is being stolen and the experiences of all are being forced into specific, comfortable categories. This equalization of the experiences of all without a commitment to the original intention and meaning of intersectionality fails to engage systems of power and the ways they are perpetuated.

The problem with intersectionality, then, is its institutionalization and its failure to call into action the same folks it was intended to support. Institutionalized intersectionality works systemically to injure certain bodies, and this intersectionality cannot be equalized across experiences. One system can never come ahead of the others; hierarchy counters how intersectionality works. Its sheer power is in the fact that these systems cannot be separated. Finally, institutionalized intersectionality fails to understand how privilege and oppression are always linked. In attempting to understand these stories and these systems, it is imperative to consider Mari Matsuda (1990) when she asks us to “ask the other question.” For me, the other question within

all of this is two questions: What is missing here? How am I implicated? It is always easier to point the finger in blame at another than to ask how I contribute to the problem: in this case, the institutionalization of intersectionality, the equalization of experiences, and the further pushing to the margins of the marginalized.

When stories make us go “hmmm,” we must ask what the stories are telling us. In an academy built on gaining knowledge from the “other,” it comes as no surprise that marginalized students, academics, and staff are put in a position to constantly engage in hmmm-provoking scenarios. And as long as this remains true, racialized and marginalized people who engage in this space will be expected to conserve this system.

If you see yourself reflected in these stories, there is a reason. If you do not, that says something, too, because we are all implicated in this system and its maintenance. So perhaps as a start the next time you find yourself engaged in a moment that makes you go “hmmm,” it might be interesting to ask, “Which systems am I perpetuating in this moment?”

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# Intersectionality, Inc.: A Dialogue on Intersectionality's Travels and Tribulations

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**Patrick R. Grzanka** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he serves as core faculty in the Counseling Psychology Program and the interdisciplinary program in Women, Gender, and Sexuality. His research explores emotions, attitudes, and mental health at the nexus of social inequalities, particularly race, gender, and sexuality. His first book, *Intersectionality: A Foundations and Frontiers Reader* (Westview Press/Perseus Books 2014), traces the origins and contemporary frontlines of international scholar-activism that critiques how social inequalities are organized along multiple dimensions of difference, power, and inequity. His research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the American Psychological Association and his work has been published in a wide range of scholarly journals, including *Sexualities*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, *Symbolic Interaction*, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *The Counselling Psychology*, and *American Journal of Bioethics: Neuroscience*. He holds a PhD in American Studies from the University of Maryland.  
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**Rajani Bhatia** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University at Albany-State University of New York (SUNY). Her research interests lie in developing new approaches to feminist theorizations of reproduction and feminist science and technology studies with a focus on reproductive technologies, health, bioethics, and biomedicine. Through engagement as a scholar-activist in international women's health and reproductive justice movements, Dr. Bhatia has contributed to feminist analysis of global population control, right-wing environmentalism, and coercive practices and unethical testing related to contraceptive and sterilization technologies both inside and outside the United States. Her forthcoming book, *Gender Before Birth: Sex Selection in a Transnational Context*, will be released by University

of Washington Press in spring 2018. She holds a PhD in Women's Studies from the University of Maryland.  
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**Mel Michelle Lewis** is Associate Professor and Program Director of Ethnic Studies at Saint Mary's College of California. Dr. Lewis completed her Ph.D. in Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, and she was formerly an assistant professor in the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and affiliate faculty in Africana Studies at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland. Originally from the Alabama Gulf Coast, Dr. Lewis is a Black feminist queer studies interdisciplinary scholar working at the nexus of intersectional queer critical race studies and pedagogies of social justice praxis. Her research publications and course offerings reflect this positioning. Her current project, *Femme Query: Pedagogy, Pleasure, and Queer of Color Possibility*, engages social justice educators, activists, cultural workers, and artists who articulate the power and possibility of femme pedagogies of liberatory praxis.  
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**Sheri L. Parks** is Associate Dean for Research, Interdisciplinary Scholarship, and Programming in the College of Arts and Humanities and Associate Professor in the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is also the author of *Fierce Angels: The Strong Black Woman in American Life and Culture* (Ballantine/Random House 2010) and a new revised and expanded edition, *Fierce Angels: Living with a Legacy from the Sacred Dark Feminine to the Strong Black Woman* (Lawrence Hill Books 2013). Her general research area is public aesthetics, or the ways in which people find and create meaning and beauty in their everyday lives, with specific emphasis on race, gender, and social class. She is a well-known Black academic feminist and she has appeared frequently in national and international media, including the BBC, NBC News, Anderson Cooper 360, *Newsweek*, and the *Los Angeles Times* as well as Polish, Chinese, and German media.



On stage, she has interviewed and moderated discussions with a number of prominent figures, including Angela Davis, David Simon, and David Alan Grier. As founding director of the Arts and Humanities Center for Synergy, Dr. Parks facilitates collaborations of scholars inside and outside of the university.

**Joshua C. Woodfork** is the Executive Director of the Office of the President and Coordinator of Strategic Initiatives at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. He was formerly the Director of The Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS) at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Prior to joining CHAS, Dr. Woodfork was Assistant Professor of American Studies at American University (2010-2012) and Assistant Professor of American Studies at Skidmore College (2005-2010) where he co-founded Skidmore's Black Faculty and Staff Group. He earned his PhD from the University of Maryland, his MA from Michigan State University, and his BA from Colby College where he has served on the Board of Trustees since 2009. His scholarly interests and teaching center on U.S. history, ethnography, intersectional analysis, popular culture, multiraciality, African Americans, whiteness, and social justice. He recently finished the manuscript of a book project entitled *Shifting Whiteness: White Parents of Biracial and Black Children*.

**Michael Casiano** is a doctoral candidate and Flagship Fellow in the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. In 2012, he received double bachelor's degrees from the University of Maryland in English and American Studies. His research analyzes the development of financialized geographies in Baltimore City over the course of the twentieth century using multi-disciplinary methods, including archival research, oral history, and political economy. As a graduate student, Michael has been active in efforts to unionize graduate assistants on the University of Maryland campus. As an instructor, he has taught intersectionality theory to undergraduates in both introductory and intermediate American Studies courses.

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### Abstract

In a roundtable discussion held at the American Studies Association's annual meeting in 2013, the authors interrogate intersectionality's uptake in diverse settings, considering how its radical potential may be coopted and conflated with "diversity," "multiculturalism," "inclusion," and similarly neoliberal institutional imperatives. The authors also discuss opportunities for resistance and transformation.

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### Résumé

Lors d'une table ronde tenue dans le cadre de la réunion annuelle de l'American Studies Association en 2013, les auteurs s'interrogent sur l'adoption de l'intersectionnalité dans divers contextes, en considérant comment son potentiel radical peut être coopté et confondu avec « la diversité », « le multiculturalisme », « l'inclusion » et des impératifs institutionnels également néo-libéraux. Les auteurs discutent également des occasions de résistance et de transformation.

In November 2013, on the eve of the American Studies Association's (ASA) decision to boycott Israeli universities and formally join the BDS (Boycott, Disinvestment, and Sanctions) movement, a group of scholars convened a roundtable at the ASA's annual meeting in Washington, D.C. to discuss the state(s) of intersectionality. Amid the cacophony of discourse on BDS, settler colonialism, and the aftermath of the Global Economic Crisis, we considered how the complexity of contemporary inequalities necessitates an active and activist-oriented intersectional critique. From across disciplines, institutions, and career stages, we offered experimental and even contentious cartographies of intersectionality as the field of intersectionality studies confronts and is confronted by post-Crisis re-orderings of power, privilege, and inequity. What follows is an abridged transcript of our two-hour conversation organized around intersectionality's precarious travels into disciplinary and institutional spaces. We do not reach consensus—it was not our goal nor the outcome of the dialogue—but, in different ways, we all consider how intersectionality's critical interventions may be co-opted by and incorporated into neoliberal social and institutional formations. Finally, we interrogate how contemporary deployments of intersectionality may or may not resist superficial "multiculturalism," "diversity," and other forms of symbolic social transformation that obfuscate the material reality of deep—and exacerbating—inequities.

Linked by a commitment to the critical study of how race and intersecting social systems function as dimensions on which life chances are unfairly and unequally distributed, the following scholars participated in this dialogue: the group's convener, Patrick Grzanka, is an interdisciplinary social scientist whose work investigates social inequalities at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. His research explores how both scientists and the lay public transform affect into knowledge and practices. Rajani Bhatia is trained in women's studies and brings a transnational feminist perspective to science and technology studies where her research has investigated the complex politics of assisted reproduction. Mel Michelle Lewis has spent her entire career in women's studies and is an expert on the embodiment of intersectionality in pedagogical spaces, specifically the undergraduate-level classroom. Sheri Parks, originally trained in mass communication studies, is an interdisciplinary scholar and public intellectual whose definitive work on the figure

of the strong Black woman is internationally renowned. Joshua Woodfork, who moderates the dialogue, is an academic administrator and qualitative researcher whose dissertation project explored the life histories of parents of biracial children. Finally, our dialogue was recorded and transcribed by University of Maryland doctoral candidate Michael Casiano who studies the financial practices that produced profoundly racialized poverty in Baltimore, Maryland.

**Joshua Woodfork:** As we emerge from the wreckage of the Great Recession, we're preoccupied by questions of how to respond to new cartographies of inequality. In the face of emergent, elusive forms of discrimination, displacement, and gentrification, how do we chart the frontiers of intersectionality so we might disrupt the neoliberal commodification of diversity and a simultaneous disinvestment of marginalized communities? How does intersectionality support marginalized communities and marginalized people? In Patrick Grzanka's book *Intersectionality: A Foundations and Frontiers Reader*, Bonnie Thornton Dill (2014) states: "The new frontiers are new not because there are new inequalities, although there certainly are some, but because old inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, among others, are manifested in new ways and require new tools to examine, expose, and dismantle them" (342). Each of you has forged unique sets of tools to do the work of dismantling complex inequalities, which reflects the diversity of ways in which scholars and activists can both conceptualize and do intersectionality. My first question is: how did you arrive at intersectionality in your work, scholarship, teaching, and activism and was there a particular text or event that catalyzed this kind of thinking for you or was it always there?

**Sheri Parks:** I basically *am* intersectionality. I would argue that we *all* are. That is actually how I arrived at it, and you'll hear me argue several times that intersectionality is an abstraction and that we really need to be focusing on it as a tool of discourse to explain the lived life where we are *all* intersectionality. It's pretty obvious as a Black woman that intersectionality speaks to me, but it speaks to all of us in pretty much the same way. I really did arrive at it as a way to explain me to me, to explain my life, and particularly the way that people

were coming at me in a particular way. I'm the Associate Dean for Research, Interdisciplinary Scholarship, and Programming at the University of Maryland, College Park, and I not only work for the chair of American Studies, but also for Dean Bonnie Thornton Dill. The Arts and Humanities Center for Synergy was launched in December 2013. It has since been recognized by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences as a national leader in advancing the conversation about the roles of the Arts and Humanities in the world. When Joshua said to think about intersectionality and to do this work, for me, an important part of that is to *do*. Often, for those of us in the room who are working on the ground, intersectionality becomes a different thing.

**Patrick Grzanka:** I'm Patrick Grzanka and my academic career began at the University of Maryland. I was very fortunate to arrive at intersectionality as a paradigm, as a rhetoric, and as a tool early in my graduate school career. The summer in between college and graduate school, I decided to attend the University of Maryland to study with Sheri Parks who ultimately directed my dissertation. I went to graduate school thinking I wanted to study race and representation and I did that for quite some time, but I came into graduate school having recently come out as a queer man and I had a hunch that the questions I was asking about race were more complicated and needed to be more complicated than the way I had initially articulated them. I was very fortunate because at work and at school, then, my life was surrounded by Black feminists who were helping me to understand and to explain—and this echoes Sheri's comment—something that I always felt and I was increasingly feeling as I was coming into myself as a queer person who then had a different relationship to power and privilege than I had had before in my life, which was identifying as a straight white man. That's where it began and it has become an essential tool for me to do the work that I do and that's why this book came about and why it was my first book project. For me, Black feminist thought is its origins and it needs to remain intersectionality's center.

**Rajani Bhatia:** I am Rajani Bhatia and I situate myself as an interdisciplinary scholar at the cross-sites of women's, gender, and sexuality studies and science and technology studies. I also was a graduate student at the

University of Maryland in the Department of Women's Studies. Intersectionality was so taken for granted there because it theoretically undergirded the analyses, assumptions, and ideas of our field as practiced in that particular location. It was something that I didn't explicitly engage with until the arrival of renewed theoretical interest in the term around 2007 with scholars such as Kathy Davis (2008), Jennifer Nash (2008), and Jasbir Puar (2007, 2012) returning back to that concept to think about what it has and has not done and how it has traveled. It's more in this second phase of reassessment that I more actively engaged the term.

**Melissa Lewis:** I'm Mel Lewis, I'm an assistant professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Goucher College in Baltimore, and I situate my work at the intersections of women, gender, and sexuality studies in Black queer studies and Black feminist thought. I work specifically on pedagogy and performing the body-as-text in the classroom around race, gender, and sexuality. Goucher is also my alma mater so I've returned home to teach. I did have a cathartic undergraduate experience with intersectionality that echoes some of what you said, Sheri, about being able to explain myself to myself. In a 100-level class in the reading packet, we had the Combahee River Collective (1977) and I'm sure most of you are familiar with that reading, "The Black Feminist Statement." I learned, for the first time, being from rural, coastal Alabama, that other Black lesbians existed! I did not know that so I went right out to the thrift store and I bought a dashiki and I was running around campus with it on. It was this kind of recognition of the intersection of this experience on the page and recognizing that there was a history for it. Then I also went to graduate school at the University of Maryland working with Bonnie Thornton Dill and these intersectional scholars who are so very well known. As Rajani said, it really was just a part of our framework and so looking and working on scholarship that very specifically fused together the experiential in terms of race, gender, and sexuality really made clear that an intersectional approach was necessary.

**Bhatia:** Just to add to that, I'm at the State University of New York in Albany and there's a class called "Classism, Racism, and Sexism" that some faculty refer to informally as the "intersectionality" class. It was a little

jarring for me at first, like, what? There's *one* class on intersectionality?

**Woodfork:** Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) have argued that intersectionality is best thought of as kind of an analytic disposition rather than a singular set of approaches or one particular genealogy. From this perspective, much work that does not use the term “intersectionality” may be thought of as intersectional so long as it takes the relationships among systems of oppression seriously and critically. I'm thinking here of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's meta-language argument about thinking about race even though it's not named. Do you use the term intersectionality routinely in your own writing or teaching? Do you feel any type of particular affinity toward the term or does it go by another name in your work, scholarship, pedagogy, or activism? It also may be helpful to think about what categories you define when you're thinking about intersectionality. Are some categories of difference privileged, are they equal, or are they simultaneously active?

**Lewis:** I do use the term intersectionality based on my training and I think that that feels very comfortable for me. In my teaching, I also use terms, such as “interlocking,” which my colleague at Goucher, Kelly Brown Douglas, also uses. In terms of thinking about the way in which identity functions as this kind of lived experience thing that we have initiated, I do also think about “constellations,” “axes,” and “co-constitution” to highlight the ways different identities intersect and co-constitute one another. Also, asserting contextual identities is important so that we're not always thinking about identity as a fixed experience or a fixed phenomenon, but that we might think about behavior versus identity. When we're thinking about intersections, are we always only thinking about racial categories and these other static social categories or can we also bring in, for instance, men who sleep with men, women who sleep with women, and these other behavior-based categories (if we even want to call them categories) or experiences that might ask us to negotiate what intersectionality is differently?

**Bhatia:** I don't routinely use the term in my writing, although, like Mel, I'm constantly using terms such as “co-constitution” and “co-construction.” There may be ways in which I'm actually saying “intersectionality,”

but not using that particular term. In any case, I would like, if I may, to give a little bit of background on the use of intersectionality in science and technology studies (STS). I tried to look at the extent to which the word “intersectionality” is explicitly taken up in three main journals of science and technology studies: *Science as Culture*; *Science, Technology, and Human Values*; and *Social Studies of Science*. I did a keyword search covering the past 20 years and found that there were only four articles in that time period that explicitly drew on intersectionality. This doesn't mean that intersectionality wasn't happening—at least, not under that name—but those were the explicit references. Among the authors of those four articles, there was a general consensus that there is a lack of intersectional work within STS. For example, one scholar, Ingunn Moser (2006), states that “There is growing concern that we seem unable to address more than one difference at a time, thus failing to interrogate enactments of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in science, technology, and medicine” (537). Like Moser, Ulf Mellström (2009), another Scandinavian scholar, critiques a lack of intersectional work in STS, saying that, “In other words, if, in theory, gender and technology are co-produced, so are ethnicity and technology, age and technology, sexuality and technology, and class and technology. Still, these latter dimensions of cross-cultural comparison and intersectional understanding are generally absent from STS research, and gender and technology studies particularly, with a few notable exceptions” (888). These scholars seem to suggest that intersectionality isn't happening enough in STS. In my own work, I bring a transnational feminist perspective to biomedicalization and only now have begun to wonder about the implications of taking intersectionality for granted. What are the implications of not explicitly mentioning it, especially in a male-dominated field such as STS? After all, I'm drawing on what Kathy Davis (2008) says “has been heralded as one of the most important contributions to feminist scholarship” (67) without naming it. Also, in looking through a lot of work in STS, I see that, if intersectionality is not directly or explicitly referenced, it's often replaced with “feminism”—a sort of deflated and overly expansive proxy. And that has interesting implications as well.

**Grzanka:** As I was listening to Rajani and Mel, I was reminded of the use of other terms that sometimes func-

tion as placeholders for intersectionality. In STS, they have “co-production.” This is a term from a woman of color scholar, Sheila Jasanoff (2004), who gave the field this concept and now it is ubiquitous in STS. Co-production is *not* intersectionality though. Co-production refers to the specific ways in which STS scholars understand knowledge projects as they are made and enacted. It is not a critique of structural inequalities. It does not theorize a matrix of domination. It does not imagine the historicity of shifting oppressions. And so, I also use “co-constitution” in my work, but I rarely use the word “co-production.” My disciplinary location now is at the crossroads of sociology, science and technology studies, and psychology. For me, in those disciplines, which have differentially taken up intersectionality, it’s very important for me to be expressly clear about what I’m doing and what I mean so as to *not* be confused across those interdisciplinary boundaries where intersectionality might not even have traveled or if it has traveled has changed in ways that might not reflect what it is that I intend for it to do. The biggest trouble that is brought up in psychology in particular is around identity (see Grzanka and Miles 2016). If a psychologist hears you talking about the co-constitution of identity categories, the way that psychologists understand what identity is—as a developmental process, perhaps as a stage that one goes through in life, as a form of identity that can be expressed demographically, or through traditional empirical methods—that’s quite different from the way that identity has been used by scholars in intersectionality studies. One of the things that I reflect on in the book is the debates around the word “identity” that Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) have recently reflected on. What they stressed is that intersectionality is *not* a theory of identity; it is a critique of structures. That speaks very much to the sociological origins of intersectionality. For me, I find myself using the word “identity” less and less—not because I’m not talking about identities—but so that when the word “identity” gets deployed, it doesn’t lead people to think that I’m doing something different from what I am. The term remains really important. The last thing I’ll say is that I think that some potentially dangerous political work happens when intersectionality becomes so mainstreamed or taken up in other disciplines where people say: “Well, yeah, it’s a structural critique of power, that’s all we need to say. We don’t need the word.” Unfortunately, I think what that

does, intentionally or not, is that it elides, actively, the real genealogy of women of color feminism that produced the theory. I wonder about the long-term ramifications of that decision not to use the word “intersectionality,” and by “wonder,” I guess I actually mean I’m quite suspicious of the effects that that could have.

**Parks:** Okay, so maybe you’re suspicious of what I’m about to say! I tend to use the term when I’m speaking to an audience like this, of other scholars. In my teaching and in my activism, I tend to find the word “intersectionality” to be complex. I find that it gets in the way of other levels of abstraction. The danger of intersectionality is that it becomes very mechanistic. You heard me use the term “synergy” a minute ago. “Synergy” is a word that’s used in philosophy and theology, but also in the sciences; what it means is that when you have multiple things that come together, something happens. There’s an interaction and the result is something that you couldn’t have gotten by just adding those pieces together. For me, I think that that is often happening when you move away, as Patrick just did, from identity to what moves around identity, to what we say, what we do, what we think, how we live, how we breathe, then I think we have to use it at its most sophisticated level. And I’m not saying that intersectionality prohibits that, but I think if we don’t keep all of those balls in the air then it’s easy to dismiss it or make it one of those pieces.

**Bhatia:** First of all, Patrick, I’m not sure that Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) were saying that intersectionality wasn’t also a theory of identity. I think that they were saying that it wasn’t *only* a theory of identity. They wanted to highlight that there has been an overemphasis on intersectionality as a theory of identity and they’re trying to return back to some of the structural elements that were always there. One of the things that I think is interesting again in respect to STS, where we’ve seen a lot of social constructivism and radical constructivism theories in use, is a tendency to move away from identity completely. To reject identity, to paint it as a category to be wary of in general. I think that intersectionality, in my view, didn’t actually do that; it just thought about identity more complexly.

**Grzanka:** Well put, Rajani. In my book, what I try in the unit on identity is to foreground the debates around

identity, not to foreclose upon them. The most important thing to sociologists is structural analysis and that's a fair position, but I think what we see there are that some of the tensions emerge in these cross-disciplinary elaborations of intersectionality. I think Devon Carbado (2013) and Catharine MacKinnon (2013) make a more explicit critique of identity. Albeit differently, they both go so far as to say that all of these identities we're talking about are the products of structures—oppressions' most ossified effects. I think that I try to take—and this is probably my American Studies background—a little bit more of a multi-directional approach to that and I think that may also speak to what Rajani said: that intersectionality's foremothers were never saying that it was just about identity.

**Woodfork:** How have the events of the past five to ten years, particularly the Great Recession and the political economy of the Obama presidency, changed the things that you study? How have you responded to these shifts in your work? How have your respective fields been slow to react to transforming landscapes of neoliberal inequalities or have you perceived meaningful innovations? I've worked in a few different institutions over the few years, and the debates in terms of funding, and our pedagogies and the way that students learn in terms of attention spans, etc. are all relevant here. Has this caused anything in your work or teaching to change in the way that you look at some of your scholarship or in terms of making meaning out of the things you do in your activism?

**Parks:** I think that there's an urgency to my work that I think has always been there, but it's more activist now. I started teaching classes in social activism and popular culture with the idea that students learn how to become change agents—intellectual change agents so that, like this conversation, it's moving from the theoretical to the action. I started out as an English major and didn't feel that I had the luxury to theorize so I added popular culture and so I've realized just recently that I've made the loop again—that I no longer have the luxury to theorize and I no longer have the luxury of teaching students to theorize. Immediately they have to learn—and then you get right back to complexity—the messiness of what happens when you go out to the field. There are people who *need* this and need us to do this *work*.

I have a book called *Fierce Angels* (2010, 2013), which started out as an academic book—you know, 300 pages, letter of understanding from an editor—and I was giving talks from it and it was *really* about intersectionality, really about Black women's lived lives. Women were coming up to me in tears saying, "I can't wait to read your book," and I couldn't say, "You won't be able to." So I rewrote it, which was harder than it seemed like it would be in the beginning. I constantly get reminded of the urgency of the work that everybody in this room does. There are people out there *waiting for it* and need it. It makes it more interesting, but it also makes it much more difficult.

**Grzanka:** I thought that maybe I would just read this line from Bonnie Thornton Dill's (2014) epilogue, "Frontiers," in my book. She closes the book with this: "The challenge for intersectional scholars today is not to trap ourselves in a tower of ideas but to make sure that our scholarly debates about terminology, approaches, and assumptions are meaningful and productive so that we can apply both our old and new insights to generate strategies to address experiences of injustice on the ground. Ultimately, the value in identifying new scholarly frontiers in scholarship and writing about intersectionality is to reveal new understandings and approaches that help us do the work of reducing inequalities and expanding social justice" (343). I think that that reflects, in a beautiful way, the pragmatist origins of intersectionality as a justice project.

**Parks:** There is work that only *we* will do and only we *can* do and it's important for that work to be done so that we and other people can build on it.

**Bhatia:** I think I'm also going to defer to Mel to think about what's happening in the classroom. In terms of the last five to ten years, the Great Recession, and impacts on my own particular work—my work has centered on fertility clinics and, as is very typical during economically depressed times, people tend not to have as many children. They defer having children and those who might have sought In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) also put it off, especially given all the financial constraints. A lot of the clinics that I was working with in the past couple of years were trying to find ways to attract new consumers and expand their market bases. Those clinics that

might have, maybe five to ten years ago, shunned off ethically questionable methods, such as sex selection, began offering those services to stay open under conditions of economic restraint. That is a topic that I was focusing on, sex selection in particular. Also many young women finding themselves in debt in these times have also brought a boon to fertility clinics in the sense that they show up in greater numbers to sell or wanting to sell their eggs for cash. These are just some of the trends that I have seen. There are a number of shifts occurring in inequality related to reproduction and these might have been some of the things that Bonnie Thornton Dill (2014) was talking about, some of the frontiers. Part of it is just being aware of how these things are shifting and thinking about how we can apply intersectionality to these changes.

**Lewis:** I'm at a liberal arts institution so we're absolutely under siege in terms of academic capitalism and this shift in seeing students and parents, in particular, as consumers. All of the interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary fields are under scrutiny in the current climate because we are looking at bodies in peril and that is not an economically lucrative position or practice. Also, I think we're having a very hard time—and I don't think we should have to do this—but we're having a very hard time articulating what we do as skillset, in economic terms, that goes along with being able to be an intersectional scholar. In terms of faculty, I do research on Black queer feminist pedagogues and, in the course of that—doing case studies, being in people's classrooms, doing in-depth interviews—I think that our bodies are also in peril in terms of being in the academy and having these particular intersections that are very threatening because we have disrupted a particular narrative and so I think that now that the economic status of the institution has really intervened in intellectual practice, in hiring practice, and all of these things. Our diversity is being used in particular ways where we're seeing—not that there wasn't tokenism before—but now we can only afford to have one token. In terms of the job market and in terms of being that two-for, three-for, four-for, however many “fors” person that can be on the panel, to do service, to be on the committee, to perform whatever that labor is—I think that labor is happening on our bodies a little bit differently. When the university imagined itself to be able to have a different kind of

population, things changed a bit. Now, the institution can only pay one person to be the diversity quotient and who that person is and what labor their body has to do has shifted a bit too.

**Woodfork:** What have been the most significant kinds of resistances to intersectionality that you've encountered in your work and teaching? In the past few years, I've been on committees thinking about accreditation and learning goals. What does intersectionality look like in the context of institutional assessment? Although we say we appreciate interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches, we still default to the same categories. But, as Mel was saying, it's different when you're actually *embodying* what you're teaching versus someone else *choosing* to take this approach. Then there are differences, of course, in how intersectionality is received in terms of teaching evaluations, promotion and tenure, etc.

**Lewis:** Both myself and the faculty that I have researched and worked with do implicate themselves and their bodies as a part of their pedagogical practice. Sometimes suspicion arises that instructors are trying to sway students in some way and that we have a stake in doing that. And, of course, I have a stake in that! When those types of questions arise, I think myself and the other pedagogues kind of jump right in. We say: “Yes, this is about me and this is about you, too.” We have to implicate *them* [our students]. In terms of practice, asking them to apply it—asking them to apply an intersectional lens and turn the mirror on themselves—those are some ways in which I think we are addressing the pushback.

**Parks:** You reminded me of an African-American TA in another department who asked me how she could become neutral in the classroom. It was a very sad moment—she not only did not want to bring all of her categories, she did not want to bring *any* category because she felt that that would make her the most effective instructor and she was not happy when I told her that that was impossible. I think that that tyranny—and even in departments like American Studies where we are multidisciplinary and intersectional, like Women's Studies, by definition—there's still this pull of this image of the “objective”—of the distant, of the “without” category

that has its own kind of tyranny. I think the tyranny of categories themselves become part of the resistance that somebody said very early on, this is hard for people to wrap their heads around. They institutionalize their inability to wrap their brains around it.

**Bhatia:** I don't know exactly if I can call these resistances—but there appears to be a tension between, on the one hand, the intersectional relationships between sex, gender, and sexuality and, on the other hand, some transactivisms that have a stake in maintaining them separate. For example, my students will insist that “Well, my sex has nothing to do with my gender, which has nothing to do with my sexuality.” So it's more of a tension around how we understand and honor the very real stakes in that kind of thinking, teaching, and learning and, at the same time, not view those separations as contradictory to intersectionality.

**Woodfork:** So we talked a little bit about the pushback in terms of intersectionality in the classroom, but I also want to broaden this to think about how it has become synonymous, in terms of the mainstream, with diversity and inclusion. How can intersectional activists work against “inclusion” and “place at the table” trajectories that divorce minority-led social movements from the political critiques that launched them in the first place?

**Parks:** I think there's a danger to mainstreaming because intersectionality can become impotent if it doesn't do anything anymore. And, of course, the neoliberal direction would be to shake it and shake it and shake it until there's nothing left. We've seen that over and over again.

**Grzanka:** We've got never-before-seen levels of attention in the discipline of psychology to diversity and multiculturalism, including what's called “LGBT-affirmative therapy.” In applied psychology, which sort of owes it to queer people to be better than it has been, we *need* this—we need people to be prepared to do good therapy with sexual minorities and gender non-conforming clients. But, enter the context of neoliberalism in which this push to “multiculturalize” psychology gets lots of institutional attention for doing very, very little. For example, in this course on basic helping skills, we added to week 15 a unit on all the people of

color, all the queer people, and everybody else we can think of—and that's constituting multicultural competency. On the other hand, we have the new “conscience clause,” which I would argue is absolutely a neoliberal technology. Psychology graduate students are suing their universities saying, “I should not have to learn that to become a psychologist” and specifically what they're saying is they shouldn't have to learn LGBT-affirmative therapy. They're saying, “I should not have to do this kind of work because it's against my religious beliefs and I'm never going to do it anyway after you license me. I'll never treat a client who wants to talk to me about a sexual orientation or gender identity issue.” One might think the conscience clauses would get no ground, but they have made some headwinds in the U.S.—and not just in Red States. We've got some weird stuff going on where LGBT affirmative therapy is becoming this add-on to psychology's understanding of multiculturalism and we absolutely need intersectionality's insights to do some serious critique and activism around that curricular move and about what that means for the discipline in terms of science and how people are actually being treated by psychotherapists. And then, simultaneously, we have people opting out of doing any of this and potentially getting degrees by saying, “I'm not going to learn anything about *that*. I'm going to learn objective, neutral psychology.”

**Bhatia:** There are all kinds of intersectionality training tools that you can find on government websites, such as the government of Australia, which has a whole section that deals with family violence. You can download curriculum modules on intersectionality that include intersectionality exercises. What I find is that most often, once again, there's an overwhelming focus on intersectionality as individual identity. It's an improvement on mainstream notions of multiculturalism and diversity since ideas of privilege and oppression are kind of wedded to intersectionality, but these trainings tend to deplete the political content of the term. These mainstreaming efforts overemphasize, once again, intersectionality as something that only has to do with individuals rather than structures and systems. You just don't see *that* kind of training going on.

**Grzanka:** Even as just a word, “intersectionality,” is not at all like the words “diversity” and “multiculturalism.”



Those words are about feeling good. They have an affective tone to them that's about spaces getting better, even if it's just symbolic. But the word "intersectionality" was created as a way to describe *oppression*. So when intersectionality gets pulled into disciplines and institutions—like the training modules Rajani referenced—as a rhetoric through which to describe "diversity," that feels like a moment of danger. That feels like a challenge for us and a key site of neoliberalization.

**Lewis:** Intersectionality is an active undertaking. When we think of multiculturalism, we have the potluck or have some kind of festival where the students are dancing around in costumes and we're all involved! As Rajani was saying, when intersectionality is approached this way, you can actively *not* do it, or you can deny it or, you know, kind of check the box so that you don't have to do it. Whereas I see intersectionality as an active inquiry, it is also this kind of framework that requires that you have to *do something* with it. It's a working tool. Diversity itself has been framed as: you add a few people and everything's fine. Because intersectionality is a lens, it's a framework, it's a tool—we have to *do* something with it. My hope is that that gives it a particular kind of energy and a particular situatedness within the academy, and also within an activist space, to recognize that we have to deploy it in some ways (to use a really militaristic term). It's something that has to be deployed so that we can't simply add a few people and stir, but that we actually must practice it and that it is an active position to take. I think intersectionality now requires us to go another step so that we are engaging this conversation—not just about power, and privilege, and situatedness. We're very wedded to these individual positionalities, but we can simultaneously engage sexism, racism, and structural oppressions. Then we're not always only talking about these individual locations, but we have a much broader analysis that allows us to go beyond that and recognize the relationships so that intersectionality then is a way to build coalitions or to recognize alliances.

**Woodfork:** Thinking about the continued structural barriers to teaching complex intersectional research, teaching, and activism that crosses these different disciplinary boundaries, what do you see as the most important frontiers of intersectionality in higher education in general?

**Parks:** This conference has been about different types of prices, and certainly one of them is in higher education, where there's a coming decline in 18-year olds and people will be scrambling. One of the movements in order to validate our existence has been toward civic engagement—of moving undergraduates into the world. What I see is that when (our) students move into the world, in order just to explain what they're encountering, they come back to intersectionality or something like intersectionality. My student Stephanie Stevenson Akoumany has been doing a three-year longitudinal study in Baltimore City with adolescent girls. Certainly, when she went in, she knew she would be dealing with because of the school, race and social class, and gender. *They* dragged her into sexuality—and different types of sexuality. There's been this type of fanning out where, in order to—she was doing intervention and ethnography at the same time—in order to just stay where they were, where they were moving, in order to make sense of that, she became more and more intersectional. I think that's what happens when you talk about the lived life. If you are doing the *real* work—not just the work you came to do—then intersectionality becomes a really important tool.

**Bhatia:** I am thinking about the neoliberalization of universities and, again, one of the big pressures that we face is trying to internationalize the universities and make them these global spaces in order to attract international students. Getting streams of new income is a lot of what it's about. Sometimes it's hard to see that imperative in relation to what in Women and Gender Studies we know as the radical decolonizing function of transnational feminist theory. So I wonder if we can bring intersectionality to bear somehow in order to try to push back against this happy global multicultural diversity because now it's our job to create global citizens. How do we do that? How do we make that part of the frontier of intersectionality?

**Lewis:** I'm a chair of the Lesbian Caucus within the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) and we've been doing these inter-caucus projects in part to represent to the NWSA body that there are political commitments that cross caucuses. The caucuses are constituted around identity groups for the most part. Some of them are very historical: the Women of Color Caucus,

the Lesbian Caucus. And some are newer and are more situated around areas of study; for example, the South Asian Women's Caucus is an identity group, but it is also about transnational feminist theory as produced by and about South Asian women. The NWSA has supported us in pulling together our resources and having panels, doing social and artistic projects at conferences, etc., so that we are performing and embodying intersectionality within the organization and we're kind of modelling and illustrating that we have responsibilities to each other. We have these connections that are not always made clear. I think that intersectionality within the NWSA is a practice and it's a theoretical framework that we use and teach and work with in terms of our research. But to actually *make* these connections is another thing. I think that that's one new frontier: we are *doing* intersectionality and we are *doing* interdisciplinary work, but we're also highlighting the responsibility that we have to one another and really facilitating that kind of community. That is one of the new practices that we have tried to put in place so that we're able to do the work that we need to do, and we can do it together, and we're not functioning so separately.

*The intervening years since this roundtable have underscored both the continued relevance of intersectionality to social movement politics and social justice-focused intellectual inquiry as well as the persistent risks of intersectionality's dilution and cooptation. If, as Parks suggests, "we are all intersectionality," then contemporary anti-Black state violence in the U.S., homonationalism, austerity measures in Europe, and ongoing refugee crises worldwide remind us that the embodiment of intersectionality means very different things for differently situated subjects. Even activist responses to state violence against Black lives have sometimes obfuscated intersectionality in ways that have necessitated uniquely Black feminist responses. Kimberlé Crenshaw's #SayHerName campaign, for example, highlights the consistency with which quotidian state violence against Black women becomes both normalized and erased relative to Black men (see also Nash 2016). Recent academic work has also taken up the issue of Black women's erasure, as Vivian May (2015) and others (e.g., Bilge 2013) have critiqued women's and gender studies for white-washing and politically neutralizing intersectionality as it becomes even more diffuse and pervasive in contemporary feminist and cultural*

*inquiry. As Herman Gray (2013) has argued, representation and visibility in the context of neoliberalism does not necessarily correspond with liberation; intersectionality's mainstreaming has not been immune to these dynamics and has raised new questions about how including intersectionality often seems to correspond with excluding Black feminism—and Black women. We remain particularly skeptical of institutional deployments of intersectionality that engage in the erasure of Black feminism's vision of radical social transformation in exchange for the politics of diversity and inclusion. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the most generative work on intersectionality today emanates from activist projects such as #SayHerName, UndocuQueer, and other manifestations of political intersectionality and coalition-building that link transgender, immigration, and disability issues to intersectionality's traditional roots in the study and contestation of racism, sexism, and capitalism. One of the things that is most consistent throughout our roundtable is our shared emphasis on social action and social transformation. Perhaps, then, one of the most effective strategies for resisting the neoliberalization and depoliticization of intersectionality is to keep doing what Parks called the "real work" of activism and resistance over and above debating intersectionality's more esoteric academic and, therefore exclusive, articulations.*

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# Does Intersectional Training Endure? Examining Trends in a Global Database of Women's and Gender Studies Graduates (1995-2010)

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**Michele Tracy Berger** is Associate Professor in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and the Director of the Faculty Fellows Program at UNC-Chapel Hill's Institute of the Arts and Humanities. Her books include *Workable Sisterhood: The Political Journey of Stigmatized Women with HIV/AIDS* (Princeton University Press 2004) and the co-edited collections *Gaining Access: A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Qualitative Researchers* (Altamira Press 2003) and *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class and Gender* (University of North Carolina Press 2010). *Transforming Scholarship: Why Women's and Gender Studies Students Are Changing Themselves and The World* is her most recent co-authored book (Routledge 2011).

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## **Abstract:**

The undergraduate experience remains a cornerstone in the foundation of Women's and Gender Studies yet scholars know little about how graduates retain and demonstrate highly valued skills and concepts like intersectionality. This paper intervenes by answering the questions: How does intersectionality show up in graduates' reflections on their training? How do graduates utilize intersectional thinking in their personal and professional lives? Drawing on quantitative data from a large, institutionally diverse and global survey of Women's and Gender studies graduates, I demonstrate that intersectional training does endure and that graduates use intersectional concepts in the personal and professional life, in complex ways, long after graduation.

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## **Résumé**

L'expérience de premier cycle reste un pilier dans la fondation des études sur le genre et les femmes, mais les chercheurs savent peu de choses sur la façon dont les diplômés retiennent et manifestent des compétences et des concepts hautement appréciés comme l'intersec-

tionnalité. Cet article intervient en répondant aux questions suivantes : Comment l'intersectionnalité se manifeste-t-elle dans les réflexions des diplômés sur leur formation? Comment les diplômés utilisent-ils la pensée intersectionnelle dans leur vie personnelle et professionnelle? En me servant des données quantitatives tirées d'une enquête de grande envergure, de grande diversité institutionnelle et mondiale sur les diplômés en études sur le genre et les femmes, je démontre que la formation intersectionnelle persiste et que les diplômés font appel à des concepts intersectionnels dans leur vie personnelle et professionnelle, de façon complexe, longtemps après l'obtention du diplôme.

## Introduction

In the field of women's and gender studies, one of the often overlooked areas demonstrating the importance and value of intersectionality is how graduates reflect on their training. Intersectionality is a defining theoretical rubric in the field of women's and gender studies as evidenced through scholarship production and curriculum development at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Howard and Allen 2000; Weber 2004; McCall 2005; Berger and Guidroz 2009). Intersectionality has a long intellectual history with its roots in the early nineteenth century writings of Anna Julia Cooper and others that argued that Black women's realities were intertwined with sexism and racism (see Guy-Sheftall 1995; May 2007; Hancock 2016). Multiracial feminist activism and theorizing over the past 40 years brought this body of knowledge into academic communities (see Dill 1979; Davis 1981; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Chow 1987; Crenshaw 1989).

The concept of intersecting oppressions, commonly known as intersectionality, was highlighted as a unique facet of learning among the first women's studies undergraduates ever surveyed (see Luebeke and Reilly 1995). In describing what potential students gain through majoring or minoring in women's and gender studies, many departments use language that emphasizes intersectionality as a defining feature of their training and education. The undergraduate experience remains a cornerstone in the foundation of women's and gender studies yet scholars know little, as a field, about how students learn, retain, and demonstrate highly valued concepts like intersectionality. Complicating this issue is that intersectionality, while widely debated regarding epistemological and methodological questions, has not been assessed in ways that help educators understand if and how students employ it after they graduate and which benefits may accrue to them because of their knowledge of intersectionality. It is also unclear if intersectionality is primarily thought of by graduates as a concept, skill, set of practices, or all of the above. This gap in the assessment of intersectionality reflects a larger issue of the lack of shared definitions of women's and gender studies concepts and/or skills at the undergraduate level (Friedman 2002) and the lack of empirical data on these topics (Dever 2002).

This paper addresses this gap by answering the following questions: How does intersectionality show

up in graduates' reflections about their women's and gender studies education and what do they say about it? How do graduates utilize intersectional thinking in their personal and professional lives? How translatable is intersectionality to the professional world? Finally, how does this knowledge help educators reflect on their pedagogical choices and approaches in teaching intersectionality?

For the purposes of this analysis, I am working under two assumptions. One is that the majority of women's and gender studies students are introduced to the concept of intersectionality at some point in their education. The second assumption is that students are taught to have a working knowledge of some of the basic analytical tools that comprise intersectionality that include (but are not limited to): exploring and unpacking relations of domination and subordination, examining privilege and agency, understanding the politics of location, conceptualizing the implications of subjects being simultaneously privileged and oppressed, and the legacy of multiracial feminist theorizing (see May 2012).<sup>1</sup> Although intersectionality, as Vivian M. May (2012) states, is neither a "static or unified" set of intellectual practices, it does have a recurring set of arguments commonly presented in women's and gender studies undergraduate teaching. Guided by these assumptions, I employ the term "intersectional thinking" as a broad umbrella. It includes the above facets of intersectionality and takes into account the varying styles and approaches used to teach intersectionality in the women's and gender studies classroom.

In this paper, I present analyses of survey data collected from a non-probability, but institutionally and globally diverse, large sample of women's and gender studies graduates (graduating from colleges and universities from 1995 to 2010). Over 30 countries are represented in the sample. I demonstrate that intersectional training plays an important role in graduates' lives and that they value it and draw on this training in their personal and professional life, in complex ways, long after graduation.

I first examine the responses that students report based on the question: "What is the most important concept gained from your women's and gender studies degree?" I then examine the responses students report based on the question: "What is the most important skill gained from your women's and gender studies

degree?” For each of these questions, I highlight where intersectionality shows up. Finally, I analyze open-ended survey responses for how students discuss their employment of intersectionality, primarily as a concept, in their professional and personal lives. I also reflect on the possible benefits of conceptualizing intersectionality as a skill or set of skills. This paper provides new empirical and theoretical lenses on the continued institutionalization of intersectionality as reflected in the experiences of the second generation of women’s and gender studies graduates.

### Literature Review

There are several reasons why little empirical work has been done on women’s and gender studies students’ use of intersectionality. The reasons cluster around the field’s emphasis on graduate education and the lack of research on concepts and skills in women’s and gender studies.

For the last decade women’s and gender studies has been involved in debates about graduate education and the state of the field (see Scott 2008; Wiegman 2002). While this work is necessary, deeply provocative, and thought-provoking, this conversation tends to overshadow other important, and I would argue, immediate work that is before us as a community of educators. This emphasis on graduate education has left a significant gap in understanding and assessing undergraduate utilization of the field’s concepts and skills. Why is this important? Across the globe, the undergraduate experience remains a cornerstone in the foundation of women’s and gender studies, but there is little empirical data on the concepts and skills women’s and gender students learn and how they translate beyond university experience. In an era of increasing emphasis on assessment within higher education that is used to justify costs, coupled with attacks on the liberal arts and its ability to meaningfully educate and employ graduates, it is advantageous and strategic for interdisciplinary fields, such as women’s and gender studies, to empirically know more about what we do and how well we do it. And, women’s and gender studies is primarily institutionally situated in undergraduate education.

Despite the increased number of doctoral programs in women’s and gender studies (currently 25) and the steady growth of master’s programs in the United States, the numbers of students graduating every year

with an advanced degree pale in comparison to undergraduates. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, on average, about 1,200 students a year graduate with a major, minor, or concentration in women’s and gender studies in the United States. Many women’s and gender studies curricula emphasize intersectionality as a core feature of its training. Many textbooks and readers used in women’s studies classrooms highlight intersectionality as an important analytical tool. Yet, what we know about how graduates use the concepts and skills learned in the women’s and gender studies classroom and integrate them into their professional and personal lives is slim and heavily reliant on anecdotal or small qualitative studies (see Boxer 1998; Lovejoy 1998). This is true for many women’s and gender studies concepts, but especially intersectionality, an epistemological approach that, as May (2012) contends, “impacted curricular, pedagogical, methodological and theoretical work in the field” (156).

Barbara Luebke and Mary Reilly’s (1995) critical text *Women’s Studies Graduates: The First Generation* still serves as foundational in examining skill development grounded in an empirical approach. This book explored the first generation of graduates from 1977-1991. The authors distributed 375 questionnaires to the first wave of women’s studies graduates. Their final sample included 88 women and one man. They found that graduates could clearly identify a range of skills and competencies gained through their major course of study, including developing self-confidence, learning to think critically, understanding the role of difference in women’s lives, and understanding and recognizing interrelated oppressions or intersectionality. The importance of intersections was highlighted throughout graduates’ discussions about the value of the degree. However, *Women’s Studies Graduates* did not include a copy of the survey nor did the authors provide a detailed discussion of their questionnaire and the process by which they coded and analyzed the data. Thus, the study is less methodologically transparent and not replicable.

Given the importance of intersectionality in the field, current and more nuanced work is warranted.

### Methods

The data for this work comes from an online survey of the types of career and employment paths peo-

ple who graduated in women's and gender studies have pursued during the last fifteen years (1995–2010). All data was gathered in 2010. Research participants consisted of adults (18 years of age or older) who completed a major, minor, or concentration in women's and/or gender studies from a college or university either in the United States or internationally. This paper reports on the open-ended survey questions.

### Survey

Respondents were informed of the online survey through an email that was sent to the undergraduate department and program heads of active women's and gender studies departments and programs from which they graduated or through notices posted on various organizations and individuals Facebook page. There is no one standardized list of all women's and gender programs and departments globally. My research team relied on the lists of programs and departments, all of which are located in the U.S., that were maintained through the National Women's Studies Association's (NWSA) website. An email was sent to every institution listed that offered any women's and gender studies curricula at the undergraduate level. My research team also conducted multiple online searches for women's and gender studies programs outside of the U.S. Department chairs and program heads were asked to send an email with the survey (as a link) to the alumni of the program. By contacting all active programs and departments, a purposive, non-random sample was obtained.<sup>2</sup>

The three major areas of the survey included general demographic questions (e.g., age, sex, gender, racial/ethnic identity, country of origin, etc.), the characteristics of the participant's undergraduate degree experience (year that undergraduate degree was completed, type of degree—major, minor, concentration, name and location of college or university for the women's and gender studies degree, internships, etc.), and life after graduation (contact with department or program, opinion on preparation for the job market, assessment of the top skills and concepts learned as part of the degree, as well as any advice for potential women's and gender studies students).

More than 900 participants initiated the survey. Due to attrition (non-completion of the survey), failure to meet study criteria (e.g., degree outside of study time period, a graduate degree in women's and gender

studies, or no degree in women's and gender studies), or lack of response to the question, the final sample size was n=571.

Table 1 displays basic demographic data about the sample. With over 100 institutions represented and over 30 countries, it is the most institutionally and globally diverse sample of women's and gender studies students.

**Table 1**

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA		
Demographic		Percentage
Sex	Female	95%
	Male	4%
	Intersex/Other	1%
Country of Origin	US	82%
	Canada	9%
	Ghana, Germany, South Korea, Australia, Kenya, Russia, Norway, Japan and China, Trinidad, Switzerland and other countries	9%
Race and Ethnicity	Asian/Pacific Islander	3%
	Black/African American	5%
	Hispanic/Latino	3%
	Middle Eastern	>1%
	White	80%
	Other	8%

Percentage of graduates who majored in WGST

61%

### Coding the Data

Coding the data occurred in a multistage process. During the initial phase of coding, I, the primary investigator read through the responses to the questions: “What is the most important concept gained from your women and gender studies degree?” and “What is the most important skill gained from your women’s and gender studies degree?” After reading through the responses, I assigned numerical thematic codes to the cases. Besides coding by the primary researcher, three additional independent coders were given the same coding sheet and then were assessed on intercoder reliability. I also consulted working definitions of commonly taught and assessed concepts and skills in women’s and gender (see Levin 2007).

For this article, I analyzed the open-ended responses to the questions: “How did you use this concept in your personal and professional life?” and “How did you use this skill in either your professional or personal life, or both?” Because of length and richness of the data, these responses were not translated into numeric codes. Instead, I employ a descriptive analysis that contributes to a nuanced understanding of how graduates discuss the influence and use of intersectional thinking in their personal and professional lives.

### Findings

We first turn to the role of intersectionality in top concepts reported by graduates. The research questions guiding this analysis are:

- 1) How does intersectionality show up in questions about concepts and skills?
- 2) How do women’s and gender studies graduates discuss using intersectionality in their professional and personal lives?

**Table 2**  
**Top Five Concepts:**

Gender	N= 279 (49%)
Intersectionality	N=216 (38%)
Inequality	N= 34 (6%)
Equity	N=22 (4%)
Empowerment	N=17 (3%)

The top five concepts that students identify as most meaningful are gender, intersectionality, inequality, equity, and empowerment, in that order. Almost half of the sample (49%) indicated that gender was the most important concept gained during their degree. Thirty-eight percent of respondents cited intersectionality. There is a significant drop from the first two categories to the next three—almost 90% listed either gender or intersectionality. Just 6% of respondents cited inequality (how economic and social rewards are distributed across society unequally) as the most important concept learned. Equity, which includes ideas about compassion, fairness, justice, and equality, was cited by just 4% of graduates. Empowerment refers to ideas about the importance of self-advocacy, as well as advocacy on the behalf of others (i.e., feminist collective struggle), and was cited as important by 3% of respondents. It is striking that intersectionality shows up so strongly here. The emphasis on intersectionality may be a reflection of its increasing importance in undergraduate teaching over the past two decades. I discuss this finding in depth in the discussion section. Now we turn to looking at if intersectionality shows up in reference to a graduate’s skills.

**Table 3**

Critical Thinking	Knowledge	Communication	Awareness	Empowerment
N=262 (45.9%)	N=85 (14.9%)	N=114 (20%)	N=67 (11.7%)	N=33 (5.8%)



Multiple/ Diverse Analytical Perspec- tives	Gender Aware- ness	Speaking	Patience	Leader- ship
Planning and/or Evaluat- ing	Theory	Writing	Tolerance	Persever- ance/ Tenacity
	Research	Listening	Accep- tance	Agency
	Praxis	Inter- personal Skills	Empathy	Autono- my/ Indepen- dence
	Intersec- tionality	Network- ing	Sensitivity	Personal Strength
	Diversity	Equanim- ity	Openness	Assertive- ness
	Ethics			Work Ethic

The skill that was reported with the highest frequency by graduates was critical thinking skills. Almost half of the respondents (46%) indicated that critical thinking was the skill that they attributed to their degree. The second highest reported skill was communication. This skill set included a number of attributes (speaking, writing, listening, networking, and equanimity) and 20% of undergraduates in women’s and gender studies reported this as an important aspect of their degree. The third area of skills reported by graduates was knowledge. This skill was reported by approximately 15% of the sample. The skill coded as knowledge reflects applied ideas about core curriculum. Specifically, topics such as theory, research, and ethics along with gender awareness, intersectionality, and diversity make up this category. The fourth top skill reported was awareness and includes a set of skills that can be seen as interpersonal, including building empathy, developing tolerance, and openness to new ideas. This skill was re-

ported by 11% of the sample. Empowerment is the fifth top skill reported by 5% of the sample. Empowerment includes ideas about praxis, agency, and leadership.

Although graduates identified intersectionality as a top concept learned during their women’s and gender studies training, it was not identified as an important skill. Intersectionality shows up marginally within the “knowledge” skill.

These findings demonstrate the ways in which intersectionality shows up in graduates’ recall of the most important skills and concepts. However, this material alone does not provide a sense of how students use this concept and/or skill nor how it is used beyond their undergraduate career.

We turn now to a descriptive analysis examining the open-ended question: “How does this concept assist you in either your professional or personal life, or both?” Three themes emerged from the descriptive analyses of open-ended questions: professional development, connection to others, and intersectional thinking infusing one’s worldview.

*Theme One: Intersectionality and Professional Development*

The first theme focuses on professional life. Respondents made numerous and specific references to how they apply intersectional thinking in the workplace and their professional lives. Many described it as an asset and something that enhances their ability to be good at their job. They also referred to intersectionality as helping them to be aware of how issues of power, diversity, and privilege are constituted in the workplace. The following quotes are representative of how people described using intersectionality in their professional lives:

It has positioned me in various jobs to take a leadership role in working to make organizational change in areas such as diversity.

These concepts, together, keep me from thinking and writing in rigid binaries and push me to always investigate power dynamics within texts and relationships. Particularly in the ‘development’ or fundraising field, it is crucial to examine power dynamics and avoid the pitfalls of ‘donor-recipient’ binary thinking.

I manage volunteers for [a] Family and Community Health [Center]. We treat clients who are disadvantaged in almost every way. Some volunteers don't understand why they don't 'just get a job' or 'stop going back to him.' Women's Studies gave me vocabulary to explain the contexts in which most of our clients live.

These concepts are empowering for me personally, but also allow me to be more effective in advocacy and empowerment work.

Enables me to understand how multiple oppressions/standpoints affect scholarship applicants in my work, allowing me to serve women more effectively.

It helps me to assess what problems others may face multi-dimensionally; i.e., a patient's mental illness may be related to social factors.

I think it makes me a marketable candidate...I can relate to many people. I understand how the facets of our identity make us all individuals, but how this interconnects all of us.

There is a great deal of occupational diversity in this sample; respondents are entrepreneurs, public sector employees, artists, lawyers, campaign managers, etc. However, there are also a high number of health-care workers (e.g., medical doctors, nurses, researchers, etc.), social service providers, and educators. People from these three professional backgrounds often provided detailed examples about the usefulness of intersectionality. Healthcare workers, ranging from clinicians to midwives to technicians, felt that intersectional analysis was crucial in administering care and thinking about structural inequality. People working in the social service field used the word "justice" to describe how intersectionality helped them relate to clients and problem-solve together. K-12 and college educators talked about its value in a classroom to identify with underserved students' needs and also to bring up issues of difference. Graduate students and professors talked about intersectionality shaping their intellectual interests and providing them with an important foundation for later work. These comments underscore the above points:

I am thinking of applying this concept in my PhD re-

search, which will be heavily focused on how gender and raced relations shape globalized lives in our societies.

Understanding the barriers that are faced by individuals who have intersecting minority identities has been crucial for me. It has helped me be effective both in teaching minority children and in interviewing inmates.

In my professional life, I try seeing issues from multiple perspectives. Particularly, I hold in high regard the stories of the HIV+ people we work with. I am empathetic to the barriers they have faced in every aspect of their lives—including health care access.

Since I am going into urban underserved primary care, this framework will be central and has been central to my understanding of patients' and communities' situations who I work with.

This has helped me immensely in learning how to develop a more equitable healthcare delivery system.

It actually helped form the basis of my dissertation, which is a study of how domestic service was a site of racial formation for domestic workers in nineteenth century New York.

In the field of counselling, clients may be experiencing simultaneously obstacles and privileges. Understanding that this can exist simultaneously better prepares me to assist my clients and understand their needs.

[Intersectionality helps] teaching undergrads, my research, understanding where different people are coming from, understanding power/privilege of others and myself.

### *Theme Two: Intersectionality Strengthens Connection with Others*

The second theme that emerged from the data is that intersectionality gives respondents the tools to connect in a meaningful way with others. Respondents talked about intersectionality as contributing to helping them operate with more compassion, tolerance, and open-mindedness. They also said intersectionality aided awareness of the needs of people who are different than them, contribute to their cultural competency in the world, making it "easier to see where people

are coming from.” Many mentioned that this concept helped them with being a good ally (e.g., cisgender or white). This was often tied to thinking about privilege (especially white privilege) in one’s life. These ideas were conveyed throughout both respondents’ personal and professional lives:

It forces me to consistently think about how/why certain groups are disadvantaged, and reminds me to keep my own privilege in check.

Helps me to see the ways in which things are connected. It also helps me to recognize my class, race, and religious privilege instead of focusing on the fact that I ‘don’t’ have gender privilege.

It helps me be a more aware person, and allows me to see the connections between social justice movements and the need for us all to work together.

[Intersectionality] helps me to see and attempt to understand the world from perspectives other than my own. These concepts have also been key in allowing me to be a productive ally of groups to which I do not belong.

It helps me understand the complexity of different people, which gives me patience, empathy, and intelligence in social situations.

### *Theme 3: Intersectionality Infuses Worldview*

The final theme is that of intersectionality infusing and shaping a worldview. Respondents described the manner in which intersectionality structured and influenced their thinking in ways that made little distinction between personal and private life. These respondents were also more likely to say that they apply it every day. Their comments tended to focus on the big picture of dismantling macro-structures and their role in recognizing and changing oppressive systems. Unlike respondents above who often described their thoughts from an interpersonal perspective, these respondents tended to see a bigger picture. Comments stressed that intersectionality helps one to understand the “systemic nature of oppression,” “greater oppressive systems,” and how one can operate out of that “web” to make positive individual and group decisions. For many graduates, in-

tersectionality structures much of their worldview:

Intersectionality opened my eyes to the relationships among race, sex, class, ethnicity, religion, ability, etc. Studying intersectionality has improved my understanding of racism, classism, sexism, and other obstacles people face in their personal and professional lives.

The intersectional nature of oppression is the cornerstone of my worldview, activist efforts, teaching, and scholarship. I think about it and apply it daily.

That we, and all the oppressions, are all interconnected. It assists me every day in both my professional and personal life. From what I eat, to how I drive, to when I decide to ride a bike, to where I work, to who I give legal advice to, to how I give advice (‘gatekeeper’), to where I spend my money, what I spend it on, how I take care of myself and my family, to having the ability and privilege to make all these decisions.

Race, class, gender and sexuality is in play during every single moment of people’s lives. It can have an effect on how a patient acts when they walk in through the clinic door, to the kind of treatment and medical care they receive. In my personal life, I find aspects of race, class, sexuality, and gender are present in the news, advertisements, all forms of entertainment, and how the people I know live and react to their day to day lives.

I live and work in Detroit so I interact with people from all walks of life, many of whom have faced or still face huge barriers due to race and class. Learning about intersectionality and reading theorists discussing race and class while in college has helped me to be a better contributor in my community.

Again, it’s sort of the whole point—‘helping’ through an anti-oppression lens, which demands that individuals be more than their identity categories, and that the service I provide be centred around my clients’ definition of justice and not my own.

I see gender as inextricably tied to race, class, sexuality, ability, and other dimensions of difference. Thus, I don’t treat ‘gender issues’ on college campuses as something separate from the rest of who students are or from ‘racial issues,’ etc. In my personal life, one example is that in my

friendships with white women, I try to keep race and racialization, power and privilege, etc. on the table—try to challenge friends to learn to see their whiteness the same way they see their gender.

## Discussion

In this survey, intersectionality as a useful concept is what emerges most strongly among graduates' responses. Intersectionality helps them to continue to reflect on oppression in its multiple manifestations, work in tangible ways to combat it, and draw on it as an analytical perspective in their area of employment. Attention to intersectionality allows them to be aware of and challenge a pattern of binary thinking. Doing so aids them in understanding how their personal and professional decisions could reverberate across multiple communities. Respondents also provide insights about the value of intersectional thinking in cultivating empathy and civic engagement. Many graduates who work in the fields of healthcare and social work spent time discussing intersectionality's important uses in their respective fields.

In contrast, as noted above, intersectionality also shows up in the skills question under knowledge though rather weakly. Graduates in these few cases, however, shared similar observations with those who used it as a concept. They described intersectionality as useful in the professional context. The two responses below are representative of the comments:

I am able to understand people around me in a way I would not be able to without having studied GWS.

[It is a] key skill as an academic and extremely useful for future work (starting this summer) at the American Embassy in London.

There may be several reasons why intersectionality shows up only modestly under skills. One reason may be that intersectionality may not be discussed by instructors as a type of skill. Respondents' exposure to the breadth and depth of intersectionality may have also varied from class to class. It also may reflect differences in intersectional training across countries. Although there is heightened emphasis on skills in the rhetoric of undergraduate education, it is unclear if students are taught to identify skill-based learning. Students and

graduates may also have a difficult time thinking about and articulating skills in the way that faculty members and deans do. We also do not know if intersectional thinking was discussed with respondents while undergraduates as a key skill (or concept) that would aid with professional development.

Interest in and scholarship on intersectionality has grown exponentially in the field of women's and gender studies and across the academy, sparking conferences, symposia, special issue journals, and numerous scholarly articles and books. These findings point to the stability, central positioning, and value placed on intersectionality, post the first graduates of women's and gender studies, within the undergraduate curriculum. This may be welcome news for those who wish to see the role of intersectionality even more fully realized and less contested (see May 2012; Crenshaw 2010).

Moreover, employers are routinely cited as stating that they want culturally competent, globally aware, and ethically grounded graduates. In a recent United States study about employer preferences for skills, the majority of employers surveyed said it was important that candidates that they hire demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity, intercultural skills, and the capacity for continued new learning (Association of American Colleges and Universities and Hart Research Associates 2013). In another survey of employers, they highly ranked the ability to work in a team and possessing interpersonal skills (defined as relating well to others) as important for graduates (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2016). It is possible that students who utilize intersectional thinking may be attractive as candidates. These kinds of applied skills can be difficult to document and assess in typical undergraduate assessment tools. Moving forward, women's and gender studies administrators and faculty have an opportunity to support students to even better understand and describe the value of intersectionality.

Many questions, however, arise from these findings. On one hand, these findings confirm intersectionality's visibility in the field and reflect its emphasis in the undergraduate curriculum (and by extension graduate training). Conversely, it raises other questions including: What do we expect intersectionality to accomplish at the undergraduate level? To contribute to lifelong civic engagement? To help graduates in the employment world? Is intersectionality an approach that should be

fused seamlessly into all women's and gender studies education? Is intersectionality primarily in the curriculum to function as a concept or is it a skill? And if so, what kind of skill? Is it a concept that enables other skills? Is it the ability to critically discern who or what is missing from a set of situations or scenarios? Given that intersectionality did not show up strongly as a skill, is this a pedagogical challenge? What are the kinds of things we want students to do with intersectionality after they leave the college or university setting? Graduates are often engaging intersectional thinking as a set of practices, behaviours, and approaches that keep them open and aware of diverse perspectives. They strongly value having learned about intersectionality in a way that offered them a lens from which to operate. In the responses, there was much emphasis on personal learning and development. I flag this finding not to suggest that intersectionality being identified as a set of "soft skills" is wrong or "too personal," but to encourage us to continue to think about how intersectional thinking can be applied to an increasingly complex, segmented, and global workplace. The argument here is not that only one model of intersectional training (tightly focused on outcomes or securing employment) is needed, but that more thought should be given to ways that programs and departments can highlight this unique feature of undergraduate training as one that distinguishes them from their peers and that also may be highly useful in the workplace.

Thus far, in this paper, I have focused on understanding the survey data where respondents rank intersectionality as an important concept. Although it did not show up prominently under skills, I think there is more to consider about the relationship between intersectionality and skills. I offer these thoughts as a beginning point for a larger discussion in the field. First, the data suggest that intersectionality functions as an analytical tool or approach when learned in the classroom, but when put into practice operates more as a skill and potentially facilitates the enabling of other skills. What are the possible benefits of thinking about and claiming intersectional analysis also as a skill (or set of skills)? There could be several benefits. Conceiving of intersectionality as a skill may encourage a deeper engagement with the intellectual history of intersectionality. Ange-Marie Hancock (2016) and Vivian M. May (2012) have both documented the ways in which,

despite intersectionality's long history, intellectual rigor, and transformational potential, it is sometimes used "in name only" or as description (May 2012, 162). When educators consider a certain practice a particular skill, they often have to make conscious pedagogical choices (e.g., how do these particular readings or exercises support and encourage the skill of critical thinking or research analysis?). Interpreting intersectional thinking as skill-based could support that kind of engagement.

Thinking of intersectionality as a skill might offer new opportunities for curricular integration. Educators could take a critical lens to their curriculum and consider: How does intersectional thinking, as a skill, develop from an introductory class to a senior capstone? They could also ask: How can intersectional thinking be utilized in multiple ways across the curriculum that could help to anchor students' work in internships, senior seminars, study abroad, etc.? Conceptualizing intersectionality as a set of skills at the undergraduate level may also help students recognize and articulate the value of intersectionality prior to graduation.

Clues about how one might approach intersectional thinking as a skill lie in the varied ways that researchers are grappling with methodological questions inside and outside of women's and gender studies. Researchers are continuing to wrestle with the complexity of intersectionality and trying to apply it to varied projects. Increasingly, a methodological framework for intersectional research attends to the social location of the researcher (e.g., race, class, and gender), looks at relationships of power from multiple dimensions, and reveals systems of power that can be micro- or macro-focused (see Weber 2004; Berger and Guidroz 2009; Choo and Ferree 2010). There is also particular interest in these questions about projects that involve the complexities of operationalizing and making decisions about interacting with human subjects (see Cole and Sabik 2009; Thing 2010). These considerations might constitute a type of scaffolding for intersectional thinking as a skill.

I understand that some may be troubled by this discussion and believe that the down sides of focusing on intersectionality as a skill is that such a move will seem like a narrow operationalization or stifle creative thinking as well as lean heavily on the aspects of intersectional thinking that can be assessed in a quantifiable

way. As addressed above, I believe the gains of understanding intersectional thinking as a skill outweighs the potential harms. Emphasizing intersectional thinking as a skill provides an opportunity to make this facet of women's and gender studies education more visible to students as well as to other stakeholders in the academy (e.g., deans and provosts). It also provides another mechanism for job-seeking graduates to highlight the value of this work to employers.

Although this is the most institutionally and globally diverse sample collected from graduates graduating over a fifteen year period, there are some things to keep in mind. These findings show us strong patterns, but are not generalizable. There is not a comparison group to other liberal arts majors. Additionally, some have argued that self-reports from students are less reliable than other forms of data for assessing undergraduate skills (Arum and Roska 2011). And, finally, although the sample is diverse by country, the United States and Canada represent the majority of respondents. Despite these caveats, this work raises a useful and compelling picture of intersectionality and fills in long standing silences about women's and gender studies students' understanding and use of concepts and skills.

## Conclusion

This paper has made an empirical contribution to the literature of concept and skill development in women's and gender studies. Questions, however, remain about what to emphasize in training students about intersectionality and how to assess intersectionality. While I agree with Michele Fine's assessment that teaching intersectionality is about how to "theorize with complexity" (Guidroz and Berger 2009, 72), that formulation leaves open a wide field of interpretation. The majority of the discussion of pedagogy as connected to intersectionality in the undergraduate classroom has focused on supporting faculty to deepen their knowledge of intersectionality, techniques for how to apply it in their classrooms, strategies for managing resistance, and intersectionality as a type of feminist practice (see Naples 2009; Crenshaw 2010; Alejano-Steele et al. 2011; Davis 2010; Jones and Wijeyesinghe 2011; Lee 2012). This line of inquiry, however, does not offer insights into how teaching about intersectionality might help students utilize it after graduation in professional and/or civic life. Understanding how students grasp and re-

tain ideas about intersectionality may point to the kinds of pedagogical trajectories that will continue to be most productive to nurture.

This paper also makes an argument for understanding intersectional thinking as constituting a skill and/or enabling the facilitation of other skills. Such a move would potentially serve students better, encourage increased curricular coherence about intersectionality, and suggests a maturation of intersectionality's importance in the field. In an era of increasing emphasis on assessment within higher education that is used to justify costs, coupled with attacks on the liberal arts and its ability to meaningfully educate and employ graduates, it is advantageous and strategic for interdisciplinary fields, such as women's and gender studies, to empirically know more about what we do and how well we do it. Continued nuanced empirical research about the retention and impact of intersectionality (and other highly valued concepts) in undergraduate curricula can only strengthen the field.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Vivian M. May (2012), in her essay "Intersectionality," gives a creative and detailed list of ten of intersectionality's critical practices. I have borrowed and condensed this list to those that are most likely touched on, albeit briefly, in most women's and gender studies classes. As of May 2017, NWSA no longer maintains this list.

<sup>2</sup> Survey is available upon request to the author.

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# Social Movement Intersectionality and Re-Centering Intersectional Activism

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**K.L. Broad** has a PhD in Sociology (1998) from Washington State University and is currently an Associate Professor, jointly-appointed with the Department of Sociology, Criminology, and Law and the Center for Gender, Sexualities, and Women's Studies Research at the University of Florida. Her research focuses primarily on analyzing interpretive and identity work, especially in relation to gender, race, sexuality, and social movements. Dr. Broad is currently working on a research project tracing how a group of gay men in the 1980s constructed their anti-racist work.

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## Abstract

In this paper, I argue that intersectional activism needs to be re-centered in intersectional studies and that research about social movement intersectionality offers one means of doing so. To demonstrate this argument, I review several examples that complicate our understanding of how social movement intersectionality is done in practice. I discuss how these examples reiterate the point that intersectional movements can be realized; illustrate how coalitions are varied but do work; and remind us that there are, nevertheless, unique constraints that those striving to do social movement intersectionality face—for example, the challenge of constructing critical collective consciousness. I close by discussing analytic strategies characterizing the emerging research on social movement intersectionality and lessons offered herein and I call for deeper inquiry to engage activist work and re-center activist knowledges in intersectionality studies.

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## Résumé

Dans cet article, je soutiens que l'activisme intersectionnel doit être recentré dans les études intersectionnelles et que la recherche sur l'intersectionnalité du mouvement social offre un moyen de le faire. Pour démontrer cet argument, je passe en revue plusieurs exemples qui compliquent notre compréhension de la façon dont l'in-

tersectionnalité des mouvements sociaux se fait dans la pratique. Je discute de la façon dont ces exemples réaffirment le fait que les mouvements intersectionnels peuvent être réalisés, illustrent comment les coalitions sont variées mais fonctionnent et nous rappellent qu'il existe néanmoins des contraintes uniques pour ceux qui s'efforcent de faire l'intersectionnalité du mouvement social—par exemple, le défi de construire une conscience collective critique. Je conclus en discutant les stratégies analytiques qui caractérisent les recherches émergentes sur l'intersectionnalité des mouvements sociaux et les leçons offertes ici et j'appelle à une enquête plus approfondie pour engager les travaux activistes et recentrer les connaissances activistes dans les études intersectionnelles.

## Confronting a Depoliticized Intersectionality Studies

Today, scholars of intersectionality are noting how “intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall 2005, 1771) and how its “increasing acceptance as a field of study within the academy is clearly evident” (Collins 2015, 6), so much so it is now being characterized as a “burgeoning field of intersectionality studies” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 785). Although many view the project of intersectionality as one where “both scholarship and practice are recursively linked, with practice being foundational to intersectional analysis” (Collins 2015, 5), critical reflections about the field today have pointed to a troubling trend of de-politicization (Bilge 2013; Collins 2015). This paper argues that research on social movement intersectionality holds important contributions we should not overlook and is crucial for restoring its political intent and reengaging activist communities.

A crucial component of intersectionality’s political legacy has been its critical engagement with the challenge of collective action and social movement resistance. Vivian May (2015) explains that “Intersectionality’s political genealogy connects to larger struggles to eradicate inequality and emphasizes the degree to which meaningful contestation requires collective action” (48). Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) work identifies political intersectionality, which she explains is the circumstance of politics in the form of single-axis movements that focus on one oppression and therefore serve to further marginalize the multiply marginalized (particularly feminists of colour in her discussion). In so doing, she effectively names social movement spaces as central to intersectional analysis (although, in this case, it is the limits of single-axis movements). Patricia Hill Collins (2015) explains how interpretive communities in social movement settings were the spaces where intersectional analysis emerged (especially for feminists of colour) before it travelled into the academy (8). The point is that, at core, intersectional scholarship emerged as an “activist scholarship” (May 2015, 162), an “insurgent knowledge” derived from collective action efforts of feminists and lesbians of colour (Bilge 2014, 175; Roth 2004; Springer 2005), before it moved into the academy.

Recent writings argue, however, that the move to (and establishment in) the academy has depoliticized

the field such that, as Collins (2015) cites Sirma Bilge (2013) as proclaiming, the central challenge may now be “saving intersectionality from (academic) intersectionality studies” (Collins 2015, 11). Collins warns against accepting the “stock story” of the field of intersectionality studies as beginning with the coining of the term in Crenshaw’s (1991) “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” She explains that “contemporary narratives concerning the emergence of intersectionality increasingly situate its origins as a field of study within academia” (Collins 2015, 10). This, she asserts, risks erasing its activist roots in communities of resistance (especially Black feminist ones). She reinterprets the story of Crenshaw’s “Mapping the Margins” and, rather than calling it the beginning of intersectionality studies, instead frames it as a useful marker for when “ideas of social movement politics became named and subsequently incorporated into the academy” (10). It is an account that cautions against losing track of intersectionality’s critical edge, and its social movement and activist groundings, as academic interests take over. Similarly, other work argues that the field has been “systematically depoliticized” (Bilge 2013, 405). Bilge (2013), for example, argues that “disciplinary feminism,” especially European forms of it centered on “metatheoretical musings” as well as the “whitening of intersectionality,” effectively marginalize the grounded work of feminists and queers of colour (405). For instance, she notes how it is whitened not by the whiteness of people doing it, but also via the act of overlooking contributions of “those who have multiple minority identities and are marginalized social actors—women of color and queers of color,” instead foregrounding the work of White feminists as central (412). May (2015) similarly traces patterns of de-politicization. She looks at the field of intersectionality studies and traces subtle and overt patterns of distortion and the slipping away from its political intent, which together serve to “evacuate intersectionality of its history, meanings and promise” (8). What each of these cautions suggest is that the field of intersectionality studies needs to be re-politicized in part by re-centering the collective resistance work of activists, especially those multiply marginalized.

There is another related risk that derives from accepting the stock story of intersectionality studies as beginning with Crenshaw’s (1991) “Mapping the Mar-

gins.” The story implies that intersectionality studies is a field defined in relation to the legal genre. As Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) state, “contextualizing the articulation of intersectionality in the legal academy draws out the conditions of its possibility” (789). While they speak of how legal intersectionality is bound by discursive relations to legal subjectivity, I argue that it also tends to foreground too narrow a focus on “political intersectionality” (Crenshaw 1991, 1252). Although fundamentally necessary to consider, I worry that developing a field of intersectionality studies with a primary concentration on political intersectionality risks overemphasizing the constraints of single-identity movements and implies an impossibility of collective intersectional activism. We risk neglecting the possibility of intersectional resistance strategies, processes, and knowledges.

This paper began in relation to my efforts as a feminist sociologist—talking with, and learning from, a group of gay men long engaged in anti-racist work. The men have taught me a great deal about the complexity of their efforts to create what might be called “collective intersectional consciousness” as well as how to do intersectional collective action. Yet in turning to academic research to help me understand some of what I was hearing from these men, I was surprised to find far less empirical work about intersectional practice and activism, specifically social movement intersectionality, than I expected. I now understand the relative paucity of such research as linked to the trend where some instantiations of intersectionality studies has neutralized and underemphasized its political intent (Bilge 2013; Collins 2015). Collins (2015) recently argued that more attention to intersectional practice in the field of intersectionality studies, especially in a way that is useful to its practitioners, is the core challenge of the field (17). She points to local small-scale grassroots work, social institutions, and human rights work as sites of critical intersectional praxis important to the field. In what follows, I discuss attention to social movements as another core site of intersectional practice important to intersectional studies.

My purpose in this piece is to review what we can learn about intersectional activism and how it is done in social movement contexts by reading and doing research about social movement intersectionality. In many respects, I fall in the category of people Bilge

(2013) characterizes as “those trying to reconnect intersectionality with its initial vision which was grounded in the political subjectivities and struggles of less powerful social actors facing multiple intertwined oppressions” (411). I am doing so through attention to social movement empirical studies as but one means of understanding how less powerful social actors do their work. I argue that we must not forget that “intersectionality understands oppression and resistance to be ongoing relational processes” (May 2015, 237). I suggest that by focusing (in part) on social movement intersectionality, we can better attend to the reflexive relationship between political intersectionality and social movement intersectionality and thus better attend to the dynamic of oppression and resistance. I adopt the term *social movement intersectionality* from Jennifer Chun, George Lipsitz, and Young Shin (2013) to indicate my focus on social movements that use intersectionality as a resource for organization to address multiple interlocking oppressions (917). I also use the term *intersectional movements* when discussing specific types of social movement intersectionality (that done by those similarly situated in the intersections). My discussion of the research that follows points to seemingly unique forms of intersectional resistance and suggests the necessity for more sustained engagement with research on social movement intersectionality.

That said, I make the assertion that social movement research can advance our understandings of intersectionality cautiously. Tomlinson (2013) warns against inappropriate criticism directed at intersectional scholarship, one manifestation of which is work rooted in “rhetorics of rejection and replacement,” which urges a distancing from “old intersectionality” (1002) that, she argues, furthers a tendency of attacking and disparaging important oppositional theory and not analyzing it (998). Similarly Jennifer Nash (2014) names a tendency to dismiss early intersectional work as “feminism-past,” effectively erasing the racialized context and meaning of these works, a point Bilge (2014) also makes. In making a claim, as part of this paper does, that social movement scholarship offers one corrective of sorts to some intersectional scholarship, I do so with the understanding that much empirical research on social movement intersectionality does not reject, but rather draws from and elaborates on, early intersectional work. My call for engaging social movement intersectional scholarship is

not meant to be a replacement for the oppositional theory of feminists (and LGBTQ+s) of colour, but instead a further engagement with it and an acknowledgement of its continuing relevance.

In addition, I want to clarify that I use the terms “intersectionality” in part because it is the term used to name, and critically reflect on, what some argue has become a field. That said, I recognize that there are different genres and types of intersectional studies being done. Some scholars differentiate between analyses focused on intersectionality versus interlocking oppressions and I agree that distinguishing between the two is not just “quibbly” (Carastathis 2008). Anna Carastathis (2008) reminds us that there are different types of analyses of oppression where “an analysis of the way that systems of oppression ‘interlock’ has as its point of focus the matrix of micro- and macropolitical relations that produce subjects, whereas intersectional analysis focuses on the subjects produced by those relations, conceived of in identic terms” (25). The social movement studies I discuss here often use the term “intersectional” to mean both and so I also use it; however, I return to this distinction in the conclusion where I point out how the examples I feature can be distinguished by these different analytic approaches.

Finally, I want to be clear about my position in light of recent notes about disciplinary shadows and shortsightedness. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) caution that it is important to be “mindful that disciplinary conventions import a range of assumptions and truth claims that sometimes contribute to the very erasures to which intersectionality draws attention” (793). While I laud the potential of social-science oriented research on social movements here, I am not advocating a return to only a social science approach or arguing against interdisciplinarity. My hope is that we can continue to develop an intersectional studies attentive to the knowledge and wisdom emerging from disciplines, interdisciplinarity, *and* always from communities of resistance. As one step toward that, in what follows, I discuss social science oriented research that details some ways that social movement intersectionality is being done.

### **Social Movement Intersectionality**

The following discussion is not a comprehensive portrait of vast literature (Inhorn 2004, 275), but should

be read as a sampling of some key works that highlight important understandings so far. The research I discuss here offers examples of how intersectional social movements are possible, especially in particular sites, examples of how intersectional coalitions work and play out differently in practice, and examples of some of the challenges faced in doing social movement intersectionality, especially that of constructing collective, yet intersectional, consciousness.

### ***Realizing Intersectional Social Movements***

Two intersectional social movement studies (Roth 2004; Springer 2005) add to the consideration of how and where social movement intersectionality is done. In the process of complicating a stock story of the second wave feminist movement, both of these studies also complicate the stock story of intersectional studies as a product of academia. They both detail examples of activists living at the intersections of multiple oppressions, doing collective action, and forming distinctive intersectional movements. Importantly, part of a stock story that names academia as the starting point of intersectionality, thereby obscuring the existence of activist communities and the knowledges derived from them, also tends to overemphasize a notion of social movements as single-axis identity movements—reproducing, not resisting, interlocking oppressions. While “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 1984), the studies I discuss below show that the master’s tools (social movements) can be understood (and configured) differently, in unique places, for resistance by those living in the intersections. In so doing, these cases advance intersectional studies by pushing us to consider social movements as viable forms of intersectional activism.

One way these studies highlight the possibilities generated by intersectional social movement work is by illustrating how similarly situated groups resist organizing based on simplistic identity logics. For example, Kimberly Springer (2005), in her study of five Black feminist organizations from 1968-1980, shows how the uniqueness of each of these Black feminist organizations “reflect the heterogeneity of black feminist’s political views” (63). In a careful study of these organizations, based on semi-structured oral history interviews from a Black feminist standpoint, she argues that Black feminists in these organizations differently told their

stories of emergence, recounted different organizational forms, had different paths to defining feminism, and differently incorporated the “plurality of black women’s lives” (115). Benita Roth (2004) similarly traces a story of feminisms. As she says, second wave feminisms were “plural and characterized by racial/ethnic organizational distinctiveness” (1). Relying on extensive archival data and nine interviews, she traces how Black and Chicana feminisms emerged in a social movement sector with many competing movements such that they ultimately became distinct feminisms. Through their separate research studies, Springer (2005) and Roth (2004) both illustrate how social movement intersectionality, especially that engaged in by feminists of colour in the second wave, was characterized by difference even when engaged by similarly situated groups in similar historical moments. It is a reminder that these forms of social movement intersectionality are not repackaged essentialist or nationalist single-identity politics, but instances of social movement intersectionality centering difference and multiplicity.

Springer (2005) and Roth (2004) also show how social movement intersectionality must be understood in terms of where it emerged and where it is practiced. Springer (2005) tells a story of how “Black feminists took advantage of openings in the political opportunity structure...” (15) to create their own movement. Springer’s work asserts that Black feminists fit their politics into their lives wherever possible and that, between the years of 1968 and 1980, developed a collective identity and basis for organizing that reflected the intersecting nature of Black womanhood—in that it operated in the cracks between oppressions and the spaces between movements. She characterizes such social movement intersectionality as interstitial politics or a “politics in the cracks” (2). She explains how the five Black feminist organizations “inserted themselves into the cracks of the dominant political opportunity structure and the fissures created by other social movements” (12). She pushes social movement scholarship by pinpointing the location of some social movement intersectional work, in the case of her research, as operating not only in the openings created because of political opportunity, but also in the spaces between movements. It is a contribution, Springer argues, that expands the meaning of political opportunity in social movement studies. Because, in single-axis social movements, many Black women

experienced “fissures created by contradictions in rhetoric and action” (46), they formed organizations that were not meant to be either feminist or civil rights, but both and existing outside each. In that sense, Springer’s work also challenges intersectional thinkers to consider how a protest cycle characterized by identity-rigid movements might simultaneously constitute interstitial spaces where critical social movement intersectionality can emerge with the agency of activists.

Roth (2004) traces similar, but distinctive, locations of social movement intersectional work. Like Springer (2005) discussed above, Roth traces the specificity of Black and Chicana feminisms of the second wave partly to their emergence from anti-racist movements (Black Nationalist and Chicano movements respectively). In her work, however, Roth (2004) extends the portrait of the context from which these feminisms emerged and outlines how their emergence was constrained by the competitive social movement sector where loyalties to parent movements, in addition to questions about liberation and an “ethos of organizing one’s own” (181), all worked together such that second-wave feminisms became distinctive along racial/ethnic lines (215). She urges us to think of social movement intersectionality as happening not so much in the cracks between movements, but as separate movements in and of themselves (albeit in a particular movement sector). Roth’s work reveals how social movement intersectionality is not necessarily something happening within one movement, or existing between single-identity movements, but in certain circumstances manifest as multiple stand-alone movements. Furthermore, Roth’s work also offers an “appreciation of the way in which social movement actors move in nested boxes of constraint” where movements interact and “the existence of numerous movements at one time constructs the choices that participants make about organizing” (216-217). Like Springer (2005), Roth’s work points those interested in social movement resistance to a reconsideration of political opportunity in intersectional terms. As Roth (2004) explains, her work shows how researchers need to “explore how constraints on or opportunities for social movement actors are mutually constructed by the elements of unequal and systematic social divisions, and by movements-based relationships among activists whose interactions cannot help but be shaped by those divisions” (217). At heart, Roth illus-

trates separate Black and Chicana feminist movements that are not exclusionary, but are situated movements in terms of the matrix of domination and political intersectionality they resist.

These works argue that social movements can be intersectional: existing as movements unto themselves, or as collectives of those multiply marginalized, and characterized by difference and multiplicity. As such, they push intersectional studies to take seriously the possibility of intersectional movements even in the face of the constraints of the political intersectionality of single-identity movements. Related, their work also challenges intersectional studies to take seriously the possibility that social movements (and their organizations) can be effective. These both are studies which challenge a stock story of second wave feminism that asserts that women of colour feminism emerged later in the second wave and was singular and simply a response to White feminism. Instead, these studies provide convincing portraits of social movement intersectionality where women of colour acted effectively as collective movement makers operating on their own and producing parallel feminisms. These are not portraits of failed movements. Although Springer (2005) details how the Black feminist organizations she studied all but disappeared by 1980 and Roth (2004) clearly illustrates how the Black feminist and Chicana feminist movement faced hostilities from other movements, both authors argue that the movements did succeed in forming, existing, and creating critical knowledge and interventions in the specific political context in which they emerged. Thus, these works provide important intersectional portraits of the agency of feminists of colour and their successful social movement work, which should be credited with creating critical consciousness from which some intersectional theory in academia developed (Springer 2005, 168; Collins 2015). They illustrate how intersectional movements by multiply-marginalized activists can be realized and thrive in particular sites.

That said, the works discussed in this section portray the social movement intersectionality of historically specific and similarly-situated groups. They identify movements that operate separately (whether interstitially or unto themselves) because of the political landscape in which they emerged. Thus, while these works remind us that intersectional movements can be realized, and are sources of critical intersectional

knowledge, they also underscore the point that different historical contexts are particularly relevant and can broaden our understanding of how the political landscape impacts social movement intersectionality.

### ***Working Coalitions***

In addition to revealing effective intersectional movements, the research on social movement intersectionality also illustrates that intersectional coalitions do work. In describing the dangers of adopting the stock story of intersectionality studies as originating in the academy, Collins (2015) reasserts "...the centrality of both Black feminism and race/class/gender studies to social justice projects..." (10) and the emergence of one genre of intersectional studies. She identifies a set of "shared sensibilities" that scholar-activists in early race/class/gender studies had, one of which was a commitment to coalitional politics as a means by which to confront the dilemma of how to do group-based activism in terms of difference. For example, Bonnie Thornton Dill (1983) suggested abandoning a false ideal of sisterhood and instead striving toward coalition along lines of shared interest (146). Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) called for the uncomfortable work of coalition as a space where difference could be confronted. And in 1989, Collins herself called for seeing race, class, and gender as "categories of connection" (rather than sameness) and working toward "relationships and coalitions to bring about social change" (Collins 2013a, 222). She outlined how effective coalitions must address differences in power and privilege, seek to organize around a common cause, and finally struggle "to hear one another and (develop) empathy for the other points of view" (225). Yet, in reflecting on this call in 2013, Collins comments that, in the current political landscape, "Coalitions seem like pipe dreams" (2013b, 234).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Carastathis (2013) stresses how other voices have argued that intersectionality is divisive and actually limits possibility for unity or coalition (942). However, recent research about social movement intersectionality suggests that that is not the case; coalitions can work and do so in distinctive ways.

Research on how social movement intersectional coalitions are done in practice often portrays them as operating much like early conceptualizations described. For example, Elizabeth Cole (2008), in discussing her oral history research with ten feminist ac-

tivists, describes their coalition work as troubling the idea of “natural affinity groups,” recognizing the “limits of similarity” and seeking to find commonality around shared interests instead of shared identity (447). She also notes how participants spoke of power differences as a threat to groups working in alliance and coalition. In many respects, Cole’s work outlines a social movement intersectional strategy of coalition quite similar to the calls outlined above (Collins 2013a; Dill 1983; Reagon 1983) where working in terms of shared interest between groups to negotiate difference and avoid simplistic identity politics was the ideal put into practice.

Yet, other examples of social movement research about intersectional coalition work suggest some varied ways coalitions are successfully practiced in everyday movement work. Carastathis (2013) proposes a reconsideration of identity as coalition, explicitly drawing on Crenshaw’s conceptualization of identities as “in fact coalitions” (942). She points out how Crenshaw’s conceptualization challenges the distinction between identity politics and coalitional politics as based on similarity and safety (identity) versus difference and conflict (coalition) respectively. Carastathis traces the way in which a coalitional conception of identity was used in one organization, *Somos Hermanas*, a United States-based group formed in the 1980s in solidarity with Nicaraguan women. She shows how they did their work by advancing a coalitional conception of identity, which allowed them to find commonality and operate in solidarity (2013, 954). Carastathis speaks of one activist’s story and how that activist spoke of the group as a place to bring together all her “multiple identities and political commitments” (944). She outlines how they were able to operate as a “coalition of one, in which one is aligned with all parts of oneself, especially those we are taught to deny, repress or annihilate” (960). According to Carastathis, it is a means of addressing the “intersectionality within” and “constructing internal as well as external bridges” (960). In comparison to Cole’s (2008) conception of coalition based on affinity between different groups, Carastathis (2013) illustrates how one group organized in a way that honoured the “multiplicity and contradictions” of individual identities for those multiply oppressed (961).

In contrast to Carastathis’ (2013) portrait of “in fact coalition,” Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013) detail a different type of coalition as part of their broader de-

scription of intersectional social movement strategy. Like Carastathis, Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013) discuss the work of a social movement organization, but, in their research, they focus on Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA), a group that started in 1983 and organized as a community organization for Asian immigrant women employed in low-paid manufacturing and service jobs in the San Francisco area. They speak of “intersectionality” as the strategy AIWA illustrates and describe it as centered on a guiding assumption that those with the experiences of living at the intersections of multiple oppressions are equipped with “the evidence, ideas, insights and ambitions that can help solve serious social problems” (919). Thus, AIWA organizes in terms of a “community transformational organizing strategy (CTOS),” which puts the immigrant women in a group at the center and seeks to have them define the work of the organization. Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013) illustrate how AIWA was doing a type of alliance/coalition work that centered women workers in collective efforts for social change and in forming unique, but successful, alliances. In contrast to Cole (2008) and Carastathis (2013), Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013) do not emphasize coalition as a matter of figuring out how to practice group politics that can attend to difference. Instead, they stress the goal of centering the experiential critical knowledge of those living at (and resisting) the intersections of multiple interlocking oppressions. It is a means of coalitional practice that primarily seeks to address and change differences in power and privilege within the coalition.

In contrast to the previous section, which stressed the similarities between the studies being discussed, in this section, I discussed three studies separately to highlight the differences because one of the contributions of these works is that they push intersectional studies scholars in the academy to recognize and understand the subtle differences in how coalition is done. As these pieces illustrate, coalition for some groups is done in terms of shared interest, for others the emphasis is on honoring the plurality of identities and multiplicity of interests, while still others foreground differences in power, knowledge, and leadership as core to how coalitions are done. An important characteristic of all three studies is that they illustrate coalitions formed among multiply-situated activists and point to how social movement intersectionality can be done

across differences and varying levels of power of multiple social groups.

### ***The Challenge of Collective Consciousness and Constraints on Social Movement Intersectionality***

In 1977, the Combahee River Collective released a statement that many still reference as a critical articulation of an intersectionality rooted in United States Black lesbian feminism. The statement explained that members of the group had been involved in other single-axis identity movements, but felt “disillusioned” and so sought to create their own movement. They spoke of not giving up on the notion of an identity movement where personal experience and consciousness-raising would be fundamental. As they stated, “The psychological toll of being a Black woman and the difficulties this presents in reaching political consciousness and doing political work can never be underestimated (Combahee River Collective 1983, 211). I begin this section with a brief discussion of that statement to remind readers that a political understanding of intersectionality has often been named as arising out of the hard consciousness-raising work centered in the life experience of those living at the intersections of multiple interlocking oppressions. Collins (1990) states, for example, that “One distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change” (221). Many feminists of colour have returned to the point that a collective critical consciousness is central to an effective intersectional politics (Collins 1990, 2013a; Crenshaw 1991, 1265; Harris 1990; Sandoval 1991) while acknowledging the challenges to centering such a consciousness in a broader movement of multiply-situated actors (e.g., Sandoval 1991). I begin this section by noting the centrality of consciousness and the complexity of it in collective action because I am highlighting two examples of research that provide important developments to our understanding thereof in social movement arenas. The cases I discuss below outline the challenge of constructing collective intersectional consciousness in social movements and, in so doing, detail some constraints on social movement intersectionality.

The first example is Brett C. Stockdill’s (2003) book, *Activism Against Aids: At the Intersections of Sex-*

*uality, Race, Gender and Class*, which draws on his in-depth interview and participant observation research about AIDS organizing in the 1980s and 1990s to show how social problems are often situated at the intersection of multiple oppressions impacting collective action. His research illustrates, for example, how various actors in AIDS activism had “partial oppositional consciousness” (a term he adopts from Morris 1992, 364, but extends), especially hegemonic or dominant strains (for example, white, middle-class gay men as only focused on homophobia and AIDSphobia to the exclusion of racism, sexism, and classism), which served as obstacles to AIDS prevention, intervention, and also activism (Stockdill 2003, 23). Consequently, according to Stockdill, certain initiatives meant to address multiple oppressions were not as well supported as other single-axis focused initiatives. As well, coalition building was impacted by differing expectations and experiences of repression (for example, gay/lesbian communities of colour had a history and fear of more extreme state repression and this made many hesitate to become involved in the direct action AIDS activism). Yet, he also outlines how strategies by gay men and lesbians of colour to combat AIDS in communities of colour included innovative (and familiar intersectional) techniques of dialogue, empowerment, and community-centered work. He argues that this was work that used racial oppositional consciousness to “promote other forms of oppositional consciousness” (23). A key contribution that Stockdill offers intersectional studies is his portrait of how activists are “drawn into collective action within the context of *multiple* oppressions and *multiple* consciousnesses” (18) and those varied consciousnesses impact the collective action ultimately done (or not). Especially important is that Stockdill’s work attends to the significance of consciousness among 50 activists he interviewed who were involved in various organizations in different regions and differently situated in the intersections of race/class/gender/sexuality. In that respect, he also extends intersectionality studies’ understanding of consciousness beyond the specificity of consciousness among a similarly-situated group to attend to how such critical consciousness gets employed in practice in a community of multiple consciousnesses.

Rose Ernst’s (2010) book, *The Price of Progressive Politics: The Welfare Rights Movement in an Era of Colorblind Racism*, similarly reveals important new un-



derstandings of consciousness. Her research is based on interviews with 49 welfare parent activists, both women of colour and white activists, from eight different organizations. She found that "...women-of-colour activists...confront the intersectional implications of the welfare queen and, by extension, the racial ideology of colorblind racism, while White women activists tend to avoid direct discussions of these issues" (3). Ernst identifies "cosmetic colorblindness," which she explains operates when mostly white welfare activists spoke of race directly, but did so in terms of racial demographics to avoid direct discussion of racism and power dynamics. Yet she also traces how some activists avoid colourblindness frames and instead use race and class consciousness frames, thereby confronting racism. She explains that the difference in what type of framing work is done emerges from the intersectional character of organizations, the organizational structure and racial composition of leadership in particular, that impact whether there can be the creation of "shared race and class consciousness frames among both women of color and White women" (139). In the end she argues that her book illustrates how "movements premised on multiple marginalized identities that fail to develop consciousness frames that reflect the reality of these intersecting identities ultimately reproduce the very societal dynamics they seek to change" (17). In contrast to Stockdill's (2003) work, Ernst's (2010) work is focused on how consciousness plays out in terms of the framing work of movements. Yet, like Stockdill, Ernst similarly argues that the creation of oppositional consciousness, in her case central to the framing work of social movements, is tied in part to the social location of individuals. It is partly the social location of individuals and their race and class consciousness that impacts their framing and can negatively impact movements striving to work across these different meanings. Like Stockdill, Ernst is extending the understanding of consciousness in intersectionality studies by showing how, in practice, intersectional movements must confront how to effectively work with multiple situated consciousnesses. In detailing the impact of partial oppositional consciousness and colourblind framing to collective action, Stockdill and Ernst specifically unveil the central challenge of developing an intersectional consciousness among activists and organizations with multiple situated consciousnesses. In so doing, they extend the under-

standing of critical consciousness in intersectionality studies by illustrating how there are limits to achieving a multidimensional consciousness in practice.

These examples point to specific challenges of doing collective action among multiply-situated individuals and groups. While research suggests that intersectional social movements can be realized and coalitional organizations can work, the work discussed in this section suggests that collective intersectional action is nevertheless challenged by patterns of interlocking inequalities within and outside the movement that impacts its potential. Stockdill (2003), for example, highlights how all the mechanics of social movements (strategy, tactics, framing, resources, and organization) confront the challenges of multiple interlocking oppressions (especially because of dynamics of partial oppositional consciousness). In that regard, Stockdill contributes to intersectional studies an understanding of what I think of as movement matrixes: dynamics of interlocking oppressions that characterize the problems such movements face and how they are collectively resisted. Ernst (2010) highlights how political intersectionality still plays out in certain movements, but uniquely so because of changing political landscapes, organizational structures, and leadership composition. It might be said that Stockdill pushes us to consider how there may be distinctive movement matrixes, of the social problems confronted and collective action employed in resisting them, and Ernst pushes us to recognize the continued relevance and new forms of political intersectionalities. In Collins' (2000) words, in detailing the limits of consciousness in relation to the unique patterns of interlocking movement inequalities, these studies remind us that "oppression and resistance remain intricately linked such that the shape of one influences that of the other" (274). They detail the particularities of how that works at the movement level in what we might consider a dialectic of social movement intersectionality and political intersectionalities/movement matrixes.

Even as they detail the constraints on social movement intersectionality, these books reiterate a point made in the previous two sections—that social movement intersectionality is possible, in particular spaces. For example, while both studies offer compelling discussions of a foundational intersectional concept—consciousness—and detail the limits of partial or colourblind consciousness, they also identify instances

where multidimensional consciousness was practiced. They remind us that social movement intersectionality is constrained and point to the necessity for further empirical engagement with activist communities to see where and how it can thrive.

### Concluding Thoughts

While I have argued that research on social movement intersectionality reveals important lessons about how intersectional resistance and practice is done collectively, it must be considered in relation to how the research was done. Bilge (2013) suggests that “speculative” musings without “much empirical grounding” confines intersectionality to an academic exercise and depoliticizes it. She is clear that paying attention to “what intersectionality actual does in research” is important (412). She reminds us that Crenshaw’s statement in response to the *Celebrating Intersectionality* conference also suggests that to “canvass what scholars, activists, and policy makers have done under its rubric” is a means of attending to the question of what intersectionality can produce (Crenshaw 2011, 222 cited in Bilge 2013, 412). Similarly, Collins (2015) canvasses the research done to understand what it has become and what it offers (11). Thinking in terms of these assertions of the importance of paying attention to what researchers actually do analytically and methodologically, it is critical to recognize that the emerging research discussed in this paper might well be characterized in terms of Leslie McCall’s (2005) distinction between intracategorical and intercategory complexity and/or Sherene Razack’s (1998) distinction between interlocking and intersectional analysis (further elaborated by Carastathis 2008, 25). Namely, as illustrated by my discussion in the first section, there is important work that details the possibility and realization of intersectional movements, that is to say work that analytically pays attention to the complexities and strategies of forming social movements among those (mostly) within single social groups<sup>2</sup>—intracategorical research in McCall’s (2005) terms. In addition, there is social movement research that is more intercategory in that it analytically pays attention to the “complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytic categories” (1786). In the second section, I detailed examples of such research that outlined working strategies for coalitional organization. As illustrated in the

third section, there is also important work detailing the constraints and challenges of social movement intersectionality, especially in constructing critical consciousness in movements comprised of multiple social groups and relations of interlocking inequality. In other words, research about social movement intersectionality is done both intracategorically and intercategory. In Razack’s (1998) words, research on social movement intersectionality focuses both on interlocking oppressions and intersections. It might be said that the studies in the first section of this paper focused on the intersections and patterns of resistance and, in the second and third sections, on interlocking oppressions and how those manifest in movement resistance. I close by noting these different analytic strategies to make the point that social movement research, like intersectionality studies more generally, is marked by different analytic approaches. As we move forward, I recommend further critical reflection about these strategies and the implications they might have on our understanding of social movement intersectionality in practice.

In this paper, I have argued that these social movement studies highlight important contributions to the field of intersectionality studies. They offer “more complex analyses of collective action” (Collins 2013b, 242) by broadening our understanding of key dimensions of collective intersectional action. The first section highlighted two examples (Roth 2004; Springer 2005) that confront the assumption that intersectional collective resistance is not possible by illustrating that social movement intersectionality is viable, intersectional social movements are possible, and intersectional collective action practices can be effective. The next section continued to illustrate how social movement intersectionality can be realized, focusing on coalitions (Cole 2008; Carastathis 2013; Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013) and extending our understanding of coalition beyond merely politics organized around shared purpose and power to detail the complex intricacies of how it plays out differently in practice among multiply-situated actors. Finally, in the last section, I discussed two examples (Stockdill 2003; Ernst 2010) that extend our understanding of another core concept of intersectional practice—consciousness—and illustrate the restrictions on achieving a collective intersectional consciousness in practice, especially in movements of multiply-situated actors. These pieces also point out how interlocking

oppressions uniquely manifest in movements and thus constrain social movement intersectionality. Together, these studies illustrate how research on social movement intersectionality, while not yet a deep literature, nevertheless offers significant insights for intersectionality studies. But my assertion that these are important examples for intersectionality studies is meant to be more than simply a call to appreciate the existing literature and an empiricist request to pay more attention to the lessons these studies have taught us about the reality of activism out there.

As I have discussed, one risk we face in intersectional studies is accepting a stock story of it as beginning in academia and contributing the most by continuing to reside uncritically there. As many have reminded us, intersectionality studies is at risk of not being quite intersectional enough if it neglects its origins outside of the academy. It risks disregarding activist knowledges, especially those produced collectively by people with the everyday experiences of living at the intersections of interlocking oppressions and/or in active resistance to them in organizations and movements. So my call for more research engagement with social movement intersectionality is not meant to be only a suggestion for reading and doing more research. It is also meant to be a broader call for re-centering the work of activists, especially those critically located at the intersections and/or resisting interlocking oppressions, and thereby actively achieving critical situated standpoint knowledges through, and of, intersectional practice. As my brief citations of early activist/scholar writings suggest, one way to engage with activist work that has characterized the field is to read texts produced by activists with the assumption that they represent valid oppositional knowledge projects. I propose that reading the research I discussed in this piece is another way to do so. The research that I examined here was often done by scholar/activists (e.g., Stockdill 2003) or in collaboration between activists and scholars (e.g., Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013) or utilizing standpoint epistemology and feminist methods to center the experience and knowledge of activists (e.g., Cole 2008; Springer 2005). It is research that, if discussed for its methodology and strategies of intersectional analysis, might be understood as bridging work, re-centering activist voices and reigniting an exchange between activist and academic arenas through relationships of shared interest. We need to

re-center activist work and, as researchers, I think we can do so through more interaction with these communities. It is not the only way to re-center intersectional activism in intersectional studies, but in light of some of the meta-theorizing, whitening, and patterns of de-politicization that characterize some genres of intersectional studies in academia, more serious engagement of such grounded consideration of social movement intersectionality, in my opinion, is one necessary step.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Actually, Collins (2013b) holds onto the potential of coalitional politics, explaining that “communities constitute the scaffold on which coalitional politics operate.” Thus, she urges engagement with coalitional strategies within and outside of communities (236-241).

<sup>2</sup> I include the parenthetical note of “mostly” because both Springer (2005) and Roth (2004) speak to the multiplicity of identities within groups of Black feminists and the Black feminist and Chicana feminist movements.

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# #Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community

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**Tegan Zimmerman** (PhD, Comparative Literature, University of Alberta) is an Assistant Professor of English/Creative Writing and Women's Studies at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. A recent Visiting Fellow in the Centre for Contemporary Women's Writing and the Institute of Modern Languages Research at the University of London, Zimmerman specializes in contemporary women's historical fiction and contemporary gender theory. Her book *Matria Redux: Caribbean Women's Historical Fiction*, forthcoming from Northwestern University Press, examines the concepts of maternal history and maternal genealogy.

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the term "intersectionality" as defined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in relation to the digital turn: it argues that intersectionality is the dominant framework being employed by fourth wave feminists and that is most apparent on social media, especially on Twitter.

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## Résumé

Cet article analyse le terme « intersectionnalité » tel que défini par Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw en liaison avec le virage numérique : il affirme que l'intersectionnalité est le cadre dominant employé par les féministes de la quatrième vague et que cela est surtout évident sur les réseaux sociaux, en particulier sur Twitter.

Intersectionality, is the marrow within the bones of feminism. Without it, feminism will fracture even further – Roxane Gay (2013)

This article analyzes the term "intersectionality" as defined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989, 1991) in relation to the digital turn and, in doing so, considers how this concept is being employed by fourth wave feminists on Twitter. Presently, little scholarship has been devoted to fourth wave feminism and its engagement with intersectionality; however, some notable critics include Kira Cochrane, Michelle Goldberg, Mikki Kendall, Ealasaid Munro, Lola Okolosie, and Roopika Risam.<sup>1</sup> Intersectionality, with its consideration of class, race, age, ability, sexuality, and gender as intersecting loci of discriminations or privileges, is now the overriding principle among today's feminists, manifest by theorizing tweets and hashtags on Twitter. Because fourth wave feminism, more so than previous feminist movements, focuses on and takes up online technology, social media outlets like Twitter provide an unprecedented means for solidarity and activism; moreover, tweets can reach not only hundreds, but also tens of thousands, of people in a single moment (for example, #BringBackOurGirls and #fem2). This analysis references such broader examples as a means to contextualize the fourth wave, but for practical purposes is mostly concerned with the hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen. The popularity and polarizing effect of this hashtag underscores the feminist need for an online platform like Twitter because it serves as an instigative, activist tool amenable to intersectionality. Adopting intersectional feminism as my methodology, I argue that the fourth wave is characterized by an intersectional feminist framework, exemplified when analyzing the discourses on racism, feminism, and online representation presently taking place in the Twitter community.

Supplementing the lacuna in scholarship, in what follows, I provide a much needed genealogy and trajectory of fourth wave feminism, which situates the

movement in relation to the first, second, and third waves. Fourth wave feminism, the foundation of which is laid by the works I outline in the first section, fights oppression like racism and sexism via an intersectional feminist lens that 1) considers social media (e.g., Twitter) an indispensable and essential tool and 2) strongly resists separating the offline from the online. Taking into account both race and gender as identity markers, the second section considers Crenshaw's work over the last two and a half decades and develops a definition of intersectionality that is suitable for the fourth wave. In the third section, which makes up the majority of this article, I offer a detailed analysis of how the aforementioned hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen, by propagating meaningful and necessary critical dialogues on race, feminism, and online representation, evidences that intersectionality is the political impetus and theoretical framework employed by fourth wave feminists.

### A Genealogy of the Fourth Wave

While many scholars, such as Judith Roof (1997), do not like a simplification of feminism into waves, this delineation proves useful when situating the fourth wave in North American and British feminism.<sup>2</sup> Typically, the first wave fell between 1840 and 1920 (Phillips and Cree 2014, 936) and focused on women's suffragism, legal rights (marriage, property), and political representation. The movement gained public momentum via speaking, demonstrations, militant protests, and incarcerations. The second wave, meanwhile, began roughly in the 1960s and centered on egalitarianism and activism related to 1) sexuality and reproductive rights; 2) wages, education, jobs, and domesticity; and 3) visibility in art, history, science, and other disciplines. In all three areas, "The personal is political," became an important message for collective consciousness raising (Phillips and Cree 2014, 937). Unlike the first wave, which was predominantly fought by and for middle-class white women, the second wave crossed over into other identity markers and political demarcations, such as race, class, and sexuality, but arguably continued to marginalize these voices.

Confronting this marginalization head on, the third wave began in the 1980s with postmodern, cyber, anticolonial/postcolonial, and transnational perspectives (see, for example, hooks 1990; Haraway 1991; Spi-

vak 1999; Mohanty 1988, 2002). Second wave feminist concepts, such as woman, oppression, and patriarchy,<sup>3</sup> were perceived as problematically universalizing and essentializing. Distancing itself generationally from the second wave (see Walker 1992), the movement radically challenged binary, hierarchal positions as culturally constructed; for instance, the categories and constructions of sex and gender. The reconceptualization of sex and gender (including discourses on queerness and transgenderism), a decolonizing of feminism (calling for heterogeneity and a politics/complexification of location), and a reclaiming of femininity and beauty culture in the name of girl power or girlie feminism became key attributes of the third wave (Knappe and Lang 2014, 364). Additionally, early theorizations, particularly Donna Haraway's (1986) groundbreaking work on the cyborg, launched a robust feminist inquiry into digital culture, cyberliterature, and cyberworlds.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to studies that trace the origin of the movement to 2008 (Baumgardner 2011, 250; Phillips and Cree 2014, 938), the fourth wave in fact commenced with the new millennium (see Kaplan 2003; Peay 2005; Daum 2006). Defined in relation to the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, psychotherapist and activist Kathlyn Schaaf, for example, began organizing women on her website *Gather the Women* as a call for world peace. Schaaf's website on 9-11 prompted journalist Pythia Peay (2005) to claim, "the long-awaited 'fourth wave' of feminism [is]—a fusion of spirituality and social justice reminiscent of the American civil rights movement and Gandhi's call for nonviolent change" (59). The term, however, did not reach a mainstream audience until 2008. In "The Feminist Reawakening: Hillary Clinton and the Fourth Wave," Amanda Fortini (2008), a leading journalist, brought acute sexism and gender-centric issues to the forefront (42). The pernicious sexism Hillary Clinton experienced during her campaign to be the Democrat's candidate in the US presidential bid, Fortini argues, (re)politicized many women and created a new anti-postfeminist collective consciousness (43).<sup>5</sup> At this time, online representation and digital technology as *the* organizing and consciousness raising tool of the fourth wave feminist movement replaced 9-11-centric discussions.<sup>6</sup>

Surprisingly, between the years 2008 and 2013, the movement gathered scant attention in academic and popular publications. Still in its early development,

scholars were quick to identify feminism online, but were reluctant to articulate exactly what the role of the internet and other digital technologies was, as Deborah Solomon (2009)'s interview with Jessica Valenti, co-founder with Vanessa Valenti of the most widely read feminist publication at the time *Feministing.com*, demonstrates. Consider Solomon surmising: "Maybe we're onto the fourth wave now" and Valenti's casual reply "Maybe the fourth wave is online" (n.p.). This skeptical attitude is also reflected in cultural critic Jennifer Baumgardner's (2011) final chapter in *F'em! Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls*, which is titled "Is there a Fourth Wave?: Does it Matter?" At the end of her work, Baumgardner gestures briefly towards the fourth wave, arguing that it pursues "more or less the same goals of the third—reproductive justice, trans inclusion, sexual-minority rights, intersectionality, and the deconstruction of privilege—while utilizing social media and other burgeoning technologies to spread their activist message" (as paraphrased by Vogel 2014, n.p.). Noteworthy is that Baumgardner (2011) identifies that, unlike the previous waves' experiences, fourth wavers' experiences with digital technology is a given; they are born into a world that is already and always online (250). In "Feminism: A Fourth-Wave?," Ealasaid Munro (2013) likewise questions whether a new wave, dependent on the internet for contemporary debate and activism, is in fact emerging (25). This makes one wonder if there is actually any distinct philosophical or ideological differences between the third wave and the fourth wave. Does the fourth wave have to have a self-awareness that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 1964); that is, the message of the second and third wave was mostly limited to print books and "old-style models of political engagement like rallies and marches and displays of bra-burning" (Solomon 2009, n.p.), while the message of the fourth wave is now digital? It is certain that the message of feminism is changed by the medium, but the fourth wave, inevitably to be a new wave, must also distance itself ideologically.

Explaining how this digital technology constitutes a new wave for feminism, to reiterate, remained poorly expressed until Kira Cochrane (2013), writing a few short months after Munro (2013), published an essay in *The Guardian* titled "The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women." In this insightful article, Cochrane (2013) agrees with previous studies that

the fourth wave is "defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online" (n.p.); and, today, one would be hard pressed to find a scholar who did not believe that social media, used as a public forum, is the defining feature of the new wave. Beginning with Cochrane's ideas, written on the cusp of 2014, the movement has since gained momentum. Like Cochrane, current scholarship suggests the fourth wave is accomplished in part by a return to the street. That is, more so than the third wave, the fourth wave is energized by social and political activism<sup>7</sup>: the fourth wave acknowledges that theory and a web presence alone is not enough to bring about political change.

Constituting a revitalizing of the second-wave's street presence and the third wave's foray into digital culture, the fourth wave takes advantage of digital technology, but maintains a presence on the ground; for example, Take Back the Night protests and marches, which began in the '70s, have been rejuvenated. In the fourth wave, multiple co-existing consciousness raising platforms and social justice movements like Take Back the Night and Slut Walk<sup>8</sup> are thus animating the movement. Cochrane (2013) confirms this relationship by providing several examples of feminist movements across the United Kingdom sprouting up and flourishing and she shows how feminist organizations are networking and disseminating information to a wide audience in unprecedented ways. The wave, according to writers like Cochrane, takes full advantage of both offline and online spaces and often moves from web-to-street, vice versa, and from web-to-street-back-to-web; that is, women's protests in Britain that work in tandem: anti Page 3 Girl campaigns<sup>9</sup> happen online (e.g., @NoMorePage3) and offline (outside the *Sun* headquarters in London). But, more importantly, the trafficking of feminism between the online and the offline, as evidenced by these cases, strongly suggests that separating the online from the offline is neither possible nor desirable. Thus, contributing to the ideological difference of fourth wave feminism, when compared to its predecessors, is its topological and topographical positions: it reaches and connects mass audiences in rapid speed and, in doing so, it collapses the binary between the online and the offline to the extent that the online and offline are not, and perhaps never were, separate spheres.



In its most recent stage (2014-present), social media like Twitter continues to be fundamental to the fourth wave's distinct identity and visibility as necessary public platforms for commentary and mobilizing (i.e., a feminist call out culture against the kyriarchy [Baumgardner 2011; Munro 2013; Risam 2015; Vogel 2014]) and as objects of study (i.e., online harassment and representation). A delineation between the offline and the online is implicitly, if not explicitly, rejected and the employment of intersectional feminism is the dominant framework (Munro 2013, 25).<sup>10</sup> Without digressing too much, however, the movement is also detectable in the following areas: 1) an extenuation of third wave goals such as "reproductive justice, trans inclusion, sexual-minority rights...the deconstruction of privilege," and a more complex consideration of race (Vogel 2014, n.p. paraphrasing Baumgardner 2011; Perry 2014, 39); 2) a renewed interest in global politics and inequity such as women's poverty, education, (un/under)employment, sexual rights, and health. Consider that "international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the World Economic Forum (WEF), the World Health Organisation (WHO), have placed gender equality as a top priority on their policy and action agendas" (Phillips and Cree 2014, 940); 3) a repoliticization of second wave politics, which the third wave often rejected<sup>11</sup> (Cochrane 2013; Knappe and Lang 2014, 364; Phillips and Cree 2014, 939), including human trafficking, socialism, anticapitalism, patriarchy, pornography, rape and rape culture, slut-shaming, body shaming, and sex positivity (Smith 2014);<sup>12</sup> and 4) a continued indulgence in "a highly commodified feminine identity [which] is ideologically inconsistent" (Phillips and Cree 2014, 941). To reiterate, analyzing how intersectionality and social media are jointly taken up by fourth wave feminists in contesting racism and sexism is my main concern in this article, demonstrated by the third section's focus on the Twitter hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen. Moreover, studying the hashtag directly participates in advancing and developing fourth wave feminism as a distinct movement. Before I move on to this discussion, however, I establish what is meant by the term intersectionality and why, as a methodology, it is most applicable for fourth wave feminism.

### **"What Intersectionality Does Rather Than What Intersectionality Is"<sup>13</sup>**

Intersectionality emerged as a movement committed to feminism and anti-racism in the late 1980s. Grounded in the history of Black feminism, its applicability to legal doctrines and critical law studies became evident and it is often attributed to the legal work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 789-790). More than a theoretical framework or praxis of difference, intersectionality addresses the dynamics of inequalities (including identifying those that are less transparent); furthermore, it purposely avoids being a totalizing or "grand theory" (789) by refusing to conceive disadvantage and subordination "along a single categorical axis," namely gender (Crenshaw 1989, 57). In 1989, Crenshaw published her now seminal article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." Providing several legal case studies on Black women, Crenshaw articulates how "Black male and white female narratives of discrimination were understood to be fully inclusive and universal, [but] Black female narratives were rendered partial, unrecognizable, something apart from standard claims of race discrimination or gender discrimination" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 790). The strong advice for antidiscrimination discourse is to center those who are marginalized by adopting an intersectional framework (Crenshaw 1989, 58-59).

In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," Crenshaw (1991), continuing to build on her framework, examines systematic, social, and individual violence against women. She insists that, while a sense of shared experiences among women is necessary for political visibility and social change, in order to adequately consider the issue, one must take into account intragroup differences such as class and race. For this reason, leading transnational feminist Vrushali Patil (2013) characterizes intersectionality as having replaced patriarchy as the dominant mode for critiquing women's inequality (849). But, as she points out, patriarchal ideology may in fact be the foundation and source for a plurality of inequalities beyond gender (i.e., colonialism and imperialism) and these hierarchal relations may feed back into and cultivate other patriarchal models (i.e., the family) (848).<sup>14</sup>

Criticizing both feminism and antiracism for treating gender and race as mutually exclusive identities, however, Crenshaw (1991) writes: “Contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider intersectional identities such as women of color” (1242-1243). Failing to consider intersectionality further marginalizes the person or the group (for example women of colour) as each single-axis identity marker seeks to trump the other identity marker.<sup>15</sup> That is to say, if a woman of colour is subsumed under the category woman as her primary identity marker, racial differences between women (not to mention other differences like sexuality, national, cultural, religious, or class)<sup>16</sup> are effaced and overlooked; if she is marked by her race, then her gender fails to be fully taken into consideration. Furthermore, as Devon W. Carbado (2013), elaborating on Crenshaw’s work, points out, “Black women [were not permitted] to represent a class of plaintiffs that included white women or Black men: here, courts were essentially saying that Black women were too different to represent either white women or Black men as a group” (813). Therefore, Crenshaw (1991) adopts an intersectional approach in her study: “I explor[e] the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color” (1244). Crenshaw is not advocating only for the inclusion of Black women or immigrant women in terms of being recognized by the legal system, but she is challenging, via an intersectional lens, the structures, ideologies, and systems, which insist upon and impose specific political identities yet cannot represent some subjects—so-called “impossible subjects” (Ngai 2004)—which do not neatly fit into rigid, predesignated categories of identity.

Revising her earlier work for a special edition of *Signs* in 2013, Crenshaw, along with Sumi Cho and Leslie McCall, published, “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” a seminal article outlining intersectionality’s genealogy and its place as a distinct field of study. Engaging with the promises and challenges of this discipline, the authors identify three aspects of the field: 1) application of intersectional theory; 2) discursive debates about the term as a theory and methodology; and 3) political interventions. For the purpose of this article on Twitter, I am mostly concerned with the first and last categories. I disagree with scholar Jennifer C. Nash (2008) who

purports that “intersectionality has yet to contend with whether its theory explains or describes the processes and mechanisms by which subjects mobilize (or choose not to mobilize) particular aspects of their identities in particular circumstances” (12). Twitter, for several years now, as the third section demonstrates, has been an effective means for enacting feminist social movements and exposing social inequality and subordination.<sup>17</sup> Thus, as Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) insist, “efforts to produce new knowledge cannot dispense with the apparatuses through which information is produced, categorized, and interpreted (792). Understanding how Twitter, a means for knowledge dissemination and political intervention, has become a tool for fourth wave feminists committed to applying intersectionality as a strategy for identifying and contesting overlapping power dynamics and axes of inequalities is therefore key.

### **Twitter: Race, Sex, and Intersectionality**

In a neoliberal post race/gender/intersectionality society committed to consumption, privatization, institutionalization, and commodification, how can the fourth wave create inroads, especially when prolific transnational feminist scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2013) believe that “theory—feminist and/or antiracist—is trafficked as a commodity disconnected from its activist moorings and social justice commitments” (972)? Feminist antiracist activism on Twitter, however, is an example of social transformation and suggests that feminist theorists should abandon separating the offline from the online. Keeping this false dichotomy intact silences marginalized voices and conceals the fact that Twitter feminism actively engages with intersectional theory, which repoliticizes marginalized groups and renews the power of critique among feminist and antiracist voices.<sup>18</sup> Rejecting the division is imperative because, as Mohanty, in a footnote, writes: “The ‘old’ (and enduring) hierarchies of colonialism, racism, classism, and (hetero)sexism are alive and well... Global processes of domination and subordination are certainly complex in 2013, but the technologies of colonialism are still accompanied by violence and exclusions that are systemic” (968). A theoretical framework appropriate to the fourth wave’s experiences is necessary and intersectionality holds neoliberal post-ideology (e.g., post-race/feminism) as unsuitable. This is

most evident in Twitter activism by WoC against white privilege and white feminism (Milstein 2013),<sup>19</sup> the latter of which have remained somewhat impervious and hostile to criticism and accountability.

Being born in and yoked to the capitalist, neo-liberal global system, Twitter, a form of social media (O'Reilly and Milstein 2011) and the seventh most visited website in the world (Risam 2015), potentially offers those who are marginalized and disenfranchised a substantial space to voice dissent and social outrage and to politically organize against the above named restrictions. At the same time, the very public nature of social media like Twitter further plays a large role in insisting on intersectional feminist frameworks.<sup>20</sup> The format offers users a brief profile, 140 characters of text, and the ability to share photos and images. Hashtags are personalized catchphrases, which can be easily searched and linked (for instance, #YesAllWomen<sup>21</sup> is considered "trending" when it reaches large audiences). Media is shared by tweeting and retweeting to followers, but, as Roopika Risam (2015), an authority on Twitter, deftly points out, "interacting with other users does not require any formal linking of accounts" (n.p.). Thus connectivity amongst users is maximized and this explains why Twitter is invaluable in documenting events, such as protests, in real time.

Twitter, despite, or in spite of, brevity, is a protest tool in and of itself. Munro (2014) argues that the medium has, by and large, created a new language for fourth wavers: "Terms such as WoC, cis and TERF are invaluable given the 140-character limit imposed by Twitter, and lend themselves to the practice of hashtagging" (25). A controversial feminist journalist and writer, Meghan Murphy (2013) refers to this activity as Twitter feminism and elaborates that "[it's] is all about hashtags and mantras. We all compete to make the most meaningful, (seemingly) hard-hitting statement in order to gain followers and accolades. Invent the right hashtag and you can become a feminist celebrity" (n.p.). Seemingly, the goal is to attract a large number of followers in order to quickly spread one's message and spark conversations.

Though Twitter is an indispensable tool for intersectional feminist praxes, critics still falsely distinguish between the online and the offline. For example, Henrike Knappe and Sabine Lang (2014) write:

Women are increasingly savvy users of web-based mobilisation and that particularly for young women the barriers to exercising their citizenship are lower on the web than in offline civic spaces (Harris 2010; Schuster 2013). Online and offline activism do not represent a zero-sum equation. Online engagement can have spillover effects for offline activity (Bimber et al. 2012; Earl et al. 2010); alternatively, online and offline engagement can converge into specific modes of participation (Hirzalla and Van Zoonen 2011: 494). (364)

Active bloggers on the subject, Mariame Kaba and Andrea Smith (2014), however, question whether a delineation between online and offline spaces is productive, but fail to extend this thinking to its logical conclusion, which is that one cannot separate the two. Furthermore, a refusal to separate the online and the offline is imperative for understanding intersectional feminist engagements and activities.

Although counter-intuitive for a methodology committed to seemingly immutable categories of identity, like race, an intersectional feminist methodology nevertheless necessitates a rejection of conceiving identity in terms of binary thinking. Intersectional feminism, if it is to impart political change, must embrace and foster categories of identity according to a non-binary spectrum while, at the same time, remaining hostile to being subsumed and high-jacked by neoliberal thinking, which attempts to render discrimination invisible (e.g., individualism or analogizing that the post offline/online space is the same as claiming we are a post-race or a post gender society). Intersectional feminism reveals that neoliberalism, at the same time as espousing equality for all as in being post sexism, simultaneously enforces and naturalizes hierarchical binary categories such as gender (male/female) as a means of oppression. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to recognize Twitter feminism as a grassroots project or grounded praxis, like Cochrane's (2013) example of the anti-Page 3 campaigns, and that the online and offline are one in the same.

Intersectional feminism on Twitter reveals that activism online is offline activism and offline activism is online activism. The innovative web-based project Everyday Sexism, which now has 219,000 followers, traverses this interstitial space. Founded by Laura Bates, the project "proved so successful that it was rolled out

to 17 countries on its first anniversary this year, tens of thousands of women worldwide writing about the street harassment, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination and body-shaming they encounter” (Cochrane 2013, n.p.). Bates’ project does important work in making harassment visible as a gendered issue, but it likewise addresses one of Patil’s (2013) criticisms of intersectionality<sup>22</sup>: it does not adequately take into consideration cross-border dynamics or transterritorial inequities (853). The site, transnational in scope, though admittedly quite British focused, allows women from different geo-political-situations, provided they have access to a computer, the internet, the tech tools, and a proficient command of the English language, to post their experiences and to advocate for change.

The rationale behind sites like Bates’ is that its “organizing is designed to enable participants to recognize, analyze, and address the overlapping layers of marginality and discrimination in their lives” (Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013, 918). These layers are evident when reading posts on the site such as those directly experienced by the person and/or those indirectly experienced (i.e., a Kim Kardashian sex-tape flag flying at Glastonbury Festival). Both kinds of claims express a revived reiteration of the second wave’s insistence that the personal, because it is inherently political, must enter into public spaces and dialogues. In doing so, definitions of sexism are determined by preexisting notions of the term (enabling the initial recognition and vocalization), but thereafter expanded upon, and most likely challenged, by the plethora of posts by other tweeters. Twitter therefore provides an indispensable stage for critical discussions and debates relating to feminism, which cuts across intersectional lines like race and class.

The idea that all fourth wave feminist projects, however, are inherently intersectional is misleading. In “Hashtag Feminism, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the Other #FemFuture,” Susana Loza (2014), writing on how Twitter is a platform for expressing feminism, notes that many WoC are frustrated and angered by mainstream feminism privileging white feminism; that is to say that solidarity equals white women. For example, vocal activist Mikki Kendall (@Karynthia) called out white feminists, such as Vanessa Valenti, for defending white male feminist Hugo Schwyzer’s racial discriminations. Kendall devised the now infamous hashtag #solidarityisforwhitewomen, which was

retweeted 75,465 times over four days (Loza 2014). Reflecting on her hashtag, Kendall (2013b) writes that digital feminism and, according to my theory she means feminism generally, is too exclusionary and does not meaningfully value WoC’s perspectives: “White feminism has argued that gender should trump race since its inception. That rhetoric not only erases the experiences of women of color, but also alienates many from a movement that claims to want equality for all” (n.p.). Race theorist Lauren Walker (2013), who once identified with the label “feminist,” responded to Kendall’s hashtag in “Why #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Has Been So Meaningful To Me, And Why It Must Never Be Forgotten” and outlines the many ways in which feminism erases race to the extent that she concludes: “Solidarity was, and is, for white women” (n.p.). The debate surrounding Schwyzer, of course, is a mere snippet of the larger issues pertaining to feminist solidarity and digital feminist praxis, which continues to mis-and-under represent matrices of power like race and class.

Mainstream digital feminist praxes (e.g., the 2012 #Fem Future convention and the report #Fem Future: Online Revolution which followed, put together by Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti in conjunction with the Barnard Center for Research and Women and organized around making online feminism financially sustainable) can and do exclude WoC in part because they fail to employ an intersectional framework. Elitism and white middle-class feminism will continue to dominate digital studies and the feminist digital future until it is radically ruptured by marginalized voices who are no longer marginalized (Okolosie 2014, 92). Vivian M. May (2014) calls this “the struggle to articulate what cannot necessarily be told in conventional terms, and the struggle to be heard without being (mis)translated into normative logics that occlude the meanings at hand” (99). Thus, intersectional feminists, attune to such predicaments, must remain self-reflexive in working to transform categories that violently homogenize and hierarchize.

Race and gender theorist Naomi Zack (2005), however, argues that intersectional analyses keep white women in the dominant position (7-8) by reinforcing “the distinction between ‘feminism’ on the one hand and ‘multi-cultural feminism’ and ‘global feminism’ on the other (Garry 2011, 829). Unsurprising, this sentiment sometimes is presented for the opposite reason—

meaning intersectionality is the intellectual property of WoC; that is, Iphis (2014), whose blog title “If you’re white, don’t call yourself an ‘intersectional feminist’ and don’t use ‘intersectionality’ for white people” claims that calling oneself intersectional if he or she is not of colour is political misappropriation and serves to hegemonize white feminism. Philosopher Ann Garry (2011), like Zack (2005), conversely, argues that intersectionality does in fact apply to all women “given that all people, not just the oppressed, have race/ethnicity” (Garry 2011, 829), not to mention age, ableism, sexuality, class, etc. Unlike Zack (2005) and Iphis (2014), Garry (2011) does not conceive of intersectionality as a “conceptual basis for dividing feminists” (829). The intersectional feminist nevertheless “signals the end of a certain conception of feminism, a (neo)liberal conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of womankind who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice (Hayles 1999, 286)” (Loza 2014, n.p.).

In her provocative essay “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars,” Michelle Goldberg (2014) queries whether the race wars between feminists or the “trashing” of other feminists in the name of intersectionality, such as that which resulted from the #Fem Future report, benefits or hinders feminism. Goldberg suggests that infighting within feminism (made public on Twitter) has disrupted a “former feminist blogosphere [which] seemed an insouciant, freewheeling place, revivifying women’s liberation for a new generation” (13). Feminist debates have resulted in fearmongering in terms of speaking up against ideas, risking alienation from a group that purportedly is a safe community, and jeopardizing one’s reputation. Furthermore, such behaviour weakens the movement and inclines feminists and potential allies to disengage. Intersectionality may be “the dogma that’s being enforced in online feminist spaces ... Online, however, intersectionality is overwhelmingly about chastisement and rooting out individual sin” (15). Thus, Goldberg sees intersectionality as having a toxic effect in online feminist spaces.

Similarly, in “The Trouble with Twitter Feminism,” Murphy (2013) offers a frank, non-exhaustive list of the abuse she has received over Twitter such as that she is a “white supremacist,” that she “hates women,” and that she is a defender of Schwyzer (n.p.).<sup>23</sup> Murphy, how-

ever, only discusses the experiences of a white, cis-gendered woman and she is a polarizing figure in Canadian feminist social media and minority communities; for example, sex workers and trans\* folks and their allies have tried to ban her columns from leftist publications such as *Rabble.ca*. Her antagonistic position, however, helps frame the debate within and surrounding intersectionality, Twitter, and fourth wave feminism. For example, Murphy writes: “I don’t think it’s [Twitter is] a place for productive discourse or movement-building. I think it’s a place where intellectual laziness is encouraged, oversimplification is mandatory, posturing is de rigueur, and bullying is rewarded” (n.p.). Murphy concludes that Twitter “1) is not at all representative of the feminist movement and the actual beliefs of and work done by feminists around the world [and] 2) It is a, generally, toxic and unproductive place for feminism and movement-building” (n.p.). Moreover, Murphy questions the ability of online feminism to compensate for face-to-face feminism and “on the ground” praxis, but as I have suggested throughout this article, the failure to confront this false binary of offline and online is also a failure to seriously engage with intersectionality and to confront oppression like racism.

The ability for online posters to remain anonymous and utter derogatory remarks without severe repercussions (i.e., trolls, doxxers, misogynists, racists) because Twitter does not have a code of behavior, however, is a legitimate concern that Murphy voices in her anti-Twitter grievances.<sup>24</sup> Another controversial figure, Daniel Greenfield (2014), Shillman Journalism Fellow at the David Horowitz Freedom Center, further adds that online feminism, read intersectional feminism, egregiously berates and shames white privilege, which has led to a dizzying effect of prostrated white feminists apologizing while “the other side [WOC] keeps punching them” (n.p.).<sup>25</sup> Greenfield purports that white feminists often disingenuously supplicate themselves for fear of being reprimanded as anti-intersectional and racist.

Countering representations of the Twitter-sphere as toxic (Goldberg 2014; Greenfield 2014; Murphy 2013), Kaba and Smith (2014) argue that “The only way we can avoid toxicity is to actually end white supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy. Women of color know that when we leave the supposed ‘toxicity’ of Twitter, we are not going to another place

that is not toxic. Thus, our goal is not to avoid toxicity, as if that is even possible, but to dismantle the structures that create toxicity” (n.p.). Removing one’s self from Twitter in order to avoid denigrating comments signals privilege because deep-rooted inequalities, particularly for WoC, are experienced online and offline. Contrary to assumptions that a digital self has no physicality, a body behind anonymity is still expected in online relationships. Discriminations based on visibility (of race, class, disability, age, and gender) continue to perniciously persist (Kendall 2002, 215). Digital worlds like Twitter, however, certainly complicate notions of identity and representation.

Subverting Goldberg’s (2014) rhetoric that intersectional feminism on Twitter is destructive, Risam (2015) claims that mainstream white feminists’ utopian visions of an idyllic online setting are in fact toxic discourses:

These toxic discourses, disseminated online, help replicate and amplify racialized and gendered differences that exist among progressive activists. In doing so, they position women of color as the repository of failure for online feminism, guilty of creating spaces in which white feminists claim a reluctance to speak, for fear of censure. As a result, engagement with intersectional, rather than single-issue, feminism is rendered a problem, a disruption, perhaps even a distraction from the putatively more productive work of an online feminism untroubled by ‘infighting’ over racial dynamics. (n.p.)

She further contends that “the most troubling facet... is that she [Goldberg] holds women of color largely to blame for the backlash against Martin and Valenti [#Fem Future]. In doing so, she instantiates a notion of toxic femininity, positioning women of color feminists as the disruptive bodies that transgress fictive, ideal feminist spaces on Twitter” (n.p.). The label of toxic as an antonym of health, wellness, and/or harmless indicates two important things: 1) WoC’s voices pose a considerable threat to mainstream feminism (emphasizing the former’s influence and power); 2) the neo-conservative reaction is to label those who oppose the normalization of discrimination as “toxic,” thereby silencing marginalized voices and stabilizing “a hegemonic version of online feminism” (Risam 2015, n.p.). Like Risam, Kaba and Smith (2014) contest “the trope of the ‘bad fem-

inist,” which Kendall as well as other WoC feminists have been labeled:

[It] has been deployed as a disciplinary mechanism for re-establishing and maintaining power and control. Rather than substantively engage Black feminist critiques, for example, gatekeepers demonize the bad Black feminist who is not nice to white women. The analysis of ‘twitter’ wars then quickly devolves into a battle among individual personalities. [Feminism actually needs less focus on individuals and more on the collective struggle to uproot oppression]. (n.p.).

Mainstream feminism’s refusal to seriously consider voices from the margins means the movement continues to be exclusionary, segregating, and non-intersectional.

Jamie Nesbitt Golden, like Kendall, therefore believes in the mobilizing potential of technology, especially Twitter and hashtag feminism, to bring WoC, across borders and boundaries, together so as to create an important movement and space for political resistance: “Social media has made it possible for black feminists in Johannesburg to connect with black feminists in St. Louis and all points in between. Blogs written by women of color from one side of the globe become topics of discussion on the other side in a matter of minutes” (Golden as qtd. in Loza 2014, n.p.). Golden emphasizes that a transnational feminist approach to online relationships carves out a unique space for Black feminists who may have no face-to-face contact. The space also brings visibility and awareness to “people and projects generally overlooked by popular feminist outlets” (as qtd. in Loza 2014, n.p.). That WoC’s organizations radically disrupt and transform feminist politics via Twitter is unequivocal (Okolosie 2014, 90).

In reference to the exchange on Schwyzer, Kendall (2013b) adds that “despite the natural brevity encouraged by Twitter, any conversation that can span a full day must generate some change. The only question is whether or not feminism will be receptive to the critiquing and to doing the work required to resolve the problems” (n.p.). Kendall’s statement in fact highlights two problematic, systemic issues in regards to feminism: is it not highly suspicious that just as WoC’s voices are seriously decentering white privilege, are demanding recognition, and are bringing race and feminism to the

forefront of debate, that digital feminism, and Twitter in particular, is claimed to be in crisis, internecine, divisive, merely cathartic? In addition, intersectional frameworks are being charged with reifying categories of identity, oppression, and privilege (Garry 2011, 830) and therefore failing as analytic tools and means to establish gender and social justice.

Worse yet, as Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional critique of antiracist and feminist approaches highlighted, the logic that places gender once again as the single defining characteristic of one's self is being applied to global concerns. For example, Flavia Dzodan (2011) writes about a sign, held by a white woman at a New York Slut Walk, which read: "*woman is the N\* of the world.*"<sup>26</sup> Responding to critics like Shira Tenant, who implicitly defended the sign in the name of feminist solidarity, Dzodan posted: "MY FEMINISM WILL BE INTERSECTIONAL OR IT WILL BE BULLSHIT! Do you see where I am coming from with this? Am I not supposed to apply that lens to Slut Walk? Am I supposed to ignore the violence that ensued in the N\* word discussion? Am I supposed to overlook its blatant violence in the name of sisterhood?! IS THAT WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME?!" (n.p.). Dzodan's comments highlight how non-intersectional feminism polices criticism and forces would-be WoC allies to distance themselves from the movement. By upholding global justice and/or global solidarity as the higher feminist goal, unified by gender—this is the case with the hashtag #Bringbackourgirls<sup>27</sup> (italics mine)—those voices, which are so crucial to feminism, instantaneously become obsolete and irrelevant. In decrying the power of Twitter feminism (and thereby the power of WoC's voices using said technology) to impact social change and in moving the goal posts, marginalized voices are doubly silenced.

If the fourth wave is to move forward in its commitment to solidarity, it must gain stability and credibility from WoC. Unsurprisingly, however, feminists have taken issue with the way the argument surrounding white solidarity and white feminism versus women of colour feminism has been framed. Veronica Arreola (2014) of *Viva La Feminista* in "The Colour of Toxicity" recaps the debate between Kendall and Goldberg on the inclusivity and exclusivity of #Fem Future; she points out "[t]he erasure of a larger critique by Latinas, Asian women, Native women of #Femfuture...

Our issues may not be the same and not every woman of color was critical of these conversations, but it was far more diverse than just black feminist twitter" (n.p.). Like Kaba and Smith (2014), Daniela Ramirez (2013), writing from a Latina perspective, contests "the myth of representation" the term WoC implies. She argues that WoC is "the very category that has been used to justify our exclusion from—and tokenist representation within—the mainstream movement" (n.p.). Importantly, she clarifies that there is no monolithic or singular notion of WoC and that many women are not either a white woman or a woman of colour, but "both."

Being both, *la mestiza* (Lugones 2003; Moraga 1983; Anzaldúa 1987), creates its own set of problems in terms of choosing between solidarity with WoC and being "white feminist" allies, given that Latinas like Ramirez (2013) "are not recognized fully as members of either [group]" (n.p.). This notion invites one to question whether racial identity, like gender (or as Judith Butler [1990] suggests sex), is a construct that can be experienced on a spectrum and as fluid? Consider the now infamous case of American civil rights activist Rachel Dolezal, who culturally identifies as Black, but is not African American. Unsurprisingly, Dolezal has polarized views on this subject: she has found some support from groups and individuals who either accept or identify with her identity struggles. For example, an interview with race scholar Alyson Hobbes by television host and political commentator Melissa Harris-Perry (2015) on *The Melissa Harris-Perry Show* on MSNBC discusses the possibility of cis and trans racial identity (using the parlance of transgenderism).<sup>28</sup> Others, like Kat Blaque (2015), a Black trans vlogger for *Everyday Feminism*, however, has made convincing arguments about crucial differences between gender identity and racial identity, not least of which is the legacy of slavery.

Crenshaw's (1991) emphasis on how WoC are rendered non-representable when either gender or race is the determining axes of inequality adds complexity to the issue. Lola Okolosie (2014), speaking on the reception and dissemination of intersectionality and an erroneous perception in the United Kingdom that it is synonymous with Black feminism, clarifies:

As black feminism is presented as the site that 'houses' intersectionality, however inadvertently, we too are liable to ignore other intersections of oppression. Gender and

race become the principal foci from which much of our discussions about the term and concept are had. Ability, sexuality, age, nationality and class (which is often treated as implicated in our experience as members of ethnic minority communities) become areas that exist within our 'safe spaces' as marginal. (93)

Such thinking therefore calls on WoC feminists, and all feminists, to analyze oppressive, privileged structures, diversity, and heterogeneity within its own movement. McCall (2005) calls this intracategorical complexity because intersectionality pays more attention to race than class (1773, 1788); this might explain why Ramirez (2013) goes further to boldly suggest that other inequalities, such as socioeconomic status "and the privilege that it allows, unites and divides us more than race and gender" (n.p.). One may disagree that socioeconomic status is more important, but the point that McCall's (2005), Okolosie's (2014), and Ramirez's (2013) analyses make is that intersectional feminists will often be faced with several competing axes of power and inequality and one may in fact be privileged in one way (e.g., class), but be disadvantaged in another (e.g., gender); thus, remaining self-reflexive, vigilantly attune to differences, and open to adopting new strategic practices of intersectionality is necessary.

Advancing this dialogue, following the Twitterstorm Kendall's hashtag caused, both she and tech-media expert Sarah Milstein (2013) have devised steps white feminists can take towards a more progressive, intersectional perspective. Kendall (2013a) provides the following list: 1) Listen and do not become defensive<sup>29</sup>: "Understand that your role is not to lead, or speak for women of color. We're more than capable of speaking up for ourselves"; 2) Educate yourself and read; 3) Check yourself and others for racist, anti-feminist, and derogatory comments/actions; and 4) Understand that feminist communities will not all have the same goals or needs. Milstein (2013), like Kendall, stresses that raising feminist consciousness can be achieved when WoC and white feminists become allies: "Their insights are leading us toward a more conscious feminism. White women, however, need to take responsibility for educating [themselves]...White feminists [must] connect more genuinely with women of color [in order to] improve feminist outcomes for people of all races" (n.p.). Somewhat ventriloquizing Kendall, she emphasizes promot-

ing intersectionality and inaugurating meaningful dialogue and change via: 1) Accept the intentional fallacy<sup>30</sup> (basically, intentions—good or not—are irrelevant; only actions and impact matter); 2) Avoid being defensive; 3) Identify and rectify racist tendencies; 4) Listen to marginalized voices; and 5) Challenge the mis-and-under representation of minorities.

Kendall (2013a) and Milstein (2013) do important work in suggesting how one can adopt an intersectional approach to one's anti-racist feminism, but there is also the need for systemic, institutional approaches to applying intersectionality like an honest commitment to diversity in terms of contributors, editors, executives, and any other gatekeepers as well as access to platforms, formal mentorships, and financial compensation for WoC, a point which is also argued by feminist writer and academic Roxane Gay (2013). Contributions from fourth wave feminists like Kendall (2013a, 2013b), Milstein (2013), and Gay (2013) continue to centralize intersectionality (as a subject and a method) because its complexity, as witnessed on Twitter, lends itself well to the topics that concern fourth wave feminists the most: representation, racism, feminism, and solidarity.

## Conclusion

To conclude, as many of the authors have suggested, the fourth wave is defined by its use of technology, so much so that it depends specifically on social media like Twitter for its existence. Twitter is the most important platform for fourth wave feminist activism chiefly because of its deployment of intersectionality. Identifying privilege, difference, representation, and racism from an intersectional approach is a necessary prerequisite for fourth wavers, demonstrated time after time with hashtags like #solidarityisforwhitewomen, which resonated, angered, and divided many feminists. As this article has argued, the work of feminism is to foster debate, to encourage critical discussion, to mobilize activism for social justice and change, and for feminists not to give into the fabricated binary between offline and online realms, which only reinforces oppression and division. Thus, intersectionality as a theoretical framework is most suitable for the fourth wave movement because it strives for political intervention and visibility, but not at the expense of silence, erasure, segregation, and/or marginalization. The intersectional framework employed by fourth wave feminists on the



issues of racism, feminism, and online representation, via Twitter, is therefore creating meaningful collaboration, fruitful coalitions, focused political action, and a firmer sense of what non-totalizing solidarity can and should look like.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>These academics, journalists, and writers are the most influential in terms of Twitter debates on intersectionality and its toxicity. For instance, Mikki Kendall's creation of the Twitter hashtag #solidarityisforwomen has inspired several articles including her own work, "After #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen: So You Want To Be An Ally, Now What?" (2013a) in *XOJane*.

<sup>2</sup>Mariame Kaba and Andrea Smith (2014) argue that "[u]sually, women of color appear in significant numbers in the third wave seemingly out of nowhere to join the struggle... [Thus] the incomplete and selective telling of a feminist history has been contested by many women of color over the years. Yet the idea that women of color (particularly Black women) are interlopers and disruptive presences within the feminist movement has persisted" (n.p.). See also the Combahee River Collective (1982).

<sup>3</sup>For a more recent feminist critique of patriarchy, see Vrushali Patil (2013).

<sup>4</sup>Maureen McNeil (2007) argues that, by the 1990s, there were two separate feminist camps in technoscience: "successor science" associated with Sandra Harding and cyberfeminism strategized by Donna Haraway (143). Haraway's (1986) cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (291).

<sup>5</sup>Postfeminism emerged in the early 1980s and is read by critics as a backlash against feminism (Faludi 1992, 15; Walters 1995, 117), an "othering" of feminism (Tasker and Negra 2007, 4), or a moving beyond feminism (McRobbie 2009, 28). Amber E. Kinser (2004) in "Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism," elaborates that "a now sophisticated and prolific postfeminist ideology...has co-opted and depoliticized the central tenets of feminism. The only thing postfeminism has to do with authentic feminism, however, is to contradict it at every turn while disguising this agenda, to perpetuate the falsehood that the need for feminist change is outdated" (124). Postfeminism is often characterized by individuality, choice, empowerment, sexuality, and consumption; therefore, it is problematic and flawed because equality between the sexes has not been achieved and feminism is necessary. That Hilary Clinton ran as the Democratic presidential candidate in 2016 would make for a fruitful comparison, but it would detract too much from my focus.

<sup>6</sup>Judy Rebick (2013) stresses the necessity for peace to be a part of the fourth wave and, in doing so, strengthens this link between it and the second wave. Like E. Ann Kaplan (2003) who emphasized the centrality of peace in the face of terrorism, Rebick (2013) insists that, because "second-wave feminism began as a peace movement in Canada with the formation of the formidable Voice of Women (VOW), so peace must retain a central element of femi-

nism" (683). In a sense, Shaaf's work does still fit the bill of later fourth wave feminism because it was her website that reached a wide feminist audience.

<sup>7</sup>This does not suggest that the third wave did not have an activist presence. Calls for LGBT legal rights and Pride parades for LGBT communities (although originating in the late 1960s and 1970s) gained widespread attention during the 1980s and 1990s and were at the forefront of this wave. However, as scholars like Judith Rebeck and Jacquetta Newman and Linda White suggest, the third wave, as a whole, dwelled in the cultural arena and was less committed to a street presence, a defining feature of both the second and first waves of Anglo feminisms (Rebeck 2013, 678; Newman and White 2013, 667).

<sup>8</sup>The first Slut Walk took place in Toronto in 2011 after a police officer told women that they if they did not want to be victims/survivors of sexual assault, then they should not dress like sluts. The Walk is now held in several cities across the globe.

<sup>9</sup>The Page 3 Girl is a daily featuring of a topless young woman: there is no male equivalent in the newspaper.

<sup>10</sup>A collapse of the offline and online fits with Haraway's (1986) cyborg, particularly because she critiques categorizations, such as race and gender and class, which are false, "contradictory, partial, and strategic" (295): "these consciousness[es]" have been "forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism" (296). Both intersectional feminism and posthumanism deconstruct the racist, sexist, homophobic discourses of (neo)liberal humanism. While these are preliminary remarks on the relation between intersectional feminism and posthumanism, more work is needed. See also Rosi Braidotti's (2013) comment that posthumanism is a "fast-growing new intersectional feminist alliance" (178).

<sup>11</sup>For example, the Edinburgh fringe festival in 2013 included many feminist-informed shows including Mary Bourke's show *Muffragette*. Kira Cochrane (2013) explains how "Bourke memorably noted in a BBC interview this summer that the open-mic circuit has become a 'rape circle' in recent years. Feminist stand-ups were ready to respond. Nadia Kamil performed a feminist burlesque, peeling off eight layers of clothing to reveal messages such as 'pubes are normal' and 'equal pay' picked out in sequins. She also explained the theory of intersectionality through a vocoder, and gave out badges with the slogan 'Smash the Kyriarchy'" (n.p.). Kamil educates the audience by introducing them to words like "kyriarchy" and "cis."

<sup>12</sup>See Lydia Smith's (2014) article for the appeal of Betty Dodson's work on female masturbation.

<sup>13</sup>See Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013).

<sup>14</sup>Patil (2013) believes that Crenshaw and others are concerned with patriarchy in that intersectionality "articulates the interaction of racism and patriarchy" (Crenshaw as qtd. in Patil 2013, 852), but that it is not rigorously analyzed or developed (852).

<sup>15</sup>Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2013) notes in response to critics that neither she nor Crenshaw are attempting to "reduc[e] the institutional analysis of state power and women-of-color epistemology to essentialist and reductive formulations" (969). She has also conceptually decolonized the notion of a singular or monolithic "Third World Woman."

<sup>16</sup> Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) address points of intersectionality ad infinitum.

<sup>17</sup> See Leslie McCall's essay (2005) for three different kinds of intersectional methodologies: "intracategorical complexity inaugurated the study of intersectionality, I discuss it as the second approach because it falls conceptually in the middle of the continuum between the first approach [anti-categorical complexity], which rejects categories, and the third approach [intercategorical complexity], which uses them strategically" (1773). Twitter debates on race and feminism often support McCall's claim that feminists of colour fall into the intracategorical approach to complexity (both theoretically and empirically) (1780).

<sup>18</sup> I deliberately use the term digital feminism and phrases like online and offline because this is the language currently in circulation—my argument nevertheless remains that this division is divisive and detrimental to feminist theory.

<sup>19</sup> Kate Bradley (2014) cites the blog *BattyMamzelle* for a definition of "white feminism," "which can help white feminists to start questioning their beliefs, and which rejects the racially essentialist connotations that the term seems to suggest... whilst most 'white feminism' is conducted by white, privileged women, it is actually a label for a 'specific set of single-issue, non-intersectional, superficial feminist practices,' and it is possible for feminists of all colours to practise a better, more inclusive feminism" (n.p.).

<sup>20</sup> One wonders if users are genuinely fighting racism and sexism or paying lip service because they are afraid of being labelled sexist or racist or both. The limited number of characters might also restrict what posters can and cannot say.

<sup>21</sup> #YesAllWomen is a response to the 2014 Isla Vista killings of six people with thirteen others being injured. The killer, Elliot Rodger, was a misogynist and thus the hashtag represents users' examples or stories of misogyny and violence against women.

<sup>22</sup> For two of the most damning criticisms of intersectionality, see Devon W. Carbado (2013) and Jennifer C. Nash (2008). Vivian M. May (2014), in refuting anti-intersectionality discourses, takes an interpretive approach, arguing that these critiques are invaluable for examining "hermeneutic marginalization and interpretive violence; the politics of citation; and the impact of dominant expectations or established social imaginaries on meaning-making" (94). She contends that "how intersectionality is critiqued, and how its ideas about power, subjectivity, knowledge, and oppression are interpretively represented, likewise 'establishes limits on what counts as meaningful' within feminist theory and in policy and research contexts where intersectionality is being applied as an equity instrument" (95).

<sup>23</sup> The controversy around Meghan Murphy is another example of intersectionality, but is not within the scope of this article.

<sup>24</sup> A discussion of online (dis)embodiment is certainly fruitful, but is not possible here.

<sup>25</sup> Relatedly, Lola Okolosie (2014) recounts a discussion that took place on Radio 4's "Woman's Hour" program on December 31, 2013. The topic was the success of fourth wave feminism in the UK and featured three prominent participants: Laura Bates (Everyday Sexism Project), Caroline Criado-Perez (women on bank notes), and Black feminist Reni Eddo-Lodge who "talked of her work, along with other black feminists, to highlight 'racism within feminism.' Criado-Perez (2013) directly followed Eddo-Lodge's contri-

bution here by stating that 'it is disingenuous to suggest that white women are anti-intersectionality' and that a 'big part of the problem is the way certain women use intersectionality as a cloak to abuse' prominent white feminists." As Okolosie notes, "the ensuing heated debates on Twitter around the show centred on the fact that intersectionality was being presented as particularly worthy of lending itself to such abuse" (92-93).

<sup>26</sup> This is the title of a John Lennon song (1972), which suggests once more that the second wave is being re-hashed in the fourth wave.

<sup>27</sup> #Bringbackourgirls refers to April 14, 2014 when 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped from Government Secondary School, Chibok by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria. Fifty seven escaped and 219 are still missing. The global outrage this event caused speaks to Kaplan's (2003) concerns about how feminists should negotiate gender justice in a globalized world.

<sup>28</sup> Rachel Dolezal has spoken about how Caitlyn Jenner's transgenderism resonates with her own experiences with race.

<sup>29</sup> See Jessie-Lane Metz (2013) for an account of why defensive responses to calls for more intersectional feminism are problematic.

<sup>30</sup> This comes from W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley (1954).

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# Intersectionality in the Canadian Courts: In Search of a Decolonial Politics of Possibility

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**Caroline Hodes** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Lethbridge. She completed her PhD in the Department of Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies at York University in 2013. Her dissertation is entitled "(Re) Producing Nation at the Supreme Court of Canada: Identity, Memory, History and Equality in *R. v. Kapp*." The Helena Orton Memorial fund and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded her doctoral research. Her work can be read in the *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice*, and in *Feminist (Im)Mobilities in Fortress(ing) North America: Rights, Citizenships and Identities in Transnational Perspective*, a collection in Ashgate's Gender in a Global/Local World series.

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## Abstract

This critical examination of intersectionality in the context of Canadian anti-discrimination cases outlines the Lockean foundations of identity construction in the courts. By framing Jasbir Puar's articulation of intersectionality as an invitation to create more complex cartographies, the author challenges the hegemony of certain kinds of knowledge production in sites of institutional power.

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## Résumé

Cet examen critique de l'intersectionnalité dans le contexte des affaires de lutte contre la discrimination au Canada souligne les fondements lockiens de la construction de l'identité devant les tribunaux. En formulant l'articulation de l'intersectionnalité par Jasbir Puar comme une invitation à créer des cartographies plus complexes, l'auteure conteste l'hégémonie de certains types de production des connaissances dans les lieux de pouvoir institutionnel.

## Introduction

It has been over 25 years since Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) first put a name to intersectionality. Since then, intersectionality has become "an everyday metaphor that anyone can use" to interrogate, and intervene in, the ways that social life is experienced, discussed, represented, structured, and institutionalized. The central idea, however, was not new at the time and Crenshaw herself acknowledges that:

In every generation and in every intellectual sphere and in every political moment, there have been African American women who have articulated the need to think and talk about race through a lens that looks at gender, or think and talk about feminism through a lens that looks at race. (Adewumni 2014, n.p.)

Nevertheless, in those 25 years, unlike its preceding articulations, the specific term "intersectionality" has not only become foundational to feminist theory and praxis, it has crossed borders making appearances within and in-between multiple legal jurisdictions, theoretical planes, and geographic locations. By focussing my attention on the epistemological foundations of the rules that govern identity formation within Canadian anti-discrimination law, in this article, I examine issues that have received little attention in the literature on intersectionality. Following Jasbir Puar's (2012) pivotal insight that "many of the cherished categories of the intersectional mantra ... are the products of modernist, colonial agendas and regimes of epistemic violence" (54), I argue that, without carefully examining the Lockean foundations of the concept of identity itself, the use of intersectionality in the context of anti-discrimination law will continue to reproduce the essentialism and epistemic violence that intersectional resistance initially sought to disrupt.

Vrushali Patil (2013) maintains that, if cross-border dynamics are neglected and the nation's emergence via transnational processes remains unproblematized,

“our [intersectional] analyses will remain tethered to the spatialities and temporalities of colonial modernity” (863). This important insight bears out in the context of Canadian anti-discrimination law. Anti-discrimination claims are a primary site of nation building that, despite pretenses to geographic particularity, simultaneously borrow, exchange, assimilate, and disavow the terminologies and legal logics of other national jurisdictions. Despite previous articulations of the power relations at the heart of intersectional analyses in Black feminist thought in the U.S., intersectionality as a terminology is firmly rooted in the intellectual and institutional culture of 1980’s and 1990’s U.S. Critical Legal Studies (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). Carol A. Aylward (2010) situates intersectionality as “an offshoot of Critical Race Theory which originated with Black and other scholars of colour who felt that existing legal discourse, including Critical Legal Studies discourse, was alienating to all people of colour (3). As such, the term intersectionality was forged in a geographically and methodologically specific site of institutional power: the U.S. legal academy. It also emerged in relation to a specific articulation of juridical power. As Crenshaw (2014) states:

...the term was used to capture the applicability of Black feminism to anti-discrimination law...anti-discrimination law looks at race and gender separately. The consequence of that is when African American women or any other women of colour experience either compound or overlapping discrimination, the law initially just was not there to come to their defence (n.p.).

U.S. anti-discrimination law, including its legitimating logics, its doctrinal obstacles, and its role in impeding or outright reversing modest law reforms was among the initial targets of intersectional resistance (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). This context has, to a certain extent, shaped its possibilities, conditioned its emergence, and has created certain parameters of intelligibility around its future potential. Its genesis as a juridical concept has had a significant impact on the ways that intersectionality has been able to cross borders and inform the drafting and implementation of anti-discrimination and equality law in other parts of the world. This includes, but is not limited to, interpretations of both federal and provincial human rights codes in Canada and judicial interpretation of the equality

provisions in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In the context of Canadian public policy and anti-discrimination law, judges, lawyers, and legislators have historically and continue to borrow and codify the racial language and the invented taxonomies of the U.S. (Mawani 2011; Hodes 2013; *R v. Kapp* 2008).

Contrary to Crenshaw’s initial objectives, rather than appearing as a defence against discrimination, intersectionality as it appears on national, regional, and international legal and social policy landscapes often functions as “a tool of diversity management and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism” (Puar 2007, 212; Yuval-Davis 2006). As a result, intersectionality often colludes with the disciplinary apparatuses of states, re-centers universalizing liberal essentialist identity formations, seeks to harness mobility, and encases difference “within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid” (Puar 2007, 212). In the context of Canadian anti-discrimination law, the grounds approach provides a structural container that disciplines identity into a formulaic grid that is populated by a series of fixed and unchanging characteristics. This is not, however, only the result of the narrow interpretive frameworks produced in Canadian anti-discrimination cases. It is also partly a result of Crenshaw’s (1989) use of the categories that appear in U.S. anti-discrimination law as descriptive features of experience in the early development of the concept.

The idea that race and gender, or race and sex as it would be articulated in the context of anti-discrimination claims, intersect to produce qualitatively different experiences of discrimination disrupts any singular or universalizing category of woman (Crenshaw 1991). It also disrupts any universalizing notions of racialized gender discrimination (Brah and Phoenix 2004). The intersecting categories, however, remain heuristic devices with juridical force that pre-exist and produce knowledge about the experiences that they purport to describe. The assumed transparency of identity categories has led to explorations of the multiple ways that they often impose both epistemological frameworks and ontological presumptions when they appear both independently and in the context of intersectional frameworks (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Joseph Massad in Boggio Éwanjé-Épée and Magliani-Belkacem 2013; Mawani 2011; McClintock 1995; Puar 2012; Yuval-Da-



vis 2006). In legal contexts, these identity categories are often used as discrete and static descriptive features of a presumed reality. As a result, whether intersectional or not, the use of identity categories in Canadian anti-discrimination law imposes both epistemological frameworks and ontological presumptions.

The problem is therefore simultaneously one of conceptualization and one of deployment. In its articulation as a response to U.S. anti-discrimination law, intersectionality takes for granted predetermined identity categories as they manifest in U.S. anti-discrimination doctrine. Similarly, when imported as a response to Canadian anti-discrimination law, intersectional analyses take for granted the supposed universality and transparency of the predetermined identity categories that are listed as grounds in human rights legislation and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. A closer look at the methods of identity construction required by the grounds approach in Canadian anti-discrimination law, however, reveals that the grounds are neither transparent nor universal. The rules that establish the content and meaning of the grounds transform anti-discrimination claims into expressions of colonial modernity through the imposition of Lockean epistemological and ontological presumptions about the body, identity, diversity, and difference.

### **Intersectionality and The Grounds Approach in Canada**

One of the key features of feminist intersectional analyses is the desire to decenter the unified, self-referential subjects of modernity that often appear in feminist and other contexts (Brah and Phoenix 2004). Earlier articulations of intersectionality, such as the Combahee River Collective's (1977) advocacy for analyses that recognize interlocking systems of oppression, drew attention to what Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004) refer to as "the futility of privileging a single dimension of experience as if it constituted the whole of life" (78). Unfortunately, the rules that govern how identity is articulated in Canadian anti-discrimination law prevent the kinds of intersectional analyses that consider identity to be an experience that is mediated by agency, social relationships, and power relations. In this context, experience is not the focus. Instead, identity and the many categories used to describe it are the focus and they become sets of immutable physical characteristics

that reduce all experience to that which can be articulated through the grounds. Identity thereby becomes a concrete fact of being. A closer examination of the concept of identity reveals that each of the categories that make up the grounds carry many of the universalizing Euro-American ontological and epistemological presumptions that are reflective of John Locke's ideas about embodiment, difference, and diversity. It also reveals that identity itself is the vehicle through which the unified, self-referential subjects of colonial modernity become reified in anti-discrimination claims.

John Locke is the hinge that connects England's colonial aspirations in the Americas to contemporary discourses around identity in judicial decisions and the work of legal scholars that focus on constitutional anti-discrimination and equality law in both Canada and the United States. Locke, although never taking credit for the *Second Treatise of Government* in his lifetime, created within it an economic defense of English colonialism in the Americas (Arneil 1996). It was also John Locke who was among the first to suture the concept of identity to human and other living beings in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Philip Gleason (1983) and Radhika Mohanram (1999) describe how the word identity derives from the terminologies of logic and algebra and that it was not until Locke came along in the 1680s and 1690s, emphasizing the "the importance of categorizing identity as somatic sameness" or as "encapsulated within the same body which functions as a bag or vessel to contain life," that the word identity was used to describe something trapped inside and/or on the body (Mohanram 1999, 31). Locke's texts emphasize the centrality of the body not only as "the scaffolding upon which identity and difference rest," but they also construct the body, its characteristics, and its consciousness as central to civil state formation (31). This body, its consciousness, and its characteristics is emblematic of the unified, self-referential subject of colonial modernity that feminist analyses of interlocking systems of oppression originally sought to decenter. This body is also epistemologically and ontologically presumed by the universalizing Euro-American identity categories that Puar (2012), Massad (Boggio Éwanjé-Épée and Magliani-Belkacem 2013), and Brah and Phoenix (2004) disrupt in their respective analyses of identity categories and intersectionality. This body, its categories, and its Lockean foun-

ation is also central to earlier articulations of intersectionality in Canadian law and public policy.

In 1989, the year that Crenshaw's pivotal piece appeared in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women articulated some of the same concerns that Crenshaw outlined in relation to U.S. anti-discrimination doctrine:

We would have liked to explore more fully the application of the *Charter* guarantees to the inequality of women who are discriminated against because of race, disability, or other grounds. Unfortunately, cases that challenge the particular complex of disadvantage experienced by women of colour or women with disabilities, for example, are virtually absent from the body of decisions. So far these cases are simply not reaching the courts. In the few cases that involve poor women and Lesbian women, sex equality arguments have not been advanced ... [this] means that judges are not being presented with women's unique experience of discrimination... (Brodsky and Day 1989, 4 and 5 quoted in Aylward 2010, 3)

Although more cases have been litigated and heard in the courts since then, the series of overarching problems outlined here has not changed significantly nor has the presumed universal content of the grounds or the singular, unified bodies that manifest them materially.

Kamini Steinberg (2009) shows that in practice the reliance on a list of discrete grounds of discrimination leads to either the privileging of one foundational ground as the root of the discrimination or to the creation of what a number of feminist scholars have referred to as an "additive approach" (Collins 1990; Caldwell 1999; Yuval-Davis 2006). The additive approach creates a hierarchy of oppression whereby the more grounds that are pleaded, the more kinds of discrimination are catalogued as having taken place. Claimants are then seen to be doubly or triply disadvantaged. In the context of cases that have been pleaded under the equality provisions of the *Charter*, when intersectional approaches have been attempted, they have either defaulted to a foundational ground (see *Canada (Attorney General) v. Mossop* 1993) or in the case of *Corbiere v. Canada*, the majority of the judges commented that Madame Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé's creation of an intersectional framework made her reasoning "unnec-

essarily complex" (Steinberg 2009 and *Corbiere* 1999, para. 72).

Both of these approaches to intersectionality maintain the discrete separability of universalizable identity categories. They also contradict Crenshaw's (2014) later description of compound discrimination or forms of discrimination that cannot be addressed through the separation of either identity categories or kinds of oppression. However, both additive approaches and approaches that privilege one ground, while contradicting Crenshaw's description of compound discrimination, are also simultaneously supported by her claim that different kinds of discrimination can somehow overlap, intersect, or interlock. The language of overlapping, intersecting, or interlocking presupposes that each ground or system of oppression pre-exists the discrimination as a discrete and identifiable entity or strand. When they come together, a new identity and experience is formed, but these are still dependent on the meanings associated with the parts that make up these new wholes.

Despite the problems of insufficient analyses and resistance to intersectional approaches that Steinberg (2009) has drawn attention to in her assessment of the practical application of intersectionality, legal scholars continue to advocate for the use of intersectional frameworks in the Canadian courts. Central to Steinberg's thesis is the need for a more nuanced and holistic analysis in the Canadian courts. More recently, Sébastien Grammond (2009) has criticized Sharon McIvor's challenge to Bill C-31's 1985 amendments to the *Indian Act* for its failure to include both sex and race as grounds of discrimination. Grammond's contention is that challenges to the rules of Indian status that do not consider discrimination at the intersection of sex and race will, and have in McIvor's case, invite "the courts to embrace a truncated vision of the shortcomings of the *Indian Act*" (425). It is important to consider this case in more detail here because it provides insight into identity formation in both Canadian courts and in public policy.

The reason that Sharon McIvor brought her claim forward is because the amendments to the *Indian Act* contained in Bill C-31 resulted in residual sex discrimination. The history of the rules of Indian status is long and complex, but after numerous challenges beginning with those brought forward by Jeannette Cor-

biere Lavell and Sandra Lovelace, the original rules were changed. Before Bill C-31, women with Indian status who married non-Indian men would lose their status whereas non-Indian women who married Indian men would gain status. The problem was that the Bill C-31 amendments still maintained different eligibility rules for men and women.

Under the new rules, women who had their status restored could pass that status on to their children if they married someone without status. Their grandchildren, however, would not be able to pass that status on to their children thereby granting status to only two generations. Men, on the other hand, who had previously been entitled to status would have their status confirmed under Bill C-31. If they were married to people without status, their partners would also have their status confirmed. If they had children, they too would be able to pass on their status as would their children's children. As a result, three generations would gain status: the men, their children, and their grandchildren (National Centre for First Nations Governance 2009).

Sharon McIvor challenged this in court because she was told that, while she was entitled to status under Bill C-31, her son, Jacob Grismer, was not because she traced her ancestry through the female, rather than the male, line. While the courts recognized the residual sex discrimination, the court of appeal and the federal government's legislative response to that judicial decision resulted in the continuation of the same kind of discrimination for future generations. As Mary Eberts (2010), who acted as counsel to the Native Women's Association of Canada in the *McIvor* (2009) appeal, has articulated:

...the Court of Appeal and Canada's response to its decision, perpetuate and exacerbate the sorry legacy of misogyny deeply embedded in the Indian Act. Indeed Canada's response to the *McIvor* case underlines, once again and with even more force, how inappropriate it is for the state to be usurping the indigenous right to determine identity, membership and belonging. (Eberts 2010, 16)

Cases like Sharon McIvor's show the multiple ways that anti-discrimination cases, even when they are considered to be partial victories, maintain the founding violences of settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and genocide. The racialized and gendered membership

criteria outlined in the *Indian Act* were historically and remain an assimilation strategy that promote inclusion through racialized and gendered legislative exclusion. Even if this had been a challenge to the *Indian Act* at the intersection of race and sex, it would have done little to remedy the discrimination due to the built in preference for patrilineal descent and the irremediable nature of a set of rules that were historically crafted as a way to assimilate Indigenous Peoples into the Canadian polity through dispossession (Stote 2015). In fact, using the language of race constitutes one of the many ways in which Canada shares the language and the invented taxonomies of the United States. Bonita Lawrence (2003) has outlined how race as a means of classification reduces "diverse nations to common experiences of subjugation" in both countries and that "to be defined as a race, is synonymous with having [Indigenous] nations dismembered" (5). In *McIvor's* case, rather than drawing attention to the homogenizing, gendered forms of racialization that are intrinsic to the *Indian Act*, a claim based on multiple grounds may have instead further entrenched the racism and sexism that it sought to rectify because of the rules that govern identity formation in Canadian anti-discrimination law.

The quest for fixity and immutability and the framing of rights claims as contingent on identity is an essential piece of anti-discrimination doctrine in Canadian law. If making a claim under section 15 of the *Charter* or under any of the human rights codes as a claimant or counsel for a claimant, you must establish a connection to one or more of the grounds listed or make a successful claim for an analogous ground to be created in order to have a case. These criteria are something that people who are clamoring for the inclusion of more and more grounds should not celebrate, but rather be wary of for the following reasons: in order to establish a ground, it must first be established that claimants are in possession of a condition of being that is either not capable of, or susceptible, to change or that can only be changed at cost to a singular, unified identity.

This legal ontology is very much in keeping with Lockean ideas of embodiment and identity. In Locke's formulation, human bodies are singular and unified self-aware entities separable from both other humans and living beings due to their capacity to reason through abstraction and both the real and the nominal essence.

es used to describe them. The real essences involve attributing an internal quality or structure to something when outwardly that quality would be invisible. The nominal essences are the names given to outwardly visible qualities. In the end, the real are also nominal to the extent that it is necessary to first perceive outward characteristics and on that basis attribute an internal structure. The nominal essences are therefore central to attributions of reason and to the denial of full humanity to those who are determined to be incapable of reason. The real are also nominal to the extent that human perception is limited. Because human perception of bodies leads to the naming of those bodies according to their qualities – black, white, male, female—to be a species of a certain kind or a certain kind of member of a species requires common qualities. But in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the essential qualities possessed by living beings are not entirely accessible via human perception (Locke 2008, 279-304).

While Locke may have doubted the capacity of human beings to perceive the essences of the body and doubted the existence of innate capacities of mind, he also argued that human perception created common characteristics. In this formulation, the body is what leads to the perception of the characteristics in question (Locke 2008, 279-302; Phemister 2008, xxx). For Locke, only observation and empirical evidence could lead to the removal of some qualities and substitute others in the refiguring of the nominal essence of any given living being. Therefore, living beings do not change, only our perceptions of them. This is something that scientists, such as Charles Darwin and his contemporaries, later challenged—the bodies of species do change in order to adapt (Wilkins 2009). Mohanram (1999) also challenges this assessment of the body insofar as the body ages and, in the process of growing older, changes considerably both internally and externally over the course of a single life span. Nevertheless, these nominal essences form the basis of Locke’s system of classification of species into groups and sub-groupings sharing common characteristics. The practice of representing nominal essences through language reifies these qualities, leading to their material manifestation and the perception of them as real, discrete, separable, natural, uncontested, and universal in the realm of meaning making. In Locke’s account of language, words stand in for ideas and ideas manifest materially as bodies and behaviors.

Locke names these groupings as applied to human beings: “identity and diversity” (Locke 2008, 203-218).

In Canadian anti-discrimination law, like in the works of John Locke, to be in excess of an identity or criteria becomes a fault or an exception that must be rigorously examined through scientific inquiry. Identity is not therefore a quality of the body or of being in the world. Rather, it becomes a prison for the body through the denial of potentiality. In this context, identity disciplines corporeal expression and representation and forces the repression of any excess that cannot be reproduced as consistent with the nominal essences that are described through empirical observation and the establishment of ontological facts or, in the context of Canadian anti-discrimination law, some connection to the grounds.

The contradictions inherent in Locke’s theories are consistently mirrored in judicial assessments of identity and in legal arguments that represent the identities of the people who are either party to or have an interest in the claim. In anti-discrimination cases, nominal essences are constructed as unchanging and potentially unchangeable reality. Yet, at the same time as the courts focus on the immovable fixity of identity, they often simultaneously question and fight over who will be fixed as what. As such, in this context the nominal are also real, frozen in and on the body as those things that both transcend time, context, and the body and as those things that enable individual claimants to stand in for groups. The 1999 Supreme Court decision in *Corbiere v. Canada* is the case where the Court chose to define what they meant by immutable characteristics thereby entrenching the Lockean foundations of identity as doctrine in Canadian anti-discrimination law. The *Corbiere* decision was also where Canadian Supreme Court justices created their first intersectional analysis.

In *Corbiere*, members of the Batchewana Indian Band challenged the section of the *Indian Act* that prohibited band members who lived off reserve from voting in band elections. In this case, the Supreme Court took it upon itself to define immutable personal characteristics as those things that “...are changeable only at unacceptable cost to personal identity...[or that] we cannot change or that the government has no legitimate interest in expecting us to change...” (*Corbiere* 1999, 5). They concluded that immutability could be actual, as in the case of race, or constructed, as in the case of reli-

gion. The Court's immutable characteristics, like Locke's nominal essences, are considered to be physical characteristics located in or on the body. In this case, the Court racialized non-resident members of the Batchewana Indian Band by creating out of them a "discrete and insular minority" defined by race, residence, and uniqueness, all of which were conceived to be immutable or unchangeable conditions of the body (*Corbiere* 1999, 9). Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé then proceeded to create the additive approach to intersectionality that Paulette Caldwell (1999), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Kamini Steinberg (2010), and Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) have all criticized. This was done through the addition of sex to the analysis as opposed to a consideration of the inseparability or compound nature of structural factors that, while they affect bodies significantly, are actually external to them. In addition, instead of a consideration of shared histories and the role of current government-led racist and sexist legislation like the section of the *Indian Act* that was being challenged in the case, history as something intrinsic to them, "their history," also becomes affixed to the body as a marker of difference (See Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé in *Corbiere* 1999, 259).

In both this case and in subsequent cases, once this condition of somatic sameness has been established through actual or constructed immutable characteristics, it is applied to others who share like characteristics. This way of articulating the body freezes it in time, place, capability, and potential as part of a set of like kinds. In this context, the grounds play the social role of Lockean nominal essences and thereby, as Patil (2013) forewarns, tether judicial interpretation to the spatialities and temporalities of colonial modernity. But this is not everything that the grounds approach shares with Lockean systems of classification.

As I articulated above, Locke created a framework whereby nominal essences were open to being considered creatures of perception that could be changed through empirical challenges to the real. The body may remain fixed, unchanging, and endowed with both real and constructed immutable characteristics in *Corbiere v. Canada* (1999), but in the context of cases that are pre-occupied with the veracity of the litigant's immutable identity, this second feature of the Lockean schema plays out. This is often done by ignoring how the people involved in or affected by the case would choose to identify themselves.

Disputes over identity that rely on the grounds approach often result in analyses that locate the cause of the discrimination in the body. In these cases, the question periodically changes from what is the nature of the discrimination to what are you? This was particularly evident in Kimberley Nixon's challenge to Vancouver Rape Relief Society's policy whereby only women born women could volunteer for their organization. In August 1995, Kimberley Nixon filed a sex discrimination complaint against Vancouver Rape Relief Society for denying her the opportunity to volunteer for their organization. Vancouver Rape Relief defended their decision to reject her by arguing that because Nixon had been socialized as a boy growing up, she could not provide effective counseling to the cisgendered women that the shelter served. Nixon initially won her complaint at the tribunal level, but after a series of appeals, the Supreme Court of British Columbia reversed the tribunal's decision and ruled in favour of Vancouver Rape Relief. Nixon attempted to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, but they denied her leave to appeal. In the context of that case, at every level of court, Kimberley Nixon's body either began as, or eventually became, the object of inquiry. Experts were called on to explain gender continuums and Nixon's birth certificate, date of surgery, and awareness of her gender identity were all brought under scrutiny. Questions related to what it means to be a woman and to pass or not pass as a woman were also raised at multiple levels of court (*Nixon* 2000 and 2005).

In other cases, the question changes to: what are they and how do their immutable characteristics result in my exclusion? This occurred in the context of *R. v. Kapp* (2008), a BC Pacific salmon fisheries case. In this case, a group of commercial fishers argued that, because Aboriginal fisheries were "race-based" fisheries, the commercial fishers who had been denied access to these fisheries for a period of 24 hours were being discriminated against. In this case, not only were the bodies of the Indigenous Peoples who were the beneficiaries of the government programs framed as the problem that needed to be solved, but their identities were also contested and variously represented at different levels of court as a single race, as political organizations, and as nations. The Crown also consistently argued that the commercial fishers were too diverse a group to plead on any of the grounds in order to get the case thrown out of

court. In lieu of engaging in an intersectional analysis, the courts determined that the occupation of commercial fishing was an immutable characteristic analogous to race. Finally, due to the grounds requirement in s. 15 cases, the Indigenous beneficiaries of the government program were reduced to a singular race, meeting the criteria of actual immutability at the Supreme Court of Canada and thereby reproducing the settler colonial violence that Lawrence (2003) describes as the dismemberment of Indigenous nations.

The deployment of intersectionality and the way that identity and its many categories are understood in all of these cases reveals that the grounds approach limits the range of what is possible. The reliance on the grounds and their Lockean content in Canadian anti-discrimination cases thus maintains the modernist, colonial agendas and regimes of epistemic violence that Puar (2012) has identified as being central to the cherished categories of the intersectional mantra. If this is the case, then what new possibilities might emerge from this analysis?

### **Conclusion: In Search of a Politics of Possibility**

In tracing the Lockean foundations upon which identity and difference rest in a select group of pivotal Canadian anti-discrimination cases, I have partially mapped out what happens to intersectionality when it is incorporated into an institutional context that is tethered to the logic of inclusion as an expression of colonial modernity. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013), however, argue that critiques of intersectionality that claim that it reifies identity categories distort identity politics. They argue that such narrow interpretations of intersectionality are unnecessarily preoccupied with who people are as opposed to how things work (797). But, as I have demonstrated here, this is exactly what happens to intersectionality when it goes to court in Canada. This is done by reproducing the Lockean nominal essences in a way that ends up performing the same social role that biology plays in reductionist and deterministic accounts of both race and gender. In so doing, bodies become not only the objects of inquiry in these kinds of cases, but also the causes of the discrimination. Because the grounds were created to provide a framework through which to articulate difference, a politics of inclusion in this context is very much a kind of assimilation strategy whereby difference

becomes manageable through the production of what Benedict Anderson (1983) has referred to as a “human landscape of perfect visibility” (185).

So where does all this managing of difference get us if, as Jessica Yee (2011) has pointed out, just because we have fancy new language like intersectionality in our talk, it doesn’t mean that anything changes in our walk? In her analysis of feminist challenges to intersectionality, Puar (2012) articulates that “[d]ifference now precedes and defines identity” (55). In Canadian anti-discrimination law, this is, in fact, a doctrinal feature of the grounds approach. Following Rey Chow (2006), Puar (2012) also argues that the endless production of new subjects of inquiry through the creation of difference “has become a universalizing project that is always beholden to the self-referentiality of the centre” (55). In the context of Canadian anti-discrimination law, the centre that Puar is writing about is John Locke’s singular and unified self-aware human entity. This human is separable from other living beings due to its capacity to reason through abstraction and its ability to transcend those markings that remind it of its own bestial mortality. Every grievance that is articulated on the basis of difference, whether intersectional or not, is therefore beholden to this unarticulated centre through comparison to it as part of a process of inclusion. The body marked by identity in this institutional context is not a relation, a doing, or an event. It is an object. It is a thing that can stand in for others of like kind at the same time as it is rendered distinct from its ideal type.

Just as I have shown in the context of the *McIvor* (2009) and *Corbiere* (1999) cases, where litigants challenged the *Indian Act*, exclusion is multiplied infinitely “in order to promote inclusion” into the Canadian polity through dispossession (Puar 2012, 55; Stote 2015). This inclusion, however, is inherently asymmetrical and reproductive of racialized and gendered status hierarchies whereby those bodies marked by their difference exist on an additive continuum of problems that need to be solved. Here Brah and Phoenix’s (2004) insight that identities are not objects, but are rather “processes constituted in and through power relations” (277), is an apt description of the way that the Lockean legal ontology that is deployed through the grounds approach imposes presumptions about the body, identity, diversity, and difference that reify modernist, unified, self-referential subjects in anti-discrimination cases in Canada. But

this way of understanding identity is not unique to this setting.

These cases and this Lockean legal ontology raise many of the old feminist questions and debates around the category woman, the idea of “woman’s voice,” the concept of ‘sisterhood,’ and the existence of woman-only spaces. Recent critiques have pointed to connections between land dispossession and settler feminisms that “claim space and each others’ bodies” (Cruz 2011, 52). In relation to gendered space, Louis Esme Cruz (2011) argues that claiming men-only and women-only space reifies binary essentialist constructions of sex and gender (52). For Cruz, this “encourages invasion and conquest” through territorial claims and exclusions (53). Cruz argues that the creation of these spaces “seems a lot like how land is manhandled as a resource that only some get to benefit from” in settler colonial contexts (52).

In addition, the cases and the Lockean legal ontology examined here point to the value of feminist critiques of liberal and Marxist feminisms that remain rooted in the modernist theoretical and philosophical traditions of the European Enlightenment (Brah and Phoenix 2004, 82). John Locke is often hailed as the father of liberalism and was “a major influence on the rise of materialism in both Britain and France” (Locke 2008, xl). His theories set the stage for many different ways of thinking, including the English and Scottish theories of political economy that would later influence Marx and the social constructivist ideas of identity like those found in some feminist theories. So what possibilities might emerge in the liminal space that follows this disillusioned re-telling of what keeps returning?

Puar (2012) proposes that the concept of assemblage might help to “de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing” by rendering perfectly delimitable sociological objects like the body, identity, and its many categories hazy and indeterminate (57). But, given the Lockean calculus that is central to the law and policy frameworks I have examined here, is anti-discrimination law immovable? Would assemblage become yet another category in the proliferation of differences? Or perhaps the question ought to be reframed: if, as in Félix Guatarri’s (2009) elaboration of the category class or the class struggle, assemblage prevents clearly mapped out categories, how can assemblage transform epistemologies and ontologies that consider identity as perfectly

delimitable? That manage difference on the basis of immutable characteristics? I propose that it can inspire analytic moves that refuse all final closures. What Brah and Phoenix (2004), following Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1986), characterize as the skill of a “decolonized mind” (2004, 77).

In Puar’s (2012) assessment of intersectionality and assemblage, she creates a cartography that eludes reductionist formulations of intersectionality. She reformulates intersectionality in a way that is very much in keeping with Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall’s (2013) characterization of it as a way of interrogating how things work. Unlike the fixed and immovable objects that appear in Canadian anti-discrimination claims, following Crenshaw (1989), Puar (2012) situates intersectionality as an event, an encounter, an accident, in fact (59). Therefore, following her reading of assemblage and intersectionality together, the fusion of the two is not so much a solution to any of what might look like contradictions, inconsistencies, or colluding oppositions in the conceptualization and deployment of intersectionality examined here. Nor is it a resolution of the distortions that occur when intersectionality is institutionalized. It is rather an invitation to create more complex cartographies that are irreducible to identity that challenge how things work in sites of institutional power and beyond.

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# We Are Still Here: Re-Centring the Quintessential Subject of Intersectionality

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**Dr. Khatidja Chantler**, BSc, PhD, Reader and founder member of the Connect Centre for International Research on New Approaches to Prevent Violence and Harm at the University of Central Lancashire, UK, having previously worked for over twenty years in social services and the voluntary sector. She has a wide range of research and evaluation experience particularly in the areas of violence against women and mental health, gender and ethnicity. She supervises PhD students in these fields and is widely published.

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**Dr. Ravi K. Thiara**, BA, MA, PhD is Principal Research Fellow and Director of the Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being at the University of Warwick, UK. She has over twenty-five years' experience conducting research, evaluation, and service development in the area of violence against women. She has a particular expertise in race/ethnicity, gender, and violence. She teaches and supervises PhD students in this area and has published widely.

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## Abstract

This paper argues that “Black woman” should remain the quintessential subject of intersectionality as we are concerned that racialization has been submerged within intersectionality debates. Drawing on research and policy related to violence against women in minoritized communities in the UK, we (re)interrogate the explanatory power and effects of intersectionality.

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## Résumé

Cet article fait valoir que « la femme noire » devrait rester le sujet quintessentiel de l'intersectionnalité, car nous craignons que la racialisation n'ait été noyée dans les débats sur l'intersectionnalité. En nous appuyant sur la recherche et les politiques liées à la violence à l'égard des femmes dans les communautés minoritaires au Royaume-Uni, nous (ré)interrogeons le pouvoir explicatif et les effets de l'intersectionnalité.

## Introduction

In this paper, we have two key aims. First, we explore some key developments in intersectionality theory and second, we focus on violence against women (VAW) in Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in the United Kingdom (UK) context to illustrate the imperative of centring the experiences and knowledges of BME women in intersectionality studies. It is no coincidence that we focus on VAW, as this was one of the major tropes utilised by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) to explicate the dynamics of intersectionality. Crenshaw's (1989) work on intersectionality focussed on the experiences of Black women, defined as African American. In the UK context, Black is an oppositional political term, which refers to African and African-Caribbean women as well as women from visible minorities. However, to attend to the variety of cultural and ethnic communities this covers, the term Black and minority ethnic (BME) is normally used in policy and practice. Within this nomenclature, our paper primarily addresses the issues of VAW in (South) Asian communities (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan communities) and illustrates how some of these issues also have a strong resonance in African communities.

Since Crenshaw's (1989) original formulation of intersectionality, the debate on intersectionality has become increasingly abstract/theoretical and, whilst we consider it crucial to engage with this ongoing debate, equally important to us is the necessity of speaking to the lived experiences and material realities of BME women experiencing violence. Rather than viewing theory and lived experience as dichotomous, we argue that in keeping with the best traditions of feminist scholarship, theory and praxis should be constitutive of each other. In this way, the implications of our theoretical positioning are laid bare and ensure that our theorizing is grounded in, and resonates with, the experiences we seek to theorize. We therefore weave between theoretical debates

and praxis precisely to illustrate this complementarity and interplay.

### **Intersectionality Studies**

Intersectionality studies has burgeoned in the last 25 years within feminist scholarship, the very domain that intersectional analysis sought to disrupt by challenging the absence of an analysis that moved beyond patriarchy/gender to also include other social divisions that shaped the experiences specifically of Black women. Both the precursors of intersectional analysis and its naming have been widely highlighted; the writing and activism of Black women in the US and UK emphasising the uniqueness of Black women's lived-experiences, as differentiated by race, gender and class, and Crenshaw's (1989) coining of the term "intersectionality" as part of the feminist debate about how to theorise "difference." Aimed specifically at exposing the erasure of Black women and of the processes that reinforced their oppression, intersectionality, as an analytical tool, sought to uncover and explain how intersecting axes of power and difference operate to re/inscribe marginality and privilege. Indeed, as noted by some, for Black women, intersectionality represented more than a theoretical development; rather, it evoked a deep emotional response to the centring of Black women's experiences and inclusion within feminist scholarship, as "it helped to erode the epistemological boundaries between those who 'know' and those who 'experience'" (Lewis 2013, 873).

Since the 1990s, intersectionality has pervaded most social science disciplines, as seen by the exponential growth in feminist research and writing (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Davis, 2008; Lewis 2013; Puar 2012, 2013). In attempting to account for this success, Kathy Davis (2008) has identified four key characteristics of a successful theory and hence the success of intersectionality: that it addresses the differences among women, a central concern of feminism; that it does this in new ways, hence offering a "novel twist" to address an old problem; that it appeals to broad academic audience of generalists and specialists; and finally, and of interest to us, that it is the ambiguity and incompleteness of intersectionality, which "allows endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored...intersectionality offers endless opportunities for interrogating one's own blind spots and transforms them into analytic

resources for further critical analysis" (Davis 2008, 77). For Gail Lewis (2013) also, the success of intersectionality is a testament to the fact that knowledge produced at the margins by Black women can be applied beyond their issues and can become "part of a more generalizable theoretical, methodological and conceptual toolkit" (871).

### **Ongoing Debates in Intersectionality Studies**

Since its beginnings, questions about what intersectionality is, what intersectional analysis enables, and how it can be applied have generated considerable debate as well as confusion, leading Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) to assert that much of this writing betrays a lack of familiarity with intersectionality's origins and starting points. Debate about intersectionality has been particularly fertile in Europe and the US and, as noted by Nina Lykke (2010), much of this has been focused on "which intersections, power differentials and normativities should be given priority in which political contexts" (67). In other words, is there a normative subject at the heart of intersectional analysis, a question visited and revisited as a result of concern among some that intersectionality is increasingly used to address an ever-wider range of identities and indeed has become a catch-all approach. As articulated by Lewis (2013), questions about whether the subject of intersectionality should be forms and processes of structural inequality, identity formation, or a mode of analysis that centralises deconstructionism have been repeatedly posed—as a result of the ways in which intersectionality has travelled away from its origins and specificity and some of the unexpected dimensions of its travel (see also Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Carbado 2013).

Indeed, debate has generally focused on the genealogy and trajectory of intersectionality. While it is not possible to trace this in detail here, some key aspects can be highlighted, which are important to our argument. These range from the origins of intersectionality in Black feminism and liberation struggles in the global South, its incorporation into feminist studies and the academy, to an increased critique of its appropriation and the displacement of structural inequalities and racialised power relations. Clearly, the trajectory of a theory cannot be predicted as it travels across socio-historical and geo-political space through process-

es that are far from seamless; travel can result in a loss of critical/radical potential, as argued by Edward Said (2000). Within the debate on intersectionality, not only is it possible to observe contention about its genealogy, reflected in some European liberal feminist claims that intersectionality was reflected in their work before its emergence within Black feminism (Lewis 2009), but also the appropriation of the concept has meant that it is utilised to examine different identities and subject positions as a catch-all approach (Tomlinson 2013). This has resulted not only in the marginalisation of Black women in such debates, but also the absence of an analysis of race and racism as argued by Lewis (2013). Indeed, Lewis highlights the paradox in the expansion of intersectionality studies, namely a lack of attention to the racialised relational dynamic among feminists with contrasting views and positions such that it has “neglected some of the very issues of inequality and differentiated subjectivities constituted in intersectional matrices as they are played out in the spaces of feminist infrastructure” (870).

Moreover, this appropriation and the integration of the concept into the academy has led to a loss of its radical potential, which focuses primarily on an analysis of the structural processes that re/produce power and marginality, albeit in complex and contradictory ways. Thus, a preoccupation with the potential of intersectionality to be operationalized beyond race/racism has resulted in an emphasis on subjectivity and identity politics and an obfuscation of an analysis of racialised structural inequality and power relations. In other words, there is an overemphasis on diversity, as signifying differences, rather than on inequality, which signifies “difference.” The predominant focus on ways of seeing (identities), rather than ways of being (structural inequality) in much of the writing on intersectionality, has become a focus of concern for many (see Lewis 2013).

Much of the debate about intersectionality, as noted, has focused on the capacity of intersectionality to speak to other forms of differentiation beyond race/racism and the particularity of Black women. Within this, issues highlighted have variously included the utility of the metaphors used (road intersection, the matrix, and interlocking oppression); the additive and mutually constitutive nature of race/gender/class/sexuality/nation nexus; the number of categories and sub-

jects to be included; and the static versus contextual nature of intersectional research (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 788; Crenshaw 2011; Yuval-Davis 2006). Since the 1990s, transnational and post-colonial feminists have also been perturbed by the nation-contextual specificity of intersectionality’s central subject and an eschewing of imperialism and the transnational (see Patil 2013). Such critique has raised some interesting issues and added to the refinement of the concept, as it demands that attention be paid to imperialism and the global capitalist context in which racialised inequality is re/produced. More recently, Jasbir Puar (2012, 2013) has expressed further discontent, drawing on the tension created between theories that place the subject at the centre of analysis and those that expose the tenuous nature of the processes of subject formation, to argue that intersectionality has to be reconceptualised/supplemented by a notion of assemblage as the friction created between the two concepts is desirable. By so doing, she argues, a further dimension emerges, which offers a more nuanced understanding of the role of discipline and control in shaping individual identities and lifts intersectionality from the realm of mere identity politics to offering greater insights about the “possibility that for some bodies...discipline and punish may well still be the primary mode of power apparatus” (2013, 388). In pointing to “the ironic othering of WOC through an approach that meant to alleviate such othering,” Puar (2012) highlights the ways in which the mainstreaming of intersectionality and its very invocation has increasingly begun to replace intersectional analysis itself among feminists (52-53). More than this, Puar’s discontent with intersectionality goes beyond its decentring of the normative subject of feminism (that is, white women) to questioning the very “construct of the subject (which) is itself already normative” (63).

Building on a distinction previously made by Crenshaw (1989) between structural, political, and intersectional intersectionality and, in their attempt to develop a template for a field of intersectionality studies, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) have identified three trends within intersectionality studies: first, applications of an intersectionality framework or an investigation of intersectional dynamics—*structural intersectionality*; second, debates about the scope and content of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm, including “whether there is an essential subject

of intersectionality” (785) —*intersectional knowledge production*; and, finally, political interventions, which adopt an intersectional lens and seek to transform intersectional dynamics—*political intersectionality*. This distinction helpfully highlights the key ways in which intersectionality has been utilised over recent decades, though the trajectory within each one requires further exploration. Our argument is linked to the second, that the utility and power of intersectionality as a theoretical tool is significantly compromised and neutralised when the relational context of race/racism, and indeed Black women, are displaced from analysis.

### Centrality of Power Relations

For our purposes, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), along with others such as Lewis (2013), very helpfully re-emphasise the importance of utilising intersectionality as an analytic tool to examine structural power and inequality rather than diverse identities, arguing for the importance of looking beyond identities to those social structures and dynamics that work to create them in the first place. We regard relational dynamics as key to intersectional analysis; while subordinate and privileged locations/identities can be examined through an intersectional lens, we consider an interrogation of the relational dynamic of these as key to this exercise. For example, in a focus on the dis/location of white gay men, it is crucial to also “ask the other question” (Davis 2008, 70) and examine the privilege associated with being a white, gay man when compared to other differentiated social categories. Thus, we emphasise the relational power dynamics that result from structural inequality and give rise to the identity categories that have also been underlined as the project of intersectionality by others such as Lewis (2013) and Jennifer Jihye Chun, George Lipsitz, and Young Shin (2013). Moreover, the very spaces in which intersectionality has travelled are themselves constituted by power relations and cannot be overlooked. Thus, the concept of intersectionality and the responses to it “reflect structural relations that are dynamically constituted by the very forces being interrogated” (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 789):

The recasting of intersectionality as a theory primarily fascinated with the infinite combinations and implications of overlapping identities from an analytic initially concerned

with structures of power and exclusion is curious given the explicit references to structures...(797)

In other words, as asserted by Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013), “intersectionality primarily concerns the *way things work* rather than *who people are*” (923; our emphasis). Within these arguments, while a focus on identity is not rejected, that such a focus should also address social relations of power is emphasised. Thus, when the question of the exclusion of white men from intersectionality is raised to point to the failure of intersectionality to address all subjects, for instance, it can be argued that the central concern of intersectionality—that of engagement with power rather than diverse identities—is missed. As argued by Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), far from limiting its claims to greater inclusion of Black women, intersectionality sought to address the “ideological structures in which subjects, problems and solutions were framed” (791). Moreover, if intersectionality is to be viewed as

a way of thinking, an analytical disposition, then what makes an analysis intersectional ... is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problems of sameness and difference and its relation to power. This framing—conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power – emphasises what intersectionality *does* rather than what intersectionality *is*. (795; our emphasis)

We use the above emphasis on what intersectionality does as a starting point for considering violence against BME women and explicating the material effects of the invisibility of Black women and race/racism from the debates on intersectionality.

### The (Re) Erasure of ‘Race’ from Intersectionality

As noted above, the argument developed by Lewis (2013) is pertinent to this paper—that Black women, and indeed race/racism, have been displaced from feminist discussions of intersectionality in Europe even whilst race/racism remains at the centre of political and policy discourse. Incidentally, Puar (2012) also notes the abstraction of intersectionality from social movements (though not in the UK where it is closely linked). Troubled by such developments, Lewis (2013)

argues that race and racialised power has to be retained as the central concept in intersectionality studies.

This is illustrated well in relation to European Union (EU) policy regarding violence against women (VAW). From an EU perspective, intersectionality is widely used in policy documents, as in United Nations related bodies, but its use appears to be declining in VAW EU policies (Lombardo and Agustin 2014). Emanuela Lombardo and Lise Rolandsen Agustin's (2014) analysis of gender based violence (GBV) policy documents between 2000 and 2008 revealed that the quintessential subject of intersectionality ("Black woman"), as originally formulated by Crenshaw (1989), has virtually disappeared from policy considerations. There is greater consideration placed on, for example, gender-age, gender-class, and gender-citizenship-region, but with no attempts to explain or articulate how these intersect with race and ethnicity in relation to migrant women (Lombardo and Agustin 2014). Similarly, Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) has highlighted the analytic confusions that are evident in the utilisation of intersectionality within United Nations bodies. This confusion relates primarily to "the question of whether to interpret the intersectionality of social divisions as an additive or as a constitutive process" (195). Such confusion (particularly relating to additive understandings of intersectionality) contributes to erasures and illustrates the need to re-centre race/racism within intersectional analysis. One possible explanation for this silence relates to the growing anti-immigration socio-political context, which uses old, but still powerful, discourses, such as "too many," "taking our jobs," "taking our welfare," "alien cultures," to position and "fix" identities of new migrants as well as those who have been settled in the UK and other European countries for many generations.

Whilst the discourses are old, they have been re-circulated, taken up, and invigorated by the main UK media outlets, as evidenced in the growth in popularity of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which has an explicitly anti-immigrant agenda. Rather than challenging this stance, mainstream UK (and other European) political parties have realigned their rhetoric and policies to conform to this agenda. Within this wider political context, it is necessary to combat the silence regarding Black women and race/racism, as illustrated in the European wide VAW documents and, simultane-

ously, to challenge the negative and pathologizing representations of migrant communities. This dynamic of "normalised absence/pathologized presence" was first conceptualised by Ann Phoenix (1987) and is a helpful intervention to understand the mechanisms of representation of minoritised communities in the UK. Given this context, and the evidence from the aforementioned policy analysis, it is highly appropriate to argue for the re-instatement of an analysis that attends to unequal social relations based on racialisation and gender as central to intersectionality if intersectionality is still to speak to the lived experiences of the very women who were at the centre of its original analysis.

Hence, Lewis's (2013) argument that racialised difference continues and is reinforced within and among feminists engaged in intersectional scholarship and policy work created by the displacement of race/racism as a focus of intersectional analysis appears to hold true. In a context in which intersectionality is considered to have travelled some way from its origins, Lewis poses the question: "how valued and recognised do the women who might claim to be among intersectionality's central empirical subjects feel themselves to be in the circumstances of the debate?" (873). To respond to this question, we focus on VAW as this has traditionally been a key site for illuminating unequal gender relations, campaigning for public policy and legislation to combat VAW, as well as responding to women and children who need shelter as a result of the violence they experience.

### **Austerity, Intersectionality, and VAW Services**

The expansion of shelters in the UK, from the 1970s to the 2000s, can, in large part, be attributed to the campaigns of second wave feminisms and the acknowledgment that racism within UK society needed to be addressed. The 1970s saw legislation to eliminate sex and race discrimination: the *Sex Discrimination Act*, 1975 and the *Race Relations Act*, 1976, which have since been superseded by the *Equalities Act*, 2010. The bringing together of different forms of discrimination under one piece of legislation can be construed as an intersectional approach, but there is also a danger that specific forms of discrimination might become more, rather than less, invisible—as is argued below. The political climate from the 1970s to the 1980s was fuelled by optimism for the future and a belief that social divisions and inequality could be eradicated. From the 1990s onwards,

a negative shift in this optimism is discernible with the beginnings of the rolling back of the welfare state and the introduction of marketization, commissioning, and competitive tendering of welfare services, including shelter provision. The current context of austerity has made shelter provision much more precarious (Women's Aid 2014), coupled with a gender and race neutral framing of domestic abuse that appears to minimise violence against women. In summary, the direction of funding has shifted from an optimistic, open, and collective frame to a competitive, neo-liberal, and hostile merger climate and a preoccupation with the bottom line, leading to fragmentation and fewer opportunities for collective action (Carey 2008; Harris 2005).

Over the last 40 years in the UK, funding for women's shelters, including BME shelters, has primarily been allocated via local authority structures. Local authorities are responsible for safeguarding and protecting children and 'vulnerable' adults from abuse and harm and commission services such as shelter provision. In total, there are 418 local authorities in the UK. Most shelters are affiliated with Women's Aid, an umbrella organisation, which describes itself as "a grassroots federation working together to provide life-saving services and build a future where domestic violence is not tolerated."<sup>1</sup>

In 2008, the Council of Europe recommended one family shelter space per 10,000 of the population (Kelly and Dubois 2008). In the UK, this recommendation has not been fully realised, with women and children being turned away from shelters on a regular basis and with demand far outstripping the supply of shelter spaces (Women's Aid 2014).

In the UK, there has been a vibrant response by BME women to VAW with specialist shelters and organisations established by BME activists to respond to the specific difficulties encountered by BME women experiencing violence. In part, these were developed as mainstream refuges were unable or unwilling to adequately support minoritised women. However, in the current economic context of austerity, VAW services are facing an unprecedented challenge to their funding and to their fundamental principle of providing women only services. First, the economic climate has precipitated year-on-year cutbacks in resourcing the sector by 31% in 2010-2011 (Walby and Towers 2012) and a further 31% in 2012-2013 with ongoing cuts

continuing into the foreseeable future (Howard, Laxton, and Musoke 2014). However, BME organisations have experienced disproportionate cuts of 47% to their funding (Imkaan 2012). Second, and relatedly, commissioners of services are rationalising and standardising services to a uniform service rather than funding specialist shelter provision. This has resulted in a loss of shelter spaces and an increase in the supported housing sector (i.e., generalist housing with non-specialist VAW staff). However, the supported housing sector does not have a history of feminism, activism, or specialist skills in supporting women and children with experiences of abuse. Furthermore, in complex cases of VAW (e.g. BME women), supported housing associations are referring women and children back to specialist women's services (Hawkins and Taylor 2015). Hence, the most complex cases of domestic abuse are poorly catered for by non-specialist providers. Many specialist BME shelters and outreach services have been shut down or, alternatively, "taken over" by mainstream providers. Such "take overs" increasingly result in a loss of expertise in responding sensitively and appropriately to Black women. These developments highlight the ways in which the marginalisation of BME women is re-inscribed, even within/between women's organisations, with an accompanying failure to examine the trajectory and consequences of such differentiation.

### **Mainstreaming Intersectionality**

In a parallel move, some commissioners (see the example below of the London Borough of Ealing) have argued that BME services are discriminatory because they do not provide services for white women and/or they prevent cohesion and integration of minority women into mainstream society. The solution to this problem is posited as a generic VAW service to cater for all women, but with less resources and expertise. The supposedly 'race' neutral positioning of such sentiments has serious consequences for women attempting to access appropriate services.

A notable challenge to such thinking was made by two service users of a Black feminist organisation, Southall Black Sisters (SBS), which, in 2008, took the London Borough of Ealing (a commissioner) to court to challenge its decision to remove funding from SBS and instead to create a generic VAW service (*R (Kaur & Shah) v London Borough of Ealing* [2008]). The court

ruled in the women's favour and, importantly, the case has clarified that it is not unlawful or discriminatory for local authorities to fund specialist BME VAW services and that the Council failed in its duty to consider the impact on BME women experiencing VAW of the proposed change under race relations legislation. This judgement has been widely welcomed by the BME non-governmental sector as it asserts the right to their existence and acknowledges the value of specialist BME services. Whilst many women and children experiencing domestic abuse are routinely turned away from shelters due to underfunding, the situation for Black women is significantly more serious—not just because of the lack of shelter spaces, but because their experiences of VAW are mediated by their structural and cultural locations.

There has also been pressure on women's domestic abuse services from commissioners to take on additional services to support men in abusive relationships (Coy, Kelly, and Foord 2009, 22). Here, it can be argued that the mainstreaming of intersectionality has had some peculiar effects. Clearly, men in abusive relationships require support, but is this best provided by and from the women's sector? The history of the women's sector, including the BME sector, is rooted in the experience of struggle at multiple levels, of activism within and outside their communities, of challenging 'white' feminist thinking by providing an analysis of the necessity to work with multiple oppressions, of illustrating the paucity of a 'culturalising' frame to understand and respond to violence against women in BME communities, and of having the courage to shift VAW from a private matter to one of public policy. With a reduction in resources to the VAW sector, specifically BME organisations, it seems perverse to ask the women's sector to provide services to men. This request, in part, emanates from the growing 'gender neutral' framing of domestic abuse. The central argument here is of symmetry of abuse: that men and women are equally abusive to one another (see Kimmel 2002 for a detailed discussion of the problematics of this interpretation from the research data). However, the most robust evidence from the crime surveys for England and Wales clearly shows that women experience the most serious assaults with more repeat incidents over a longer period and suffer long-term impacts of abuse compared to men (see, for example, Office for National Statistics 2015). A handful

of men's organizations (e.g. GALOP UK, Men's Advice Line) provide advice and help for men who experience domestic abuse—this includes men in same-sex relationships. Hester et al. (2012) has found that male victims in heterosexual relationships are often also perpetrators of domestic abuse.

In our view, it is a positive step that men's organizations are more involved in domestic abuse services and we would argue that this is potentially a better solution to responding to male victims of domestic abuse. Even at a very practical level, it is difficult to envisage, for example, mixed gender shelter provision for reasons of safety (actual or perceived). More fundamentally, such an agenda appears to discount not only the histories of the violence against women movement, but also the value that is placed on women only spaces by women who use domestic violence services to rebuild their lives and those of their children. However, the argument for separate provision for men and women also re-inscribes essentialised gender binaries, which work to overlook trans\* people who are experiencing abuse. Provision for trans\* people is extremely scarce and is, as yet, a largely unexplored area of UK research and practice. An intersectional lens is useful, precisely because it illuminates junctures previously hidden from view.

### **Replacements of Race: Culture and Religion**

As argued by Lewis (2013), the displacement of race/racism across much of Europe is accompanied by the foregrounding of culture, religion, and ethnicity as the marker of essentialized difference. This makes it even more difficult to talk about race/racism and racialisation where race/racism is deemed to be of significance only to Black women, thus occluding the possibility that whiteness is also racialised. Such a focus on culture and religion serves to situate the problem with "othered" groups/communities/women themselves and emphasises the unspeakability of race/racism. For Lewis, this "process of displacement and disavowal" is of central concern:

...for some feminists in some parts of Europe to seemingly uncritically reproduce the position that race is unutterable and without analytic utility in the contemporary European context can be experienced as an act of epistemological and social erasure—erasure both of contemporary realities of intersectional subjects (including racialization of



whiteness) and of the history of racial categories and racialising processes across the whole of Europe. (886)

In relation to VAW, whilst BME services have been curtailed, there has been a simultaneous exoticisation of certain forms of VAW associated with particular communities, specifically forced marriage, honour-based violence, and female genital mutilation. The badging of these as “harmful cultural practices” in European policy is curious as it implies that these aspects of VAW somehow sit outside the power relations seen as central to VAW in majority communities. It also erroneously implies that despite its widespread prevalence, VAW in majority communities is not cultural. Further, such a construction overlooks the “everyday” experiences of VAW experienced by BME women, which are common to other groups of women such as domestic abuse. To compound matters, notwithstanding those BME women who also adopt such positions, some white feminists, under the rubric of intersectionality, have taken it upon themselves to “rescue” BME women from their “oppressive” cultures (see Razack 2004). The net result of these interventions has been the co-option of feminisms within racist immigration state structures, particularly in the guise of combatting VAW (Chantler and Gangoli 2011).

Other feminists have promulgated the notion of “multi-culturalism without culture” in recognition of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-faith groups residing in the UK whilst also arguing that the essentialising impulse of such recognition should be resisted (Phillips 2007). The arguments regarding the essentialising of culture have been well-rehearsed so they will not be repeated here except to point out that, within this frame, BME women are constructed as completely culture bound, passive, and lacking in agency. This argument is particularly pertinent to our consideration of VAW in BME communities as illustrated below.

The conflation of religion and culture has increased in the post 9/11 context and public policy has moved from culture to religion (or faith) as the primary focus of intervention. Pragna Patel and Hannana Siddiqui (2010) write persuasively about the importance of maintaining secular spaces, particularly in relation to VAW, given the new approach to race relations since the July 2005 London bombings emphasises a “faith” and cohesion agenda. As noted by Patel and Siddiqui, the shift from multiculturalism to “multi-faithism”

is evidence of a dual and contradictory approach to BME women, which, while appearing to tackle forms of VAW, also uses these issues to tighten immigration controls. However, at the same time, UK Government policy promotes a “faith” based approach, which contributes to policies aimed at recognising and protecting religious identity, which simultaneously reinforces unequal gender relations within minority communities. The resultant shrinkage of secular spaces, a necessary pre-condition for women’s rights, poses a threat to the gains made by BME activists—“the accommodation of religious identity within State institutions, including the legal system, is undermining, albeit slowly and surreptitiously, the rights of minority women” (111). The focus on culture and religion also elides the importance of structural processes in understanding and responding to BME women’s experience of VAW.

### **Structural Processes**

As already noted, although important, an exclusive focus on identity within much of intersectionality studies further displaces the emphasis on racialized structural inequality in a world that continues to be deeply marked by such inequalities. To illustrate our argument, we draw on research to discuss two key structural complexities in the experiences of migrant BME women experiencing domestic violence—“no recourse to public funds” and seeking asylum on the basis of gender based persecution.

One of the recurring themes in research on BME women experiencing domestic abuse is the issue of no recourse to public funds (NRPF) (Anitha 2010; Burman and Chantler 2005; Thiara and Roy 2010). The NRPF rule means that women who have entered the UK as a spouse, civil partner, or unmarried partner (including same sex partner) of a British resident have to remain in the marriage or relationship for a period of five years to prove that the marriage was genuine at point of entry (Home Office 2012). This is commonly called the probationary period. If, during the probationary period, the marriage breaks down, for example, because of domestic abuse, the woman is entitled to support under the Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) concession for a period of three months in the first instance. This concession has been in place since April 2012 and women have to apply for indefinite leave to remain on the grounds of domestic violence within the three-month

window. This concession was won after years of campaigning and research highlighting the harms of NRPF to women. It represents a major shift, but has stopped short of abolishing NRPF altogether. Significantly, the time frame for proving that a marriage or relationship is genuine has expanded from one year in the 1980s to five years in 2012 (Home Office 2012).

Other than the very tangible material effects of being subject to NRPF, there is another dual process taking place. First, NRPF means that the incoming spouse or partner is financially dependent on her British partner (unless she has a highly paid job). As is well documented in feminist and activist writing, economic dependency can generate the conditions for VAW to flourish. By extension, we argue that the state is complicit in this arrangement via its five-year rule. Further, the incoming spouse or partner may well have to endure a range of behaviours, especially psychological and emotional abuse, and can do little about it as their immigration status is dependent on staying in the relationship for five years. The introduction of new legislation in 2015 to combat coercive and controlling behaviour might provide an avenue for claiming the DDV concession in cases of emotional violence, but it is difficult to know how this legislation will be put into practice. Cases of physical violence present better opportunities for evidence gathering, such as photographs of injuries, medical treatment, and notes, whereas for emotional abuse the absence of “hard” evidence means that the case will rest on whose word is more credible. Given the unequal power relations in heterosexual relationships in favour of men and the history of poor police response to domestic violence (HMIC 2014), it is difficult to see how emotional abuse can be effectively prosecuted.

Second, a significant concern is the way in which structural issues, such as NRPF, slip into the cultural domain. Instead of recognizing that BME women subject to NRPF have their autonomy severely curtailed by societal arrangements, such women’s apparent lack of agency is assumed to be part of their culture. Clearly, culture has a bearing on VAW in BME as well as in majority communities, but VAW is often framed solely in terms of culture when it relates to minoritised communities, particularly in the global North (Chantler and Gangoli 2011). The construction of the South Asian woman as particularly passive and completely cul-

ture-bound ignores the very material effects of NRPF, denies the realities of her experience of domestic abuse, and undermines her sense of agency. In this process, majority cultures (and women) are re-centred and represented as superior/civilised whilst “others” are represented as backward. Such a positioning obfuscates the dogged determination and successes of the activism and campaigning of many South Asian women’s organizations and fails to make connections between victims of domestic abuse from different ethnic groups, including majority working-class women. Whilst there are significant differences in the experiences of domestic abuse between minoritised women and majority women, there are also similarities in experiences, which can serve to unite women with experiences of domestic abuse. The culturalising frame that is deployed in relation to BME women, together with the anti-immigration context discussed above, renders such alliances highly improbable.

In addition to NRPF, the second structural concern relates to migrant women who escape GBV from non-EU countries and attempt to claim refugee status in the UK. Feminist analyses of personal (private) versus state (public) spaces are central to interrogating gender specific crimes as grounds for seeking refugee status. The Geneva Convention (1951) (which is used to determine whether or not the applicant meets the criteria for refugee status) does not recognise GBV under the terms of the Convention. In general terms, women are not perceived as being persecuted if they are escaping from VAW as this is considered to be a private family or cultural practice unless they can be shown to be members of a particular social group (Ismail 2010).

To illustrate what this means in practice, we draw on a study that one of the authors was involved in. Specifically, we highlight an account offered by Maria (pseudonym), a participant in the qualitative element of the study, which involved semi-structured interviews to explore needs, service responses, and gaps in services to hitherto under researched groups: BME women, men (regardless of sexual orientation and ethnicity), and transgender communities (Hester et al. 2012; further details about the methodology used in the study are available in the research report). Maria came from an African country, which had been in the grip of a serious civil war (name of country deliberately withheld to protect participant anonymity). She reported that

she had been forced into marriage and saw sex within the marriage as rape. Maria also experienced domestic abuse within her marriage and reported that there were no shelters or sources of support at either the community or state level to help her. Later, during the civil war, she was subject to gang-rape by rebel soldiers. She did not tell her husband or anybody else about the gang-rape for fear that she would be blamed for initiating the rapes. She also reported that she was very ashamed of what had happened and found it difficult to tell anybody. Eventually, she was able to make her escape to the UK where she claimed asylum on the grounds of forced marriage.

Throughout the asylum process, Maria had been questioned by men and had not felt able to disclose the multiple rapes by the rebels—even though this would have strengthened her claim for refugee status. At the hearing, there was a woman judge and Maria asked if she could have a private word with her as she thought that she would be able to disclose the rapes to a woman—despite the difficulty of speaking about them at all. However, the judge refused and Maria's asylum claim on the basis of forced marriage was refused. Importantly, we can see how opportunities to speak and give voice to her experience of gang-rape was silenced both in her country of origin and in the UK. Admittedly, it is unorthodox, according to the asylum systems in the UK, to ask to speak to a judge. Nevertheless, Maria's account illustrates that at crucial times she was not afforded the opportunity to speak—which reinforced the idea that gang-rape, even though a very public act, remains an intensely private matter.

On the other issue, that of forced marriage, this was not seen as a legitimate basis for a claim as Maria could not prove she was forced into marriage. The assumption made in this and other VAW asylum cases is that it is possible for Maria and other victims of VAW to resettle in their own countries rather than seek asylum in the UK. This invokes a particular notion of a “self,” one that is based on the possibilities and opportunities available in the UK rather than the context of the asylum seeker. The legal, social, political and cultural milieu in many countries is such that it is not possible to live a safe and independent life as a single woman (Siddiqui, Ismail, and Allen 2008). To return to Maria, at the time of the research interview, she was being supported by a BME women's organisation and was appealing her

refusal and bringing the multiple rapes into her claim.

Maria's case highlights the complexities of working with migrant women escaping VAW and the importance of services responding appropriately. As has been demonstrated above, the climate of austerity has a disproportionate negative impact on BME specialist services. The loss of such services means that women like Maria will find it increasingly difficult to access the emotional, material, and legal support required for her case. Further, the message in Maria's case is contradictory for she would be constructed as culture bound, accepting of the violence, and lacking in agency had she remained in her marriage. Her efforts to assert herself as a woman deserving a life free of the violence of a forced marriage were disbelieved, despite the acknowledgment that a forced marriage constitutes a breach of a person's human rights, according to Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What both NRPF and Maria's case study clearly demonstrate is how structural issues mediate BME women's experiences of VAW.

## Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have illustrated both theoretically and through an analysis of BME women and VAW how the erasure of race/racism and Black women from intersectionality is highly problematic. We, alongside others, are troubled by the direction of travel of intersectionality, away from its origin within Black feminisms and indeed the displacement of race/racism as central to the project of intersectional analysis (see also Lewis 2013). The replacement of race/racism with culture and religion at the expense of a structural analysis has also been problematized. Whilst it is commonly accepted that BME women experience similar and different types of VAW to majority women, highlighting structural issues throws into sharp relief exactly what “difference” means and why we must not lose sight of the quintessential subject of intersectionality: race/racism and Black woman. We recognise that we may be accused of presenting “Black women” as a monolithic category and of paying insufficient attention to diversity within the category. As discussed above, we see intersectionality as a process of explication of unequal power relations rather than one that is focussed on multiple and ever fragmented identities. Clearly, theoretically, intersectionality offers the potential of understanding and engaging with diverse forms of differentiation and

oppression, constantly bringing to the fore power relations that are unacknowledged and invisible, and this is the major strength of intersectionality. However, as our article illustrates, the quintessential subject of intersectionality is facing erasure in theory, policy, and practice. Like Lewis (2013), we argue for the centrality of race/racism and processes of racialisation in intersectional analysis and see race/racism as of significance not only for Black people, but as integral to whiteness itself. Lastly, our emphasis on what intersectionality *does* invigorates the significance of attending to both theory and praxis.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/?gclid=CML0-IvJp80CFQoT-GwodsnwD6g>.

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# Femme Theory: Refocusing the Intersectional Lens

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**Rhea Ashley Hoskin** is a CGS-SSHRC doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at Queen's University. Theorizing femme identities and systemic forms of feminine devaluation, her work focuses on perceived femininity and its impact on the experiences of marginalization and oppression among sexual and gender minorities. Within this framework, Rhea applies feminist and femme theory to the study of femme identities, femmephobia, social prejudices, and the links between gender, gender expression, health, and fitness.

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## **Abstract**

This paper seeks to develop a theory of subversive femininities or femme theory. It argues for the inclusion of femmephobia in intersectional analyses and provides the theoretical groundwork necessary for feminist theorists and researchers to incorporate an analysis of femmephobia into their studies of oppression.

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## **Résumé**

Cet article cherche à élaborer une théorie des féminités subversives ou « femme theory ». Il plaide en faveur de l'inclusion de la phobie « femme » dans les analyses intersectionnelles et fournit les bases théoriques nécessaires pour que les théoriciennes et les chercheuses féministes incorporent une analyse de la phobie « femme » dans leurs études de l'oppression.

Despite the advancements of mainstream feminist politics, the feminized remains subordinated. While traditional sexism is largely met with social disapproval, the devaluation of femininity receives social approval or remains undetected. Little academic attention has been paid to the “naturalized” subordination of femininity, which contributes to a striking pervasiveness of feminine devaluation or femmephobia. Due to its ability to masquerade as other forms of oppression, and the cultural tendency toward its naturalization, feminine devaluation remains obscure. This elusiveness has allowed femmephobia to evade being labelled a form of oppression within dominant feminist theories, including intersectionality.

Intersectionality is argued to be one of the most “important theoretical contribution(s)” made by women's studies and related fields (McCall 2005, 1771). Born out of Black feminism and Critical Race Theory, intersectional analysis is a methodology employed to demonstrate how discourses of resistance can themselves function as “sites that produce and legitimize marginalization” (Carbado et al. 2013, 303-304). The term “intersectionality” was introduced to critique “single-axis frameworks,” the argument being that women's social movement and advocacy elided the vulnerabilities of women of colour. The concept has since expanded from its nascent “two-pronged” analysis to a more multifaceted analytical approach (Hoskin et al. 2017). Consequently, intersectionality continuously brings researchers to unexplored places, reframing social issues in a way that makes “new solutions imaginable” (Carbado et al. 2013, 306). The goal of intersectional analysis is to go beyond the mere comprehension of social relations of power to “bring the often hidden dynamics forward in order to transform them” (312). Following intersectionality's trajectory, the introduction of femmephobia within intersectional analysis brings forward new ways to conceptualize social phenomena as well as new solutions.

## Femininity in Feminism

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir declared, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 1989, 267). Beauvoir marked a fracture between sex/gender and, more specifically, the distinction between “female” and femininity. These fractures set in motion the grounds for Western feminist critiques of biological determinism and essentialism. In drawing this distinction and uncoupling “womanhood” from femininity, feminism began to distance itself from femininity, which they had come to understand as the oppressor. Femininity became synonymous with female subordination, with male right of access, and with disciplinary practices enforced under patriarchal rule. In other words, femininity became the scapegoat of patriarchal oppression (Serano 2007). Germaine Greer (1970) described feminine people as “feminine parasites,” as subhuman and incomplete (22; Stern 1997, 189). Kate Millet (1977) theorized femininity as a form of “interior colonization” and to be lacking both dignity and self-respect (25). The feminist history of anti-feminine rhetoric can still be evidenced in current Western feminist theories and pedagogies (Hoskin 2017b).

While there has been a great deal of focus on the deconstruction of femininity, there has yet to be a significant scholarly analysis of how the devaluation of femininity intersects with interlocking systems of oppression or the theoretical potentialities of fem(me)inine intersections. Yet, the number of individuals who have commented on feminine devaluation, femme, and queer femininities through non-academic media speaks to the significance of these issues (e.g., <http://bffemme.tumblr.com>; <http://fuckyeahqueerfemme.tumblr.com/about>; <http://tangledupinlace.tumblr.com>). Further, although feminist scholarship has distinguished sex from gender, there is a failure to address the intersection of gender (masculinity and femininity) as unique from intersections of sex. While French theorists, like Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, laid the foundations for such an inquiry, most intersectional interrogations of “gender” are conflation of sex categories and overlook the intricacies of how femininity and masculinity interact within systems of domination.

The homogenization of feminine intersections or multiplicities gives “power to one of the most fundamental mechanisms of sexism” (Mishali 2014, 58). Arguably, the monolithic understanding of feminin-

ity has also contributed to the current environments in which femininity is a) devalued and policed and b) remains undetected as an intersecting source of oppression. This article first examines the psychosocial and feminist literature overlooking feminine devaluation and demonstrates the undercurrent of feminine intersections connecting these experiences. Then, by conceptualizing femme and patriarchal femininity, the necessary groundwork is laid to understand the pervasiveness of feminine devaluation and the application of femmephobia within intersectional analyses. Until a multifocal understanding of femininity and femme is developed, researchers cannot understand how deviations from hegemonic norms of femininity function as a source of oppression. As will be explored, the homogenization of femininity, and the subsequent erasure of femme, contributes to the failed recognition of femmephobia as an oppressor. By using a scholarly lens to interrogate feminine devaluation, this paper argues for the inclusion of femmephobia in intersectional analyses and provides the theoretical groundwork necessary for feminist theorists and researchers to incorporate an analysis of femmephobia into their studies of oppression.

## Literature Review: The Elephant in the Room

For over three decades, psychosocial and feminist research has overlooked the thematic undertones of feminine devaluation and femmephobia. Take, for instance, the different consequences of gender deviance for those designated or coercively assigned male at birth (DMAB/CAMAB/AMAB) compared to those designated or coercively assigned female at birth (DFAB/CAFAM/AFAB). Developmental psychology has concluded that boys face more repercussions than girls for gender role violations (Kilianski 2003, 38). As children, feminine boys are at a greater risk than masculine girls for being “ridiculed or bullied” and experiencing peer rejection from group activities (Taywaditep 2001, 6). Boys are more likely to experience isolation and they receive fewer positive reactions and significantly more criticism from peers and teachers for expressing femininely compared to girls who express masculinely (Fagot 1977, 902; Harry 1983, 352). In Beverly J. Fagot’s (1977) study, girls did not receive negative feedback by from their peers for gender transgressions and were less alienated as a result of their gender expressions (Harry



1983, 355). Fathers were found to place more importance on their boys acting “like boys” than their girls acting “like girls” (351), which may explain why feminine boys are also at a greater risk for having a distant relationship with their father, suicidal ideation, depression, and anxiety (Taywaditep 2001).

Trans youth on the feminine spectrum face cissexism at an earlier age and report more instances of being physically victimized than those on the masculine spectrum (Grossman et al. 2006). Similarly, trans women are at a higher risk for “verbal, physical and sexual harassment” (Jauk 2013, 808). As a result, childhood gender non-conformity among people DMAB has a greater association with later suicidality than for those DFAB (Harry 1983, 350). Moreover, parents of trans feminine youth were more likely to think that their child needed counselling (Grossman et al. 2006).

The experiences of feminine devaluation and policing are not limited to those DMAB, but extend across sexual and gender identities. Sociological theories and empirical studies have noted a privileging of masculinity in both gay male and lesbian communities (Serano 2013; Blair and Hoskin 2015, 2016; Taywaditep 2001). A broad cultural example is the privileging of tomboys and the subjugation of “sissy-boys” (Taywaditep 2001). This broader cultural phenomenon of masculine privileging exists in lesbian communities as well. For example, in a study on sexual and romantic attraction, both gay men and lesbians considered masculinity to be the most valued and attractive: gay men tended to value gender conformity or “masculinity” and lesbians tended to value gender nonconformity or masculinity (Taywaditep 2001; Miller 2015). Further exemplifying the privileging of masculinity within LGB communities, Rhea Ashley Hoskin and Karen L. Blair (2016) found that gay men were willing to date trans men, but not trans women, and lesbian women were also willing to date trans men, but not trans women. In other words, while participants demonstrated sexual fluidity between their stated sexual identity category and their stated objects of desire, this fluidity rarely included trans women.

Femme theorists have written extensively on masculine privileging within lesbian communities, which led many femme individuals to feel “inauthentic” as lesbians or feminists (Mishali 2014; Hoskin

2013, 2017a; Blair and Hoskin 2015, 2016; Levitt, Gerish, and Hiestand 2003; VanNewkirk 2006). Karen L. Blair and Rhea Ashley Hoskin (2015, 2016) discuss femme-identified individuals’ experiences of exclusion and discrimination within the LGBTQ community as a result of their feminine expression. Participants described a unique processes of identity development in which they felt their femininity to be unaccepted by their community. As a result, many participants described feeling this aspect of their identity to be “closeted” at one point in their identity development. These experiences contribute to feelings of isolation, subsequently impacting the mental well-being of femme-identified people (Mishali 2014, 61). Furthermore, there is a growing body of research that demonstrates how feminine gender presentation in terms of appearance “may be related to risk of adult sexual assault” while those who present more androgynously or masculinely report fewer cases of sexual victimization (Lehavot, Molina, and Simoni 2012, 278).

Several empirical studies have demonstrated a prejudice within gay male culture against those who are perceived as feminine. Sociological studies have shown the undesirability of, hostility toward, or even contempt of femininity among gay men (Fields et al. 2012; Sanchez and Vilain 2012; Taywaditep 2001; Miller 2015; Fagot 1977) as well as greater fear, hostility, and discomfort toward feminine gay men in society more broadly (Glick et al. 2007; Jewell and Morrison 2012). Research on the underground community in 1910s and 1920s New York found that middle-class gay men were “dissatisfied with the woman-like gender status” of gay men and adopted the label “queer” as a means of distinguishing themselves from feminine gay men (Taywaditep 2001, 7). This group of queer men further distanced themselves from feminine gay men by reserving derogatory terms, such as “fairies, faggots, and Queens,” for effeminate men “whom they despised” (7).

Not only are feminine gay men at a greater risk of in-group discrimination, such as romantic rejection from their community (Taywaditep 2001, 11), they are also at greater risk of being subject to anti-gay attitudes in society at large than are masculine gay men (Glick et al. 2007, 55). Feminine gay men suffer from lower psychological well-being, higher anxiety, lower self-esteem, and have a higher risk of clinical depres-

sion when compared to masculine gay men (Taywaditep 2001; Weinrich et al. 1995). In a revealing study, Sanjay Aggarwal and Rene Gerrets (2014) explored gay men's elevated psychological distress. Despite high levels of LGBTQ equality, gay men in this study were three times more likely to report a mood or anxiety disorder and ten times more likely to report suicidal ideation. In part, this study attributes the psychological health discrepancies between same-sex and mixed-sex oriented men to the privileging of masculinity, evidenced in both LGBTQ communities and dominant culture. While the results of this study exemplify femmephobia, it remains unnamed as a point of theoretical intersection within the work. By employing femme theory, researchers can begin to better understand the origins of health discrepancies, such as those cited above, and to better understand dominant cultural responses to male femininity.

Lisa Jewell and Melanie Morrison's (2012) article "Making Sense of Homonegativity" showcases the dominant cultural responses to male femininity. The results from their analysis indicate that participants' homonegativity was "characterized by feelings of discomfort when confronted with homosexuality and perceptions that gay men are effeminate" (351). Both male and female participants described a gay relationship as consisting of a "masculine" and a "feminine" partner and said that they were "particularly bothered by the partner who acts feminine" (359). As with much of the current research looking at homonegativity, Jewell and Morrison did not examine the cultural devaluation of femininity as a fundamental component underlying homonegative responses.

Jewell and Morrison's (2012) findings can be analysed in terms of Julia Serano's (2007) "effemania," a term she uses to describe the stigmatization of "male" expressions of femininity or men's entrances into the "feminine realm." Serano explains this phenomenon as the result of the hegemonic hierarchical positioning of masculinity above femininity, whereby the policing of femininity becomes permissible. Serano (2013) also discusses the concept of trans-misogyny (50) illuminates prejudices specifically targeting trans women—a concept which brings insight into the work of Viviane Namaste.

Namaste (2005) has written about the prominence of trans sex workers among those accounted

for by the Transgender Day of Remembrance, adding that, of the total murders, nearly 100 percent were male-to-female. Although the site frames the murders as "anti transgender hatred and prejudice," Namaste understands these crimes as compounded by a form of "gendered" violence, a crucial aspect that is erased when framed exclusively as targeting trans people (92-93). In a profound way, Namaste's work illustrates the intersections of femininity and Serano's (2013) theory of trans-misogyny. However, the underlying theme of feminine devaluation as it applies across genders and sexualities remains absent. Arguably, the violence Namaste speaks to could be understood as a form of policing bodies that deviate from patriarchal models of femininity (Hoskin 2013).

An overview of the literature finds a variety of critical terms developed to describe the subordination and policing of femininity including anti-femininity (Kilianski 2003; Eguchi 2011; Miller 2015); trans-misogyny (Serano 2007, 2013); effemimania (Serano 2007); homonegativity (Jewell and Morrison 2012); femi-negativity (Bishop et al. 2014); sissyphobia (Eguchi 2011); anti-effeminacy (Sanchez and Vilain 2012); femiphobia (Bailey 1996); slut-shaming/bashing (Tanenbaum 2015), misogynoir (Bailey 2014), and so on. To date, empirical work has demonstrated the links between antifemininity, homophobia, and misogyny (Taywaditep 2001; Kilianski 2003). These co-occurrences suggest an underlying causal mechanism such as a general aversion to femininity (Kilianski 2003). Yet, while such issues surfaced within academia over 30 years ago, there remains a gap in psychosocial and feminist literature as this underlying causal mechanism of feminine devaluation continues to inform social oppression but has remained unidentified. As evidenced above, there are multiple sources of oppression rooted in the devaluation and policing of femininity, each targeting a different social group. Each is rooted in the negative associations with femininity, but there has yet to be feminist or psychosocial research examining the overarching connections among these oppressors.

### **(Re)Conceptualizing Femme**

In order to understand femmephobia as a mode or vector of oppression, one must also establish the norms against which those who deviate are policed. To do this, I will operationalize the femme subject by using

the femme lesbian as a theoretical point of departure from which to expand and explore deviations from patriarchal models of femininity.

Patriarchal femininity is the hegemonic femininity, propped up by essentialism (or essentialized femininity) and typically forced onto those DFAB. It is the subject of much feminist literature, which deconstructs or critiques femininity. Patriarchal femininity necessitates the alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality and the adherence to racial and able-bodied norms. Not only is it imperative that these “female” bodies be thin and able-bodied, to be “truly feminine,” they must also be “white” (Deliovsky 2008, 56). This construction of femininity must also be offered up to a heterosexual male gaze and be obedient to hegemonic heteropatriarchy (Mishali 2014, 59). Under patriarchal rule, femininity is only “acceptable” (not to be confused with valued) in one mode: white, heterosexually available, DFAB, able-bodied, passive, self-sacrificing, thin, young, lacking self-actualization, and simultaneously negotiating Madonna/Whore constructs. In this model, femininity is reserved exclusively for those designated female at birth.

Traditionally, femme has been understood as a feminine cisgender lesbian who is attracted to a masculine or “butch” lesbian (Kennedy and Davis 1993; Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand 2003; Nestle 1987; Munt 1997). In their fight for agency, by living, building, fighting, fucking, and loving within a queer community and context, femme lesbians were able to carve out space for feminine identity expressions that veer from patriarchal norms. Femme lesbians were the sexual deviants sexologists could not explain away (Hirschmann 2013, 144), who built queer gender communities with their butches while fighting for feminine valuation within those spaces. Their fights provided the crucial groundwork for theorizing feminine intersections and devaluation.

In contrast to patriarchal models of femininity, the femme lesbian “fails” to maintain the sanctity of patriarchal femininity in her self-actualized expression of femininity, the object(s) of her sexual desires, and her resistance to male right of access to the feminine. However, femme has become a term that covers many identities. Research conducted by Blair and Hoskin (2015) demonstrates that this understanding is an inaccurate depiction of the lived experiences of femmes. Ac-

ording to their study, femme self-identification spans across sexual and gender identities and demonstrates the many intersections of femininity. Similarly, many femme theorists have articulated femme identities beyond cisgender lesbians (Dahl 2011; Brushwood Rose and Camilleri 2002; Volcano and Dahl 2008; Coyote and Sharman 2011; Harris and Crocker 1997). What, then, does it mean to be femme? How do the multiple invocations of being femme connect to one another?

Femme is a form of divergent femininity that strays from the monolithic and patriarchally sanctioned femininity. Femme follows the same logic and application as queer in that both queer and femme are deviations from the celebrated norm. Consequently, both queer and femme provide critiques of normalcy and compulsory identities. Neither queer nor femme is reducible to singular applications: both can be used as nouns, adjectives, identities, embodiments, expressions, political invocations, or as a theoretical framework. Using a ‘failed’ model of patriarchal femininity, such ideals are carried down the line of normative feminine standards. There are many ways the invocation of femme identity may veer from the feminine cisgender lesbian model: sassy queer men; unapologetically sexual straight women; trans women; crip bodied femmes who refuse to be desexualized or degendered; and femmes of colour who refuse to approximate white beauty norms, to name a few. Each of these modes of intersecting feminine embodiment challenge one or more of the architecture of patriarchal femininity and can therefore be understood as femme.

Ergo, femme identity (and femmephobia) is applicable to diversely positioned bodies and describes a range of experiences across various intersections of difference. To this end, femme is femininity dislocated from—and not necessitated by—a female body or a female identity. Femme challenges the “normative correlations between gender [sex] and sexuality” by “remapping and renegotiating the terms in which femininity is articulated” (Mishali 2014, 66). Femmephobia, on the other hand, operates to dichotomize and normatively police bodies whose use of femininity blurs boundaries of sex, gender, and sexuality and to shame bodies that make use of feminine signifiers. Femme is femininity reworked, (re)claimed as one’s own and made in one’s own image (Brushwood Rose and Camilleri 2002; Serano 2013)—a type of “disruptive” (Erickson 2007, 44),

rogue femininity (Coyote and Sharman 2011, 205). By rejecting the masculine right of access to femininity, the femme subject collapses systems of meaning and signifiers of heterosexual hegemony. In this way, femmes give “feminine signifiers new meaning” (Levitt, Gerish, and Hiestand 2003, 99). Femme is the abnormal occupation of feminine normality (Erickson 2007, 44), meaning femininity embodied by those to whom recognition as feminine is culturally denied or who do not comply with norms of “proper womanhood.” In other words, femmes are those whose feminine expressions are culturally “unauthorized,” and who refuse to and/or do not approximate the ideal norm of what patriarchal femininity constitutes.

While many articulations of femme identity exist, what they share is a commitment to “reclaiming” and exposing the intricate intersections of femininity (Serano 2013, 48). Consequently, femme enactments are in constant dialogue with the negative assumptions projected onto femininity, challenging and disentangling the naturalized associations of patriarchal femininity. When femmes reclaim agency through the deliberate choice to present femininely, they are denied the cultural ideal of womanhood as one who forgoes agency and relinquishes the power of self-determination. Patriarchal femininity is understood as an “obstacle to subjecthood” (Dahl 2014, 607) and an expression of femininity done for another. Agential embodiment and self-actualized expressions of femininity represent a direct affront to patriarchal femininity, which necessitates selflessness and a denial of self-expression. One of the ways in which femme differs from patriarchal femininity (also known as hegemonic or essentialized femininity) is on “the ground of context and subjectivity” (Mishali 2014, 59). While patriarchal femininity promotes the pacification of the feminine subject, femme intersections necessitate an active subjectivity: femininity becomes a source of power and strength, rather than subordination (Nnawulezi, Robin, and Sewell 2015; Levitt, Gerish, and Hiestand 2003). In other words, patriarchal femininity and femmephobia operate by attempting to turn an active (femme) subject into a passive object.

One foundational aspect of patriarchal femininity is essentialized femininity: the idea that femininity is the result of one’s sex as assigned at birth and determined by one’s anatomy alone. In other words, patriarchal femininity is supported by a biological de-

terminist view of gender. This essentialist notion is one of the footholds of patriarchal femininity. However, for femme theorists, femininity is deliberate (Mishali 2014; Nnawulezi, Robin, and Sewell 2015), chosen, and *not* born out of a culturally imposed assignment of sex/gender binaries such as essentialist femininity. Femininely expressing folks who refuse to be shamed for their bodies, their minds, and their hearts exemplify femme. Femme is a “failed femininity”: namely the failure or refusal to approximate the patriarchal feminine norm of white, cisgender, able-bodied virtuosity.

### **Femmephobia and Femme-Negativity**

Femmephobia (also known as femme-negativity) differs from misogyny or sexism in its focus on gender and femininity as opposed to the latter’s focus on sex and femaleness. Feminist theory has distinguished sex from gender, but there has yet to be a comparable distinction of sexism/misogyny from the manifestations of feminine devaluation as an intersection of oppression within systems of domination. Femmephobia, or femininity as an axis within the interlocking systems of oppression, has largely been overlooked within the literature and unidentified within empirical research, despite findings that support its presence. Arguably, “misogynist conceptualizations of the female body have created insidious cultural norms wherein associations with traits deemed feminine come to be seen in a derogatory light” (Stafford 2010, 81). Indeed, a historicization of femmephobia will trace its foothold to the legacy of misogyny and sexism. However, sources of oppression are social viruses, which continue to shift and mutate. Through the incorporation of an increasingly fine-tuned intersectional lens, we can begin to tease apart the many layers of social oppression and develop a nuanced understanding of feminine intersections. Intersectionality is not a finite goal; it is an ever-shifting project—a theoretical framework necessary to tackle the viral nature of social oppressors.

### **Theorizing Femmephobia**

Femmephobia is typically understood as prejudice(s) toward femme-identified persons. In alignment with the conceptualization of femme, the concept of femmephobia must be broadened to reflect the multitudes of different forms of femmeness. In other words, femmephobia and femme as a critical intervention or

theoretical framework should be accountable to the various femmes and femme enactments, irrespective of whether an individual identifies femininely, androgynously, gender variantly, or rejects gender identification altogether. Therefore, I argue that femmephobia is prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone who is *perceived* to identify, embody, or express femininely and toward people and objects gendered femininely. More specifically, the individual is targeted for their perceived deviation from patriarchal femininity. By arguing femmephobia as a phenomenon found across a range of intersectional identities, I do not aim to homogenize and unify experiences, but rather to demonstrate the reach of femmephobic oppression and move toward its inclusion within intersectional analyses.

There are, for instance, countless victims reported in the news as having been targets of homophobia. But homophobia alone does not explain the specific targeting at stake. These experiences are underscored by (“failed”) femininity and require an analysis of femmephobia. Take, for example, the Florida man, Ronnie Paris Jr., who killed his three-year-old son for being too “soft” (Rondeaux 2005, n.p.). Similarly, 15-year-old Raymond Buys was tortured and murdered by members of the “Echo Wild Game Training Camp” who promised to turn “effeminate boys into manly men” (Davis 2013, n.p.). More recently, a sixteen-year-old high school student in Oakland set fire to eighteen-year-old Luke Fleichman’s skirt while they were riding the AC transit bus (Bender, Harris, and Debolt 2013). Like the others, Fleichman became a target due to their perceived femininity. This violent targeting of femininity in those who do not uphold patriarchal sanctions stands in stark contrast to the more flexible range of culturally sanctioned masculine expressions of female identified persons.

Crimes such as these, which operate on the basis of (perceived) gender expression, may be rooted in femmephobia. Operating within an androcentric patriarchy, those maintaining signifiers of the subordinate gender of femininity, become targets. Moreover, expressions, signifiers, or embodiments of femininity are culturally understood as a justification for degradation. I argue that, when culturally unsanctioned bodies are read through this lens, femmephobia complicates and compounds the effects of various intersections of identity and multiple oppressors. Femmephobia is a cultural

phenomenon that devalues and polices femininity, as well as perceived expressions of femininity, across intersections of difference.

These acts of violence can be understood, in part, as a revolt against unsanctioned forms of femininity—femininity on and by bodies that do not uphold a patriarchal model of womanhood. Within hegemonic gender systems, there exists a rigid distinction between femininity and masculinity. Failed masculinity descends into femininity, as evidenced by the words effeminate and emasculate. The notion of “failed masculinity,” for which there is no equivalent feminine concept, can be historically linked to female bodies being constructed as inadequate versions of male bodies (Stafford 2010). “Manhood” or “masculinity” is itself defined through the repudiation of femininity and the ability to distance itself from feminine traits (Norton 1997; Kilianski 2003). Masculinity risks “slippage” into the feminine whereas femininity itself “denotes slippage” (Stern 1997, 193). In other words, masculinity is elevated above femininity within the gender hierarchy and femininity is inherently “failed.” In this way, the maintenance of masculinity cannot be addressed without the incorporation of femmephobia.

Femmephobia functions to (re)claim “misused” femininity, as expressed by those who veer from culturally authorized versions of patriarchal femininity, with the outcome of maintaining the sanctity of a white ideal womanhood (with femininity as its signifier). Femmephobia uses forms of policing to retract femininity for the purpose of retaining cultural signifiers of white female-bodied submission and heterosexual availability. By defining particular expressions or intersections of femininity as unsanctioned, femmephobia limits gender expression to that which is authorized. As a result, femmephobia homogenizes femininities and maintains the ideology of a monolithic femininity.

### Typology of Femmephobia

Like any source of oppression, femmephobia has come to take on various forms. There are four primary ways femmephobia manifests: ascribed femmephobia; perceived femmephobia; femme-mystification; and pious femmephobia. Internalized femmephobia can manifest in any category and can result in self-imposed limits on what is expected of oneself, how one expects to be treated by others, and the resultant acceptance of

mistreatment on the basis of feminine devaluation. The internalization of femmephobia results from the deliberate conditioning and erosion of the individual by the surrounding femmephobic society until one has adopted and naturalized feminine devaluation.

### ***Ascribed Femmephobia***

Ascribed femmephobia manifests structurally and ideologically, drawing on the cultural associations of feminine subordination as a tool to “demote” the target. These associations are informed by the historical legacy of misogynist conceptions of female bodies as inadequate or failed versions of male bodies. Manifestations of the cultural indoctrination of feminine subordination are well documented in social research, as evidenced in the ways that masculinity is evaluated more positively and with greater symbolic value than femininity (Hooberman 1979; Miller 2015).

Ascribed femmephobia is embedded into daily lives through language, ideology, discourse, and processes of gendering. As mentioned above, the words “emasculate” and “effeminate” connote a hierarchical placing of masculinity above femininity, whereby masculinity descends into the realm of femininity with implications for one’s power, dignity, sense of self, and social standing. Notably, there is no equivalent masculinized concept. Much of ascribed femmephobia is linguistically embedded. It is a process of gendering, which denotes inferiority by making use of the subordinated status of femininity. For example, derogatory terms such as “pansy,” “sissy, fairy, queen, and faggot” not only suggest the equation of men’s sexual desire for other men with feminine qualities, but it also relies on the socially inherent subordination embedded within these feminized terms (Taywaditep 2001; Eguchi 2011; Schatzberg et al. 1975).

Practices of feminization are used in a myriad of ways: to insult, humiliate, disempower, or even justify violence and subordination. These practices demonstrate how feminine signifiers are understood as innately inferior and those who adorn them are conceptually demoted. The function of feminization is illustrated by perceptions of disability: the disabled body is perceived as “weak and helpless” (Hirschmann 2013, 141). By this logic, the disabled woman could be identified as hyper-feminine; however, they are perceived as unfeminine because of their “perverted femininity insofar as their

impairments cause them to fail to meet standard ideals of” patriarchal femininity (141). Similar to the ableist equation of disability as weak and therefore feminine, the associated signifiers of femininity are adopted in order to maintain the status quo (re: disability as inferior) or to infer subordination.

Social media has been bombarded with images of a “feminized” Vladimir Putin, Rob Ford, Kim Jong-un, and Donald Trump. One of the images is a parody of Putin on the cover of *Time Magazine* in makeup (Hackett 2013). Similarly, images of Trump, Ford, and Jong-un in drag and/or makeup have been circulating on social media sites. These images draw on the symbolic inferiority assigned to feminine signifiers as a way of humiliating and belittling those in power.

### ***Perceived Femmephobia***

While ascribed femmephobia employs cultural associations to subordinate the target, perceived femmephobia targets a subject as a result of their *perceived* femininity. Perceived femmephobia displays overt contempt and devaluation strictly on the basis of perceived femininity, femme identity, or what is femininely gendered. As with other types of femmephobia, perceived femmephobia frequently acts as a type of gender policing and arises overtly as a result of one’s perceived femininity. In contrast to the ideology and semantics underlying ascribed femmephobia, perceived femmephobia is manifest in the overt ridicule and trivialization of, or condescension toward, feminine enactments and is often used as justification for violence, harassment, or exclusion. Ascribed femmephobia is an ideological condition where we are socialized to associate femininity as subordinate. Perceived femmephobia is often the result of these internalized ideologies and results in overtly violent, oppressive, and exclusionary consequences. For example, masculine gay men expressing “disgust” with the “effeminacy” of other gay men or dating profiles that explicitly state “no femmes need apply” exemplify perceived femmephobia (Taywaditep 2001, 12; Eguchi 2011, 48; Miller 2015).

### ***Femme Mystification***

Femme mystification confounds femme by dehumanizing feminized bodies and rendering the feminine subject a cultural dupe. It is a type of gender policing that operates by separating femininity from

humanness—by eroticizing, exoticizing, and objectifying. This process of mystification attempts to naturalize femininity (by presenting femininity as innately tied to specific identities and bodies) while simultaneously upholding its ascribed artificiality. Femme mystification refuses to understand femme as a chosen identity and, in this refusal, denies feminine agency. In a similar vein to trans-mystification, which Serano (2007) describes as emphasizing the “artificiality of transsexuality [which creates a] false impression that...assigned genders are natural [while] identified and lived genders are not” (187), femme mystification operates to emphasize feminine artificiality, thereby creating the reciprocal effect of masculine naturalization. For example, a participant in Blair and Hoskin’s (2015) study described femme as being “dehumanized” in queer communities and regarded as “either fuckable decorations or not there at all” (240). Similarly, Shinsuke Eguchi (2011) notes that, while gay male culture belittles feminine men, they will nonetheless engage in sexual relations with those who they ridicule.

Another outcome of femme mystification is the cultural tendency to conflate androgyny or gender-neutrality and masculinity. Masculinity lays claim to normativity and denies “its status as stylization,” which solidifies its naturalized standing. This naturalization has allowed masculinity to stand in as a “gender free,” “gender neutral,” or “androgynous” mode of gender expression while solidifying the artificialization of femininity. Femininity is “put on” whereas masculinity is seen as a natural state of genderlessness. Through the construction of femininity as artificial, femininely identified people are reducible to objects or regarded as subhuman. It is this revoking of agency that makes possible the reinstatement of femininity as a patriarchal tool because it works to erase particular feminine embodiments and intersections by upholding masculine as natural and feminine as a construct. Perceivably feminine people are thus mystified, objectified, and dehumanized.

### ***Pious Femmephobia***

In 2011, a Canadian police officer named Michael Sanguinetti conducted a ‘personal safety’ workshop at York University at which he told the participants: “I’ve been told I’m not supposed to say this—however, women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to

be victimised” (Ringrose and Renold 2012, 333). This “famous line” exemplifies pious femmephobia: shaming the feminine person or enactment through positioning the femmephobic offender as morally superior or intellectually enlightened, which is thought to therefore justify the “consequences” of transgressions against patriarchal feminine norms. According to Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renold (2012), much of victim blaming discourse is embedded in the “cultural belief that women are the bearers of morality” (334). By perpetuating the cultural enforcements of female morality, victim blaming maintains patriarchal norms of femininity as virtuous.

A historical tracing of the word slut demonstrates the workings of pious femmephobia, making clear the connection between “sex, women, service, class, dirt and pollution” and solidifying feminine deviations from patriarchal norms as a source of pollution (Attwood 2007, 234). When used by other women against women, the term slut functions as an “exorcism of the unclean” with the aim to establish the user’s virtue and status (234-235). Patriarchal femininity requires subjects to walk a “very narrow tightrope” between Madonna/Whore constructs: on the one hand, ensuring their sexual attractiveness and, on the other, “without the taint of sexuality” (238). In its “move away from a traditional—feminine, romantic—sexuality,” the “slut” is a femme embodiment (238) and, through the rewriting of slut as a signifier of shame (Ringrose and Renold 2012, 336), political invocations of “slut” or SlutWalk can be understood as a femme project. SlutWalk is a sex-positive movement working to “reclaim” and “disrupt negative associations of femininity with sexuality” (Tanenbaum 2015, 5). Although critiqued for its failure to attend to intersectional differences of race, SlutWalk challenges the assumed masculine right of access over femininity that is embedded within discourses of “asking for it.” In this way, “slut-shaming” is exemplary of pious femmephobia, arising out of the self-professed moral superiority of the perpetrator. Other examples include, but are not limited to, understandings of hyper-femininity as “without dignity” or “self-respect,” inviting of sexual assault (or “asking for it”), victim blaming, and makeovers that include the gentrification of “appropriate” feminine expressions.

While society may not condone sexual violence, there are many ways in which society contrib-

utes to sexual victimization, including the naturalization of femmephobia. For example, failed femininity (or femmephobia) informs rape culture for both DMAB and DFAB survivors. Deviations from patriarchal femininity are attributed to sexual victimization among those DMAB and DFAB. Men and women alike are accused of “inviting” harassment by way of their perceived femininity (Stafford 2010, 89) and feminine attire is routinely described as being “dressed to be killed” (Mishali 2014, 58). Specifically, feminine gay men are charged with provoking “onerous criticism” as a result of their gender expression (Taywaditep 2001, 8). Furthermore, while female survivors are blamed for failing to maintain “ladylike standards,” male survivors are “feminized,” blamed for being “unmanly,” or the suggestion is made that their “weakness” somehow provoked the attack (Davies, Gilston, and Rogers 2012, 2810). Femmephobia is at work when deviations from patriarchal femininity and subsequent failed femininity are considered causal variables of sexual victimization. Even notions of the “good” and “bad” victim are informed by femmephobia and deviations from patriarchal norms such that legal understandings of “sexual violence against women...are more dependent upon a woman’s ability to meet the requirements of hegemonic femininity” (Pietsch 2010, 136). In this way, rape and systems of (in)justice function as another type of gender policing of feminine expression. Furthermore, rape myths exemplify the ways in which perceived femininity is implicated in the claim to a masculine right of access to feminine bodies. In these examples, any sex can be blamed for inviting criticism or violence as a result of their perceived misuse of femininity.

While there are many factors involved, and many overlapping subtypes of femmephobia, pious femmephobia is particularly rampant in social media. Take, for instance, Amanda Todd, Rehtaeh Parsons, Megan Meier, or Rachel Ehmke. Meier and Ehmke took their own life at the age of 13 as a result of the social policing of what could be argued were transgressions against patriarchal femininity: Meier was bullied for being fat and called a slut; Ehmke was called a prostitute and a slut (Hodge 2012). Canadian teenager Todd took her life at the age of 15 as a result of an older man persuading her to show her breasts and the subsequent harassment and slut-shaming by her peers (Hodge 2012).

Parsons, a 15-year-old girl, committed suicide after a gang rape during which one of her rapists took a picture, which was circulated among her peers who continued to harass her. Prior to her death, Parsons experienced severe slut-bashing, slut-shaming, and victim-blaming (Brodsky 2013).

Pious femmephobia works to create an unequal power relation between the victim and the perpetrator, which circulates around the internalization and naturalization of oppression, whereby society, the victim, and/or the perpetrator come to expect such oppression. In other words, “if you’re a ‘slut’ you’re expected to feel dirty, guilty, inferior, damaged, and not worthy of respect or love” (Hodge 2012, n.p.). These tragedies have several commonalities: each of them constituted a perceived transgression against patriarchal femininity in a culture of rape. To merely label such phenomena bullying, sexism, or misogyny is to overlook a specific type of gender policing that directly targets femininity and, specifically, any perceived deviations from patriarchal femininity.

To further this analysis, it is arguable that the feminine subject was targeted for the perceived ‘immoral’ use of femininity, rather than sexuality. By failing to attend to the role that femininity plays in these experiences of violence, social theorists cannot address the root cause of oppression at stake: femmephobia. In this way, the incorporation of femininity within intersectional analysis pushes the boundaries of an intersectional lens and provides a holistic look at social phenomenon, compatible with the current state of social issues.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated in this article, femmephobia is embedded in many aspects of social reality: from language to the foundations of western culture such as the associations projected onto femininity. Far too often, these associations and the meaning we ascribe socially are left unexamined, giving way to the naturalization of femmephobia. Feminists need to begin challenging the “dominant cultural construction of what it means to be feminine” or risk continuing the repression and denial of feminine subjectivity (Stafford 2010, 88). If feminists fail to attend to the feminine multiplicities that challenge dominant cultural constructions, they risk reconstituting femininity as an “object of hetero-male/



masculine desire” and further contributing to the objectification of feminine people (88). Unfortunately, as it currently stands, femmephobia remains difficult to detect in its naturalized state, which passes too often as justifiable grounds on which to devalue or oppress an Other. The pervasiveness of femmephobia can also lead to difficulties identifying it because it is typically compounded by other social influences and has yet to be disentangled from intersecting systems of domination. Intersecting modes of oppression, such as racism, transphobia, fatphobia, colonialism, homophobia, ableism, and classism, operate alongside femmephobia. As Gloria Yamato (1990) explains, sources of oppression do not function in isolation, but rather are “dependent on one another for foundation” (22). While Yamato made this argument nearly thirty years ago, the claim to interlocking oppression is well backed by current psychosocial research and continues to hold true. Take, for instance, the co-occurrence of homonegativity and misogyny (Kilianski 2003); the tendency to hold white women as the “Benchmark Woman” (i.e. normative whiteness embedded in femininity) (Deliovsky 2008; Hoskin 2017b); or the ways in which “masculinity is also intrinsically linked with race” such that racial stigma against gay Asian men is inseparable from perceived femininity (Miller 2015, 643; Eguchi 2011).

All forms of oppression are facets of the same system, working to mutually reinforce and uphold one another. In the support of a specific facet, one lends a hand to the validation of the entire matrix of oppression. To fight against one facet, it is necessary to push the boundaries of intersectionality and to interrogate interlocking systems of oppression in their entirety. No single source of oppression operates in an isolated category; they are overlapping and subject to change. The interlocking nature of oppression, therefore, underscores the necessity to view femmephobia within a holistic intersectional framework of multiple sources of oppression.

The cultural devaluation of femininity, not simply in terms of misogyny and sexism, but also as committed against those perceived to embody femininity, is a key component that is overlooked when theorizing oppression. Theoretical endeavours aimed at dismantling systems of domination have underestimated the pervasiveness of femmephobia and overlooked the intersections of femininity more broadly. Indeed, much

of feminist thought has focused on challenging femininity itself, rather than patriarchal femininity (Serano 2013, 68). One must begin employing an intersectional lens to tackle the “real” problem of femininity: “the fact that femininity is seen as inferior to masculinity” in straight settings, queer and feminist circles, and by society at large (67). Although femme is both an identity and an enactment, it is also a critical analytic, which requires bringing the multiplicity of femininities into focus. Until an intersectional lens that is inclusive of femmephobia and cognizant of feminine intersections is adopted, the subordinate state of femininity will remain naturalized. The terrain of intersectionality has yet to integrate gender (more specifically, femininity) as an axis within systems of domination. This failure has allowed femmephobia to remain undetected as a contributing oppressor. As such, the incorporation of feminine intersections and femmephobia push the current boundaries of intersectional theory towards a holistic and nuanced understanding of the mutating systems of domination.

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# Decolonizing Feminism: From Reproductive Abuse to Reproductive Justice

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**Karen Stote** is an Assistant Professor of Women and Gender Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. She teaches courses on the history of Indian policy and Indigenous-settler relations, feminism and the politics of decolonization, and issues of environmental and reproductive justice. She is the author of *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women* (Fernwood 2015).  
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## **Abstract**

This paper asks why reproductive gains have sometimes amounted to reproductive abuse for Indigenous women in Canada. Guided by an intersectional and decolonial approach, it provides a historical material critique of the individualized rights discourse and reformist goals that tend to underlay feminist struggles in Canada. It explores how Western feminism might support decolonization and reproductive justice.  
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## **Résumé**

Cet article demande pourquoi les gains en matière de reproduction se sont parfois traduits par des abus en matière de reproduction pour les femmes autochtones au Canada. Guidé par une approche intersectionnelle et décoloniale, il fournit une critique matérielle historique du discours sur les droits individualisés et des objectifs réformistes qui ont tendance à sous-tendre les luttes féministes au Canada. Il explore comment le féminisme occidental pourrait soutenir la décolonisation et la justice reproductive.

There is presently much discussion among scholars, activists, and social policy researchers over the meaning, methodology, and theory of intersectionality. What began as a critique by women of colour and Indigenous women of social movements that overlooked the realities of life for those marginalized because of their gender, but also because of their race, class, sexuality, indigeneity and/or (dis)ability (Crenshaw 1991; Combahee River Collective 1983; Collins 2000; Davis 1983; Smith 2000; Smith 2005c; Lorde 1984), has expanded to include a vast literature on the multifaceted aspects of oppression and how laws, policies, and social structures are experienced differently based on the social location one occupies. Intersectionality is now increasingly incorporated into Women's and Gender Studies programs as a legitimate approach to social theory and is being adopted by mainstream scholars and activists as a tool guiding research, organizing, and analysis (McCall 2005; Hankivsky 2011; Mason 2010; Simpson 2009). Through this mainstreaming process, much of the radical potential that comes from understanding the interlocking social relations that oppress risks being blunted or misunderstood as a plea by marginalized populations for assimilation into the current system (Dhamoon 2011; Puar 2007). Worse still, this approach is in danger of being used to reify identities into objects of study, or of it becoming the object of study, rather than a prescription for transformative action (Hillsburg 2013; Jordan-Zachery 2007; Simien 2007). Although no definitive conclusions have been reached, current discussions confirm the need to keep "intersectionality" grounded in the struggle for social justice by developing politics of liberation that seek explicitly to challenge, on a material level, the social relations that oppress while paying attention to our interconnectedness and differences, or the different work required of us to ensure justice for our communities.

For this thematic cluster, I contribute to ongoing discussions by outlining a grounded politic of liberation that employs an intersectional approach and

focuses on issues of reproductive justice as one aspect of a larger project of social justice. Starting from the lived experiences of Indigenous women in Canada, this essay refers to rarely acknowledged instances of coercion, like forced sterilization, abusive abortions, and the promotion of birth control for population control ends, which took place while mainstream feminism was fighting for or celebrating increased access to these same services. Seeking to develop a decolonial analysis useful to non-Indigenous peoples living on Indigenous lands, this work provides a historical and material critique of what could more accurately be termed a form of settler feminism and the individualized rights discourse and reformist goals that, by and large, underlay the movement. It is a central premise of this paper that reproductive rights gained from within an inherently unjust system have reinforced relations of exploitation and subjugation for all women despite the improvement in quality of life some may experience from these. Conceding these rights has allowed the state to shape our movements in ways that has limited their relevance for many. This has restricted the ability of Western feminism to call for a radical transformation of the social relations of oppression in ways necessary to ensure justice for anyone. I argue that by falling short of fundamentally revolutionizing the relations of exploitation upon which the current capitalist, heteropatriarchal, and colonial system is based, what is being offered to women as reproductive rights pales in comparison to the knowledge and self-determination women could hold and have held over our bodies under different modes of social organization. At the same time, these options have helped reinforced reproductive regulation and relations of colonialism for Indigenous women and their peoples. To achieve reproductive justice requires that we explicitly challenge the larger social relations that have led to our lack of bodily self-determination in the first place. It also requires that we grapple with the longstanding criticisms waged against our movements.

In discussing possible ways forward in our struggles, as settlers, this work engages Indigenous critiques that highlight intersecting issues, which are central to Indigenous understandings of reproductive justice, a concept directly connected to questions of decolonization and Indigenous resurgence. These critiques have direct implications for western reproduc-

tive rights movements and settler feminism in general. I apply these in conjunction with other feminist works to better understand what it means for Western feminism to adopt a justice approach in its struggles for bodily self-determination with hopes that it can also become a tool of decolonization. To take a reproductive justice approach necessitates a change in conversation and a broadening of the nature and scope of the struggles we face. Our physical and reproductive bodies are intrinsically connected to the broader social world in which we live, the structural relations that inform our social locations, and our consequent experiences of privilege and/or oppression. To improve our reproductive lives in ways that avoid reinforcing these polarities of experience, we must understand the interconnections between these and the social relations that create them and intersectionality as a tool of analysis is useful here. Insights gained by doing so hold the possibility of radically transforming our struggles in ways that could allow us to cultivate necessary and decolonial alliances with others. Taken together, this work asks us to reflect on the meaning and purpose of intersectionality as a tool for social justice. It pushes us to think beyond identity politics by re-centering a systemic analysis and a focus on structural change as key aspects of justice work, goals which have always been central to the critical scholars whose thinking is often credited with informing the term.

### **Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Abuse? It Depends on Who You Ask**

I recently completed research on the coercive sterilization of Aboriginal women in Canada (Stote 2015). This work confirms that up to 1200 sterilizations were carried out from 1970 to 1976 on Aboriginal women from at least 52 northern settlements and in federally-operated Medical Services Hospitals. There are many aspects of this history that make these sterilizations coercive, including the failure of health officials to follow guidelines on when sterilizations could be performed and the lack of informed consent and inadequate use of interpreters when these took place. There also existed a general climate of paternalism that sometimes led doctors to perform the procedure on women “for their own good” (70-73). As this research progressed, it became clear that Aboriginal women experienced abuse through the provision of other reproductive services as

well. The documents reviewed tell us that prior to the 1969 amendment to the *Criminal Code* decriminalizing contraceptives, the first high dose hormonal birth control pill was distributed to Indigenous women in areas across Canada as a part of a “departmentally directed course of instruction” in an attempt to reduce the birth rate in Indigenous communities (60-70). At least some officials hoped this would translate into savings by allowing government to decrease the size of the homes it would need to provide for Indigenous peoples. Discussions at the time also show a concern with how this practice was perceived by Indigenous peoples who were charging genocide in response to their treatment at the hands of government and this influenced moves toward decriminalization. It was anticipated that making contraceptives available to all would protect government from potential liability while influencing the birth rate among specific groups, like Aboriginal peoples (68).

The passage of the 1969 *Omnibus Health Bill* also allowed a woman to legally procure an abortion when a therapeutic abortion committee agreed a pregnancy would endanger her mental, emotional, or physical health (*Statutes of Canada* 1968-69). While some continued to be denied access to the service, others were subject to the procedure for economic reasons (Stevens 1974a, 1974b). The Badgley Committee (1977), formed in 1975 to study the equitable operation of abortion law in Canada, also found that some women were pressured to consent to sterilization when in the vulnerable position of applying for an abortion and that this was sometimes used as a prerequisite to obtaining the service (360). An investigation into abortion practices in the North began as a result of one Indigenous woman claiming she was forced to undergo the procedure without anaesthesia. Her story led to nearly 100 complaints from others who had similar experiences (Walsh 1992; Lowell 1995) and a subsequent medical audit confirmed these and other abuses. In British Columbia, a Task Force on Access to Contraception and Abortion Services (1994) revealed that, because they lived in poverty, Indigenous women were sometimes pressured by health care providers to have abortions, consent to sterilization, or submit to long-acting contraceptives, denying them the right to make genuine choices about their reproduction (10, 14). More recently, allegations were made that Aboriginal women were subject to Depo-Provera as a first choice option in an

attempt to alleviate strain on inadequately funded public health and social services (Hawaleshka 2005; Smith 2005a; Tait 2000, 14-15).

While these injustices were being carried out, whether forced sterilization, abusive abortions, or the promotion of birth control for population control ends, others were mobilizing, and in some cases continue to mobilize, for increased access to these same services. Voluntary sterilization is a popular form of birth control among primarily middle-class heterosexual couples; birth control is viewed as a key means of reproductive control; and access to safe, legal, and state-provided abortion on demand is considered a fundamental right that remains of central concern to Western feminism. There are consistent contradictions between the sought after reforms of Western feminism (relating to our reproductive lives and beyond) and how these are experienced by Indigenous women. To acknowledge these contradictions is an important first step toward understanding that securing state-sanctioned and individually-based rights does not necessarily ensure justice for communities of people. Rights and justice are in fact two different ends, though one need not be exclusive of the other. This reality also highlights the need to listen to the voices of those most marginalized who have not always experienced rights as gains.

### **Is Anybody Listening? Taking Critiques Seriously**

There is no shortage of voices challenging the relevance of a movement that has often been on the wrong side of the history when it comes to the lived realities of marginalized people(s). Western feminism has been accused of various forms of racism and of benefiting from or actively participating in colonialism (Danforth 2011; Devereux 2005; Lawrence and Dua 2005). Sometimes, it has ignored or dismissed the fact that women occupy fundamentally different positions within Indigenous societies and are respected for these (Grande 2004; St. Denis 2007; Wagner 2001). Other times, feminism has appropriated this knowledge for its own purposes or has imposed on Aboriginal women the need to choose between their gender identity and indigeneity (Danforth 2010; Monture 1995; Smith 2005c). More recently, a swell of literature has called on feminism to decolonize by paying attention to how we teach and what we leave out and how our struggles are shaped in ways that erase Indigenous peoples



and continue to make us complicit in the colonization of Indigenous lands (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013; Grey 2003; Morgenson 2011; Sehdev 2013; Smith 2013; Tuck and Yang 2012; Walia 2012). Nearly 15 years ago, anti-racist feminist Sunera Thobani (2001) pushed us to realize that there will be no social justice, no anti-racism, no feminist emancipation, no liberation of any kind for anybody on this continent unless Aboriginal peoples win their demands for self-determination. She is quite right, but with few exceptions, I am not sure conversations in non-Indigenous communities have progressed much beyond this initial challenge. Certainly little scholarship acknowledges the reproductive abuses mentioned here or ties broader Indigenous critiques explicitly to issues of reproduction justice (Cook 2008; Danforth 2010; Wiebe and Koonsmo 2014). I seek to further these discussions from a settler perspective by reflecting on the implications of these critiques for Western feminism and its notions of reproductive justice and decolonization.

Western reproductive struggles have too often overlooked the reproductive experiences of women marginalized because of their racialized, poverty, and/or Indigenous status. The very notion of reproductive justice originates in this fact. Coined by a caucus of African American women in 1994, reproductive justice can be defined as the ability of any woman to determine her reproductive destiny and it links this ability directly to the conditions of her life and her community (Ross 2011). Loretta Ross (2011) explains that the ability of Indigenous women and women of color to control what happens to their bodies is constantly challenged by poverty, racism, environmental degradation, sexism, homophobia, and a host of other injustices. This concept challenges us to understand that our reproductive lives do not exist in isolation from other aspects of ourselves and that reproductive oppression is connected to other human and Indigenous rights violations, economic exploitation, and the pollution of the environment (Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice 2005; Sillman et al. 2004; Wiebe and Koonsmo 2014). Too often, the struggle for legal access to abortion has taken precedent over the concerns of women of color, Indigenous women, or those from other marginalized groups. As a consequence, the experiences of reproductive oppression lived by these groups through state attempts to control their fertility and undermine their communities

have been ignored (Roberts 1998; Torpy 2000). As Ross (2011) states:

The isolation of abortion from other social justice issues that concern all our communities contributes to, rather than counters, reproductive oppression. Abortion isolated from other social justice/human rights issues neglects issues of economic justice, the environment, criminal justice, immigrants' rights, militarism, discrimination based on race and sexual identity, and a host of other concerns directly affecting an individual woman's decision-making process. (4)

Reproductive justice calls us to pay attention to how broader social, political, and economic factors work to discipline the reproductive lives of some and to privilege those of others while these conditions shape the choices we all make (Luna and Luker 2013). At its core, reproductive justice is an intersectional concept. It is useful to understanding the experiences of Indigenous women discussed here because it requires attention be paid to the social relations which give rise to coercion and calls on these to be transformed in order to achieve justice.

The reproductive justice movement has offered trenchant criticisms of mainstream reproductive struggles. A fundamental aspect extensively critiqued is the notion of individual choice that underlies much reproductive rights discourse. Many point out that we cannot ignore the fact that women make choices in different contexts and there are multiple factors that constrain the options available to us at any given time. Marlene Gerber Fried and Loretta Ross (1992) tell us that freedom of choice is a privilege not enjoyed by those whose lives are shaped by poverty and discrimination (36-37). Because of this, as Rickie Solinger (2001) writes, choice often has two faces. Even though the contemporary language of choice promises dignity and reproductive autonomy to women, when it is applied to the question of poor women and motherhood, it begins to sound a lot like the language of eugenics: women who cannot afford to make choices are not fit to be mothers (223). Indeed, eugenics played a role in legitimating coercive sterilization, and population control and economic interests were motivating factors in the reproductive abuses experienced by Indigenous, racialized, and other marginalized women.

We also cannot separate the reproductive violence experienced by Indigenous women from the larger systemic violence perpetrated as a result of colonialism. Sheila Cote-Meek (2014) argues that the process of colonialism in whatever its form is necessarily violent. Indigenous women and their peoples, and the environments upon which they depend to subsist, have been subject to violence since settler colonists came to the Americas. This violence has manifested in many ways, whether through forced starvation policies (Daschuk 2013), the portrayal and exploitation of Indigenous women as sexual objects (Anderson 2016), or through legislative and policy means, including but not limited to residential schools and the Indian Act (Jamieson 1978; Chrisjohn and Young 2006). Leanne Simpson (2004) highlights how this violence extends to the other forms of life and the land in general, whether through clear-cut logging, overfishing and hunting animals to extinction, or resources extraction projects, which upset the ecological and cultural balance of communities. All this negatively impacts the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples, the ability of communities to subsist outside the wage economy, and hinders, though it has not completely impeded, the ability of Indigenous peoples to fulfill their responsibilities as caretakers of the land (Brown 1996; Cook 2008; McGregor 2009).

It is this historical and material setting that informs the reproductive abuses experienced by Indigenous women in Canada and these cannot be fully understood outside of this context. Indigenous women continue to make reproductive choices under conditions of colonialism and assimilation. The abuses mentioned here have been perpetrated by a colonial government with the help of Western institutions, including Western medicine. Aboriginal women have the right, as members of their own peoples, to decide what reproductive options to employ whether these originate in Western or Indigenous ways. In Indigenous societies, women practice/d autonomy over their bodies and reproductive lives and have alternate ways of controlling fertility, inducing abortion and giving birth (Anderson 2011; Boyer 2014; National Aboriginal Health Association 2008). It is only through the process of colonialism that this autonomy and these ways were undermined (Jasen 1997; Lawford and Giles 2013). This was a necessary part of imposing colonial relations on Indigenous peoples. As Theresa Lightfoot states, "It's disrespectful

to pretend like RJ wasn't alive in our communities... Our RJ was made illegal on purpose, but that's never mentioned anywhere" (cited in Danforth 2010, n.p.). Colonialism has created a situation where Western services are often presented as the only option and this allows for coercion and abuse.

Simpson (2014) states that Western feminism has not been an ally in the fight against the violence Indigenous women experience because this violence, including reproductive violence, cannot be addressed without engaging with issues of colonialism. Tara Williamson (2014) is more explicit when she says that most Canadians "don't give a shit" about the violence Indigenous women experience because our existence as settlers is vested in a system that depends on this violence. The prominent focus on rights and individualized choice in our movements overlooks this larger context and obfuscates any systematic abuse directed toward certain populations. As Justine Smith (1999) points out, in the current Native context, where women often find the only contraceptives available are dangerous, where unemployment rates are as high as 80%, and where life expectancy can be as low as 47 years, reproductive "choice" defined so narrowly is meaningless. Instead, Native women and men must fight for community self-determination and sovereignty over health care (211). In order to create a context in which choice becomes a meaningful concept, decolonization on a material level needs to happen. Aboriginal peoples must be returned the lands, resources, and freedom to provide for their own subsistence in ways they choose without stipulations.

But what implications do these critiques have for Western feminism in its struggles for reproductive self-determination? By pushing us to go beyond current rights discourse, which presupposes the existence of fundamentally unjust relations, a justice approach requires us to connect issues more broadly by mobilizing against the relations that create all of our struggles and to see how these struggles are interrelated. As Andrea Smith (2005b) highlights, we need to reject single issue politics as they have informed reproductive rights discourse and feminism in general as an agenda that not only does not serve Indigenous women, but actually promotes structures of oppression that keep all women from having real choices or healthy lives. Instead, the dismantling of heteropatriarchal capitalism

and colonialism needs to be made central (133, 135). This means Western feminism needs to resist renaming our reproductive rights struggles as justice struggles and carry on in a way that continues to take for granted the current historical and material relations. If we are to pursue goals that are good for all women, we must move beyond reformist strategies by making the active transformation of these longstanding relations a priority. In doing so, we are inescapably bound to Indigenous peoples in that our liberation, reproductive or otherwise, cannot come without that of Indigenous peoples. As Scott Lauria Morgenson (2011) has written, Natives and non-Natives are “caught up in one another” (2) and, as settlers, we need to learn to act in relationship to others in struggle (230). A justice approach can allow for this by requiring us to locate the struggle for control over our reproductive bodies within a broader context that is not disconnected from, but fundamentally related to, these other issues.

### **Acting in Relationship: Connecting the Historical Dots**

As I follow the state of reproductive and broader feminist struggles in Canada, I find myself wondering whether Western feminism has forgotten that the capitalist, heteropatriarchal, and colonial system in place is dependent on the oppression and exploitation of all women (albeit in different ways)? For Western women, this includes a history of subjugation as patriarchy was imposed and, later, with the rise of primitive accumulation and the removal of peasants from the land (Lerner 1986; Federici 2004). The process of imposing these relations was accompanied by brutal attacks against common folk, and against women in particular, the most notable instance of this being the witch hunts (Federici 2004; Mies 1986). The witch hunts were part of a process which saw private interests solidify access to land and the wealth flowing from it (Federici 2004). This process involved the imposition of a set of laws and practices that reinforced heteropatriarchal relations conducive to capitalism by establishing strict gender binaries; by promoting sexual and other forms of violence against women; and by policing alternative sexualities. The witch hunts were also part of a war against women as they were separated from their means of subsistence, their labour was devalued, and knowledge and control over their bodies was expropriated (Federici 2004;

Riddle 1997). The increased medicalization of women's bodies also saw female healers, midwives, and alternative health and healing practices suppressed and discredited (Ehrenreich and English 2005). Modern Western medicine arose out of these relations and was based on this theft. What does it mean, then, to turn to this same state-supported medical system as the only option for reproductive justice?

Current reproductive struggles that seek to establish, secure, or strengthen access to state-provided services stemming from the medical-industrial complex leave our movements vulnerable to the whims of the state and private interests. This reality effectively works to frame the scope of our struggles by limiting our demands to those rights that are offered and then withheld or by us thinking institutions that have been actively involved in our oppression are the most effective means through which to better our individual and collective lives. It also impedes potentially more radical and all-encompassing demands for collective change in a way that reproductive justice demands. I believe this is part of what Audre Lorde (1984) was getting at in her much quoted words, “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” (112). Pursuing change within the already laid out parameters set by the state may allow some of us temporary reprieve, but this route alone will never bring about genuine change. She also says this fact is most threatening to those who still define the master's house as their only source of support (112). By and large, Western feminism continues to be invested in the settler colonial state as the only medium for change and Western medical services as the only options from which to gain reproductive control and its struggles are limited as a result.

We need to ask ourselves whether institutions responsible for creating unjust relations or that have arisen out of and are meant to perpetuate these can, at the same time, be looked to for justice. I am not alone here. More generally, Martha Gimenez (2005) writes that reforms sought by Western feminism from within the system have been partial and incomplete because these gains are only accessible to those with the privilege to take advantage of them. No doubt, the increase in various rights has resulted in substantial improvements in the opportunities and quality of life of some individual women, but as Gimenez points out, these have not and cannot substantially alter the status of all

women. They remain inherently limited achievements because they have not altered the social relations that form the basis of our struggles and that are presupposed by the very existence of the state (28). This sentiment is echoed by Barbara Smith (2000) whose words here are directed at the gay rights movement, but which are directly relevant to reproductive rights movements as well. Smith writes:

If the gay movement wants to make a real difference, as opposed to settling for handouts, it must consider creating a multi-issue revolutionary agenda. This is not about political correctness, it's about winning...Gay rights are not enough for me, and I doubt that they're enough for most of us. Frankly, I want the same thing now that I did thirty years ago...freedom. (184)

State-provided reproductive rights are not enough to achieve justice. It is only by revolutionizing the relations upon which exploitation and oppression are based that the abuses experienced by women can be overcome (Mies 1985, 553). In her critique of attempts by Western feminism to secure concessions from the state rather than overthrow the larger relations that oppress, Lee Maracle (1993) tells us that our mutual survival as settlers and Indigenous peoples requires that we cut the strings that tie us to the current system and find new threads to bind us together (158).

Jessica Danforth (2010) has written one of the few pieces that explicitly addresses Indigenous reproductive justice in a Canadian context and, through her work as the founder of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, she and her colleagues have connected Indigenous reproductive health to a host of interlinked issues, including but not limited to the right to culturally-safe sexuality education, environmental justice, violence prevention and awareness, sex work outreach, prison in-reach, two-spirit advocacy and awareness, and the reclaiming of traditional knowledge of Indigenous masculinities and feminisms. In this piece, Erin Konsmo offers a description of reproductive justice in the following way:

Reproductive justice to me means having my cycles as a woman being connected with the cycles of nature, it means having that connection be strong and healthy. It means being able to make decisions over that health including when

and if I have children, the ability to make decisions to not follow full term with a pregnancy... It also means having the ability to sit and listen to my kookum (grandmother) tell me in her own indigenous language (which she lost) with my feet in the dirt and hands planting seeds how my reproductive system is interconnected with the earth. It is not some foreign white concept written on cleaned up white paper, it is poetry, beautiful and real. Beautiful with my feet in the dirt. (in Danforth 2010, n.p.)

Reproductive justice for Indigenous peoples is intimately related to broader struggles for environmental justice, cultural rights and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, and, ultimately, for material decolonization and self-determination.

Danforth (2010) also challenges us to consider whether justice for Indigenous peoples can be achieved without challenging the very legitimacy of the Canadian state as it currently exists. She is not alone here either. Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence (2009) point out that the notion that Indigenous nations can coexist with the Canadian state, whose ideologies, values and institutions lead to the poisoning of the air, water, and land upon which we all depend and that form the basis of Indigenous identities and cultures, is increasingly being questioned. The existence of a nation-state presupposes relations of domination and control that are at odds with Indigenous struggles and approaches to the world (105-136). These relations give rise to reproductive coercion and abuse and there are direct connections between environmental injustices in Indigenous communities, reproductive health, and the cultural wellbeing of a people (Cook 2008; Wiebe and Konsmo 2014). As non-Indigenous people, we need to know that the existence of the current nation-state presupposes social relations that also deny us the ability to exist in healthy ways or to justly provide for our subsistence as well. The relations that undermine the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination are products of a system that is responsible for polluting our bodies and environments too.<sup>1</sup> It is erroneous for feminism to think that reproductive justice for anyone can be achieved from within this context.

### **Possible Ways Forward? Or, Things to Think About**

In practice, what does all this mean for Western feminism and our reproductive struggles? As first step,

I think we must critically assess the types of choices we are being offered and from which we all must choose. Many of the options available are developed by pharmaceutical companies with profits in mind and they are harmful to our bodies or are only available from an expert-based, male-dominated medical system (Minkin 1980; Shea 2007; Warsh 2010). Are these state-sanctioned choices truly gains or do they pale in comparison to the control and understanding we could hold and have held over our bodies under different modes of social organization? Judith Richter (1996) argues that any method of reproductive control must be women-centered and the benefits and risks of technologies need to be assessed before they are developed. This assessment should be based on the needs and concerns of women and a consideration of how these technologies may be employed within the larger social context. In other words, society should not develop contraceptive technologies just because it has the ability to do so if these are harmful to our bodies or run the risk of being wielded in coercive ways.

Twenty five years ago, Betsy Hartman (1987) argued there are two sets of rights at issue if women are to gain reproductive freedom. This must include the fundamental right of women to control our reproduction. To achieve this, we need to transform the relationship between the provider and recipient of reproductive services by taking control out of the hands of the medical profession and placing it back into the hands of women (32-34). This involves more than ensuring informed consent protocols are followed. It includes developing or (re)establishing alternatives to options stemming only from state-supported Western medicine. Are there potentially safer options, which exist or remain underexplored and under-researched, that are not based on technologies controlled by for-profit industries, but that rely instead on women having intimate knowledge and control over their bodies, lives, and environments? Women cannot have control over their reproductive lives if they do not have the choice to choose otherwise.

To have reproductive justice also requires that we consider as part of our reproductive lives the broader labours necessary and vital to our ability to live, feed ourselves, and reproduce, or for society to continue to function. Silvia Federici (2004) highlights how the enclosure of lands necessary to impose current social re-

lations on Western peoples involved at the same time the enclosure of our bodies and reproductive processes in the interest of capital (61-163). She pushes us to consider reproductive labour as part of a broader social reproductive work, or the complex activities, relations, and institutions that exist to produce and reproduce life (and labour power) under a capitalist heteropatriarchy (Federici 2012). Reproductive labor, which goes beyond childbirth to include domestic work, child raising, daily provisioning, subsistence farming, or even sex work, is disproportionately performed by women and, in a capitalist heteropatriarchy, this work is devalued or unvalued while it remains integral to our existence and the continued functioning of the current system (Shiva 1989; Mies 1986; Waring 1990). Federici (2012) points out that more recent structural adjustments imposed through the politics of economic liberalization and globalization serve as a form of sterilization because of the decline in life expectancy that results from policies that are destructive to human life and the environment. In this sense, reproductive justice is joined directly here with economic justice in that the political and economic relations under which we live have direct impacts on our life expectancy, quality of life, and, more broadly, on our reproductive and social lives.

With respect to Indigenous peoples in Canada, Pamela Palmater (2011) has argued similarly that the effects of colonial policy and the structural poverty conditions and chronic underfunding of vital social services imposed by the federal government are causing a “death by poverty” in Indigenous communities. This reality, too, is directly correlated with the reproductive and broader health of Indigenous peoples. Reproduction justice, then, depends on us having control over our economic and social lives and this requires a radical transformation of the political and economic relations upon which Canada is based. Hartman (1987) has also argued that everyone on earth has the right to subsistence by having our basic human needs met and by having society value and support all the labors that go into meeting these needs (32-34). Despite government rhetoric, it is possible to create such a society. It is also possible for us to mobilize in ways which make this vision a priority. The question we need to ask is whether any of this can be achieved from within a system based on values, principles, and relations that are antithetical to this vision. In pursuing these goals,

settlers, including Western feminists, also need to understand that it is not our lands or resources that need to be redistributed to do all this, that we are living on the territories of Indigenous peoples. The fact that our existence has come to depend on what is not ours does not negate this reality. As Janet McCloud states, feminism needs to lose the privilege it acquires as a settler movement by joining Indigenous peoples in liberating their lands and lives for as long as it takes to make this happen (in Grande 2004, 150-151). Our conception of reproductive justice needs to be explicitly linked to these broader issues.

In order to decolonize, some argue that we actually need to make the state irrelevant by developing new structures and ways of meeting our needs based on mutuality, relatedness, and respect (Smith 2013; Maile, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). To be effective, these efforts need to involve Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Indigenous struggles for self-determination are unique to each nation in question and often include a focus on restoring land-based languages and ways of life, revitalizing Indigenous institutions and social structures as informed by Indigenous worldviews, and dealing individually and collectively with the effects of colonialism in Indigenous lives. This work is for Indigenous peoples to carry out in ways decided upon and directed by their communities. However, these efforts would be made much easier if Western impositions on Indigenous peoples stopped and this is where settlers, including Western feminism, can be most useful. Our work toward decolonization needs to go beyond only offering support to Indigenous struggles. We must also take up our responsibilities as treaty partners and as members of the natural world in ways that promote alternative ways of living, being, and relating to one another. As Nora Butler Burke (2004) writes:

A decolonisation movement cannot be comprised solely of solidarity and support for Indigenous peoples' sovereignty and self-determination. If we are in support of self-determination, we too need to be self-determining. It is time to cut the state out of this relationship, and to replace it with a new relationship, one which is mutually negotiated, and premised on a core respect for autonomy and freedom. (4)

We cannot rely solely on the state to implement just re-

lations with Indigenous peoples when its very existence is meant to help facilitate the continuance of a system based on exploitative relations and the control and suppression of viable alternative ways of life. It is up to us to engage directly and collectively with the historical and material relations of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism in ways that undermine their existence — by creating alternate means of production and reproduction that are based on just relations with Indigenous peoples and a direct connection with and respect for our means of subsistence.

In our efforts, we would do well to listen to and take the time to understand the fundamental critiques Indigenous peoples have consistently voiced about our way of life and worldviews. Krysta Williams (2011) tells us that, without acknowledging Indigenous voices, there can be no peace and no choice and this ignorance and lack of will to listen comes not only from oppressive forces, but from feminist and activist communities as well (Williams and Ligate, 153-164). The act of listening has much to teach us about real, living, and sustainable alternatives to the system in place. Indigenous ways of life have consistently stood in opposition to the ideologies, values, and ways of relating to each other and the natural world that are inherent to the current mode of production and, by and large, they continue to stand in opposition to these today. It is exactly these ways of life that need to be respected in order to properly address the grievances of Indigenous peoples. Re-learning different ways of living as we take up our responsibilities as settlers has the potential to shift our ideological frameworks and the nature of our struggles, and this will place us in a better position to reclaim autonomy over our reproductive lives as well. As Jeanette Armstrong (1995) asks in relation to the resurgence work being done by Indigenous peoples on the west coast:

What do we stand for? What do we give our coming generations? How do we ensure a healthy lifestyle for them? How are we going to implement the changes that are necessary for the survival of our communities?...What, historically, do we need to remember and relearn and relearn, and what are the values that go along with that? (183)

These are not only questions for Indigenous peoples. As settlers, we also need to ask ourselves these ques-

tions and begin the difficult work necessary to (re) build our knowledge of practices and ways of living prior to, or different from, those required by the current system.

Taken together, the voices highlighted here are urging us to understand that justice needs to be all-encompassing or it is not justice. Neither is decolonization a metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012). It is something that should unsettle us internally, as individuals, but most importantly, in how we collectively relate to the lands and resources and with the peoples upon whom we depend for our existence. Western feminism is being challenged to seriously reconsider and re-envision how we shape our struggles and what exactly we are fighting for. Patricia Monture (1999) once wrote that in order for decolonization to be successful, we need to imagine alternate worlds based on humanity, freedom, and independence. Our movements need to think bigger about what control over our bodies looks like and what steps are needed to achieve this. What type of world do we want to live in and what is fundamentally required to get us there? A struggle for justice is not achieved by settling for less than what is required or by limiting our demands only to those rights that the system oppressing us is willing to grant. As history and the present day shows, rights that are given too often fall short of those that are truly needed and are consistently under threat of being taken away. To win reproductive justice for all women requires profound change in our entire society. This is, at its core, an intersectional project. If intersectionality is going to be useful to us in achieving liberation, we need to ask what purpose we have in adopting the term in our theorizing or research. Intersectionality as a tool can push us to see beyond ourselves by understanding how struggles are different, yet interconnected. Most importantly, it can help us to identify the structures and social relations that inform these differences and to strategize on how to transform the relations of oppression in ways that ensure material change and justice for all.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This point should not be misconstrued as a “move to innocence” by colonial equivocation or by asserting settler nativism (Tuck and Yang 2012) in a way that erases the colonial relations that continue to inform Indigenous-settler interactions or that diminishes Indig-

enous claims to self-determination. It is meant to remind western feminism that colonial and capitalist heteropatriarchal relations have not always been, are not inevitable, and will need to be transcended for both Indigenous and settler liberation.

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# Intersectionality, Lost in Translation? (Re)thinking Inter-sections between Anglophone and Francophone Intersectionality

Alexandre Baril's interdisciplinary training combines ten years in philosophy and ethics and a PhD in Women's Studies. After working as a visiting professor in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Wesleyan University and as an assistant professor with a limited-term appointment in Feminist and Gender Studies at the University of Ottawa, Dr. Baril received an Izak Walton Killam Postdoctoral Fellowship to pursue his work on trans\* and disability/crip politics in the Department of Political Science at Dalhousie University. His work has been published in *Hypatia: Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, *Feminist Review*, *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, and *Disability & Society*.

## Abstract

Inspired by the intersectional formulation "All the Women are White, All the Men are Black," this paper suggests that "all feminist intersectional analyses are Anglophone and all Francophone feminists are cisgender" to highlight the exclusion of language issues in Anglophone intersectional analyses and of trans issues in their Francophone counterparts.

## Résumé

Inspirés par la formulation intersectionnelle « Toutes les femmes sont blanches, tous les hommes sont noirs », cet article suggère que « toutes les analyses féministes intersectionnelles sont anglophones et toutes les féministes francophones sont cisgenres » pour souligner l'exclusion des problèmes de langue dans les analyses intersectionnelles anglophones et des problèmes « transgenre » dans leurs homologues francophones.

## Intersectionality, Lost in Translation?

The title of this article could have been, "All feminist intersectional analyses are Anglophone, all Francophone feminists are cisgender, but some of us are brave," in homage to Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith's (1982) celebrated collection, *All the Women are White, All the Men are Black, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*—the title of which has become one of the most popular formulations of intersectionality in the decades since its publication. Although intersectionality has since become a veritable "buzzword" (Davis 2008) across disciplines, its history, significance, and use vary from language to language. Questions of language power relations, however, remain almost entirely absent from Anglophone feminist intersectional analyses. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) initial theorization of intersectionality denounced monolingualism as a significant barrier for many non-Anglophone American women and, yet, her invitation to theorize language has not been taken up in the development and institutionalization of intersectionality in the last twenty-five years. With the rare and notable exceptions of non-American authors like Ann Denis (2008), Marie-Hélène Bourcier (2011), Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (2011), and Chantal Maillé (2012, 2014), linguistic power relations have attracted little attention in English-language conferences and publications in feminist and gender studies where intersectional approaches are the norm. I call the combined institutionalization and Anglicization of intersectionality the "institutio-anglicization of intersectionality." This phenomenon has both allowed intersectionality to take hold in the academy and normalized it through a distinctly Anglophone understanding.

In non-Anglophone milieus, particularly in the Francophone communities that are the focus of this article, intersectionality initially received a chilly reception. I will show that Francophone feminists' resistance to intersectionality is due, in part, to institutio-angli-

cization. Despite its initial failure to gain ground in Francophone circles, intersectionality has become a “hit concept” (Dorlin 2012) over the last five years. Major French-language journals in feminist and gender studies, political science, social work, and the social sciences and humanities have recently published their *first* special issues on intersectional analyses (original translations of special issue titles provided): *L’Homme et la Société* (2011, “Feminist Prisms: What is Intersectionality?”); *Politique et Sociétés* (2014, “Intersectionality: Domination, Exploitation, Resistance, and Emancipation”); *Nouvelles pratiques sociales* (2014, “Intersectionality: Theoretical Reflections and Uses in Feminist Research and Intervention”); *Interrogations? Revue pluridisciplinaire de sciences humaines et sociales* (2015, “Thinking About Intersectionality”); and *Recherches Féministes* (2015, “Intersectionalities”). While Francophone academics who use intersectionality are more likely to discuss language issues than their Anglophone counterparts, Anglophone intersectional analyses are increasingly more likely to problematize other topics and axes of oppression, such as transphobia (or cisnormativity) as yet completely absent from Francophone intersectional analyses. For example, as I will show, in a sample of 15 key Francophone texts on feminism and intersectionality, only one makes a single mention of trans issues amidst lengthy enumerations of other oppressions. Simply stated, Anglophone feminists seem to forget that they have a language (English) and Francophone feminists seem to forget that they have a gender identity (cisgender, i.e. non-transgender).

As with other ideas, theories, and political tools, “intersectionality travels” (Crenshaw 2011, 221-223). In its travels, intersectionality encounters varying degrees of enthusiasm in different national, linguistic, cultural, and political contexts; meets with resistance; adapts and is adapted; alters and is altered; and transforms and is transformed, particularly through the processes of linguistic translation, but also via social, cultural, and political translation. As Patricia Hill Collins (2012) asks: “What, if anything, has been lost in the current translation [of intersectionality]? What, if anything, might be gained via a new translation?” (n.p.). Inspired by these two theorists and using the analogy of intersectionality’s travels in Anglophone and Francophone communities, I ask the following

question: What are the limits and potentialities of the translation and inter-sections (understood as both interconnections and sections/divides) of Francophone and Anglophone feminist intersectional analyses? I propose an analysis of these limits and potentialities guided by an intersectional formulation in which “all feminist intersectional analyses are Anglophone and all Francophone feminists are cisgender.” This intersectional “analytical tool” is useful to “amplify and highlight specific problems” (Crenshaw 2011, 232) that are the central concern of this article: the exclusion of language issues in Anglophone intersectional analyses and of trans issues in their Francophone counterparts. I hope not only that pointing out the “failures” of these communities’ intersectional analyses will enrich their approaches, but that it will also permit us to (re)think solidarities between the communities themselves.

To do this, I combine critical genealogy, deconstruction, and auto-ethnographic methodology. The first of this article’s three sections addresses the absence of problematization of Anglonormativity and language issues in feminist intersectional analyses in English. The second, after briefly considering factors that have hindered the popularization of intersectionality in Francophone feminist circles until recently, including Anglonormativity, shows that Francophone feminists disregard trans issues, currently a central topic in many intersectional analyses in English. The third section, based on an auto-ethnographic analysis inspired by my experience as a transgender, Francophone man, sketches a possible future for those “brave” trans Francophones at the crossroads of these inter-sections. To conclude, I invite a (re)thinking of possible alliances suggested by the inter-sections between Anglophone and Francophone intersectional analyses.

### **“All Feminist Intersectional Analyses are Anglophone”**

The occasion for this article was a two-day seminar on the subject of ‘intersectionality’ that I recently gave during a visiting stint at a university in Germany. To my surprise, the seminar...drew interest from Ph.D. candidates and colleagues from cities throughout the region, all prepared to sacrifice their weekend and put aside their language difficulties (the seminar was in English) in order to participate. (Davis 2008, 67)

Although Kathy Davis (2008) uses neither the expression “institutio-anglicization” nor “institutionalization” in her discussion of intersectionality, her article is dedicated to understanding the growing popularity of this concept within Anglo-American contexts and a wide variety of other national contexts. She states that this seminar was given in Germany in English. What is interesting about this is how Davis, like many Anglophone theorists and despite their best intentions, presents language as an individual problem (“their language difficulties”) and not as a consequence of linguistic power relations and systemic social and political dynamics. This is an excellent example of Anglonormativity. Inspired by terms like “heteronormativity” and “cisnormativity,” which refer to cissexual/cisgender (i.e. non-trans people) norms by which trans people are judged (Baril 2015), Anglonormativity is a system of structures, institutions, and beliefs that marks English as the norm. In Anglonormative contexts, Anglonormativity is the standard by which non-Anglophone people are judged, discriminated against, and excluded (Baril 2016a). To better illustrate the subtle Anglonormativity underlying Davis’ statement, I present an example drawn from Disability/Deaf Studies. If a seminar for Deaf people were held without sign language interpreters, stating that “their language difficulties” could hinder participation, it would erase audist/oralist norms and structures (Samuels 2013). Interestingly, the absence of interpreters for languages other than English in a variety of situations, like the aforementioned seminar, summer schools, conferences, and other events often in English (Ventola, Shalom, and Thompson 2002), is not seen as a systemic accessibility issue the way it is for disabled or Deaf people. However, as Ellen Samuels (2013) and Eleanor Rose Ty (2010) point out, insufficient English skills in Anglonormative contexts can be a serious accessibility problem for immigrants. A person who does not master English may experience difficulties or be unable to access services like health care, find housing or a job, or simply manage the numerous forms of communication that are part of daily life. Instead of interpreting immigrants’ limited participation in Anglophone contexts as “language difficulties” and leaving it up to them to learn to understand and speak English with more ease, fluidity, and rapidity, we need to reflect critically about how institutions, structures,

and social organizations might be rethought in ways that take a variety of people’s language skills into consideration.

A significant obstacle to recognizing that non-Anglophone people’s language “difficulties” are societal is the fact that Anglophone identity, like many other dominant identities, is unmarked and remains invisible to the Anglonormative gaze. Despite the extensive problematization of the global dominance of English in economic, political, cultural, and academic spheres (Ventola, Shalom, and Thompson 2002) as “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson 1992) or the “hegemony of English” (Descarries 2003, 2014), these analyses have most often been put forward by non-Anglophone academics. Furthermore, critical analyses of Anglonormativity have been limited to the fields of sociology and sociolinguistics and have rarely attracted the attention of Anglophone scholars in anti-oppression fields like feminist, gender, queer, or trans studies. For example, while the terms “Anglo-normativity” and “Anglonormativity” produce 352 hits in Google searches (performed on May 22, 2015), similar terms, such as “heteronormativity” (370,000 results), “homonormativity” (49,600 results), and even “cisnormativity” (12,100 results) produce considerably more results. This clearly demonstrates that Anglonormativity is currently neither discussed nor recognized in English-speaking social movements and related disciplines. In addition to the term Anglonormativity not being used, language issues in general are not considered as I will show below. Indeed, Anglophone feminist intersectional analyses concerned with many dimensions of identity and axes of oppression have thus far failed to address Anglonormativity.

Crenshaw (1991) is one of the first and only English-speaking authors using feminist intersectional approach to denounce what she calls “monolingualism.” She presents the case of a Latina woman whose husband threatened her life and who was denied shelter services explicitly because of her limited English-language skills and the shelter’s lack of bilingual personnel. Crenshaw reminds us that this is not an isolated case. In fact, in shelters in the United States serving a large number of immigrant women, language barriers are often the most significant obstacles to receiving services. Crenshaw questions the logic of seeing language non-accessibility as an individual issue, a perspective that leads fem-

inist groups to fault specific women (victim-blaming) instead of perceiving the systemic obstacles preventing these women from accessing the same support and services as others:

Here the woman in crisis was made to bear the burden of the shelter's refusal to anticipate and provide for the needs of non-English-speaking women. [...] The specific issue of monolingualism and the monistic view of women's experience that set the stage for this tragedy were not new issues in New York. Indeed, several women of color reported that they had repeatedly struggled with the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence over language exclusion and other practices that marginalized the interests of women of color. (1264)

Despite significant intersections between linguistic and racial identities, Crenshaw's (1991) call to problematize monolinguist attitudes in Anglonormative contexts has not been taken up by other feminists who use intersectional analyses. This is still more surprising given the central concern of intersectional analysis is the experiences of women of colour, many of whom are not only racialized, but non-native English-speaking as well. Indeed, in the last twenty years, the most significant feminist texts on intersectionality either neglect to mention language issues (reflected in the absence of the terms "English," "Anglo-Saxon," "Anglonormativity," "language," and "linguistic" in these texts), as is the case in Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004), Leslie McCall (2005), Ann Phoenix (2006), Ange-Marie Hancock (2007), and Sylvia Walby (2007) or the texts mention these words very briefly without offering an analysis of language power relations, as is the case in Floya Anthias (1998), Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 2000), Helen Meekosha (2006), Nira Yuval-Davis (2006), Kathy Davis (2008), and Jennifer Nash (2008). The absence or, in some cases, cursory mention of these issues is both troubling and revealing of the work required to deconstruct Anglonormativity. In Yuval-Davis' (2006) review of dimensions other than sex, race, and class considered in intersectional analyses, language is absent once again:

Other feminist theorists add other dimensions, such as age...; disability...; sedentarism...or sexuality...One of the most comprehensive attempts to include additional axes of social divisions is that of Helma Lutz...(Lutz,

2002: 13). Her list includes the following 14 'lines of difference': gender; sexuality; 'race'/skin-colour; ethnicity; nation/state; class; culture; ability; age; sedentariness/origin; wealth; North-South; religion; stage of social development. (201-202)

It could be argued that language is implicitly included in the categories of race or ethnicity. I see two problems with this argument. First, as Baukje Prins (2006) notes, racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities, despite being interlocked, are different and not interchangeable. Second, the "implicit" inclusion of language in ethnicity or race categories tends to subsume language issues within racial or ethnic issues, which can be very different. In the case cited by Crenshaw (1991), the woman was denied access to the shelter not because of her skin color, but because of her language skills. New immigrants in the United States or Canada provide another example. Not only do they face racism in their job searches, but their English language skills can make the difference between job searches that are relatively easy, difficult, or sometimes nearly impossible. In other words, linguistic power relations are different from, intersect with, and transform ethnic and racial power relations. As a result, the experience of racism and immigration can vary greatly according to language skills.

In order to develop an ethics of responsibility and accountability toward non-Anglophone people who suffer discrimination, stigmatization, exclusion, and social and institutional violence due to Anglonormativity and linguistic colonization, these injustices must be identified as resulting from linguistic power relations rather than as secondary effects of racism. As Yuval-Davis (2006) observes, "While all social divisions share some features and are concretely constructed by/intermeshed with each other, it is important also to note that they are not reducible to each other" (200). A non-reductive feminist intersectional perspective may allow us to recognize both the irreducibility of linguistic oppression and its interlocking relations with other forms of oppression. As demonstrated here, the institutionalization of intersectionality in the academy, and more specifically in gender and feminist studies, is inseparable from its Anglicization. Not only do language issues in general, and the omnipresence of English in particular, remain under-theorized, but the reception of intersectionality in the academy has been less posi-



tive in non-Anglophone contexts such as Quebec and France (Maillé 2014).

### “All Francophone Feminists Are Cisgender”

One could even say that intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far. (McCall 2005, 1771)

The above statement accurately reflected the Anglo-American context when McCall’s (2005) text was written. Indeed, in 2005, the popularity and institutionalization of intersectionality differed in other national contexts (Lutz, Vivar, and Supik 2011), including in Francophone communities. I would like to specify that this article focuses on Francophone communities in Quebec and, to a lesser degree, France. It should also be noted that many of the reflections presented below reflect Canada’s bilingual status in which Francophones constitute a linguistic minority.

Then as now, strong critiques of intersectionality abound in Francophone feminist communities. Other concepts that promote similar ideas regarding the co-construction of oppressions, like coextensivity or “consubstantiality” (Kergoat 2001; Galerand and Kergoat 2014), have been proposed and used by Francophone feminists (Juteau 2010). Many authors note the historical lag between the popularization of intersectionality in Anglophone and Francophone communities and the intense resistance it has sometimes encountered in France (Poiret 2005; Bourcier 2011; Dorlin 2012) and French Canada (Denis 2008; Bilge 2010). In fact, Quebec and France have only recently taken the intersectional turn (Maillé 2012, 2014). Denis (2008) writes: “In contrast [to Anglophone communities], intersectional analysis is in its infancy in France, and to a lesser degree in French-speaking Canada/Québec” (682).

Authors like Denis (2008), Dorlin (2012), and Maillé (2014) explore various factors contributing to the “lag” in interest for intersectionality in French: specifically, a French republican tradition that erases identity differences in the name of abstract universalism and some Quebec feminists’ lack of interest in theorizing race until quite recently. As Maillé (2012, 2014) contends, although we must recognize that Canadian Francophones have been colonized, have struggled, and

continue to fight to protect their cultural and linguistic identities, this battle has too often overshadowed their own role as colonizers of Indigenous peoples. Maillé (2012) writes: “Quebec’s national narrative rests on one central historical element: the 1763 conquest, when descendants of French settlers were conquered by Britain. But the conquest of indigenous populations by French white settlers gets completely erased from this history” (68).

The paradoxical status of Quebec and Francophone populations in Canada as both minoritized/colonized and settler colonizers of Indigenous peoples bears closer examination in order to develop greater accountability toward Indigenous populations and nurture alliances between these communities and other linguistic minorities in Canada. However, this article is instead interested in the fact that many authors in Quebec and France have been and remain very critical of American exceptionalism and colonialism in the economic, political, social, and cultural, not to mention academic, spheres (Descarries 2003, 2014; Dorlin 2012; Maillé 2014; Pagé 2014). Put differently, the fact that intersectionality, a concept of Anglo-American origin, is currently conquering feminist studies in many national contexts is an important component of certain feminists’ rejection of intersectionality who perceive it as an institutio-anglicized, Anglo-American, colonial notion. As noted by the *Fédération des femmes du Québec/FFQ* (2013), the leading non-profit feminist organization in Quebec, some feminists in Quebec considered intersectionality a “threat to the movement” (original translation). This resistance prompted the FFQ to conduct Quebec’s first large-scale quantitative and qualitative study of the understanding and reception of intersectional analyses by Francophone feminists. Geneviève Pagé and Rosa Pires (2015), the report’s authors, note:

However, use of [the intersectional] approach is not unanimous and has caused dissent within the movement, specifically during the general assemblies [États généraux] on feminist analysis and action...and the FFQ’s general meeting...FFQ authorities are convinced of the potential of this approach...Nonetheless, despite several attempts to make it more accessible and provide more information... resistance to the approach remained. The FFQ’s leadership and research group were left with many questions and saw

the need to reopen the discussion with its members. (7; original translation)

Although the report indicates that less than 10% of Quebec feminists demonstrate strong resistance, resentment, or anger toward intersectional analysis and see it as a threat to the movement, the resistance that led to this empirical study is illustrative of the chilly, and late, reception of intersectionality in some non-Anglophone circles. Pagé and Pires' (2015) report shows not only that an increasing number of feminists (a majority) are now open to intersectional analyses, but also that intersectionality is seen as an important tool to establish more equitable relationships between women from different backgrounds.

As a Francophone feminist working on trans issues, I am struck by the growing number of French-language texts on intersectionality that, unlike their English-language counterparts, list linguistic identities and language power relations (Corbeil and Marchand 2006; Bilge 2010; Juteau 2010; Harper and Kurtzman 2014; Pagé 2014; Pagé and Pires 2015), but remain silent on trans identities and cisnormativity. With the exception of the special issue of *Recherches Féministes* (2015), which includes one of my texts on the connections between feminist and trans issues, not one of the Francophone journals' special issues on intersectionality mentioned in the introduction addresses trans issues. In the most recent and most often cited Francophone feminist texts on intersectionality, trans issues are not only never discussed in depth, but they are not mentioned at all (demonstrated by the systematic absence of the terms "trans," "transsexual," "transgender") (Kergoat 2001; Poiret 2005; Corbeil and Marchand 2006; Delphy 2006; Bilge 2009, 2010, 2014; Juteau 2010; De Sève 2011; Dorlin 2012; Fédération des femmes du Québec/FFQ 2013; Galerand and Kergoat 2014; Harper and Kurtzman 2014; Pagé 2014; Pagé et Pires 2015). Of these 15 texts, Dorlin's (2012) is the only one that makes a single mention of trans issues. This despite the fact that these texts generally present long lists of identities/oppressions that include sexism, racism, classism, settler colonialism, ageism, ableism, sizeism, English colonialism, and more. However, the notions of gender identity (cis/trans) and transphobia/cisnormativity are never identified as this excerpt from the FFQ (2013) report shows: "Reflecting the society in which it evolves, the women's movement tends to reproduce racism, classism, ableism,

homophobia and heterosexism, audism, and the marginalization of certain women. As a result, we feel that the feminist movement must position itself against each of these forms of oppression" (n.p.; original translation). It must be noted that trans women's inclusion/exclusion was a subject of much debate in more than one FFQ working committee. The authors of the FFQ report apparently did not consider cisnormative oppression worthy of inclusion in its list of oppressions. Pagé and Pires' (2015) most recent extensive report on intersectionality reveals much the same story: almost every other form of oppression is either discussed in depth or briefly mentioned. Although a participant in this empirical study raised the issue of the discrimination of trans women in Quebec's feminist movement twice, the oppression these women experience is not once mentioned in the report. Although Francophone authors who discuss the intersections between feminism and trans activism, including Maud-Yeuse Thomas, Noomi Grüsigg, and Karine Espineira (2015) and Bourcier (2011), use intersectional analyses in their work, their texts are not primarily dedicated to intersectionality nor are they recognized as key authors in French on the topic.

French-language articles, books, and reports are not the only places silence reigns on trans issues. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Baril 2016b), the leading international conference in Francophone feminist studies and research also completely invisibilizes trans people and issues. The call for proposals and website for the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Feminist Research in the Francophonie (*Congrès international des recherches féministes dans la francophonie*, Montreal, August 2015) exclusively uses feminized language. Conference documentation therefore explicitly refers to women professors, researchers, students, and so on (CIRFF 2015). Organizers argue that this feminized language includes the masculine, but this seems insensitive to the many identities that do not fit into these binary categories, including those of some trans, intersex, queer, genderqueer, and non-gendered people. Furthermore, differences between women in terms of race, class, age, sexual orientation, etc. are repeatedly mentioned throughout the conference's documentation, but trans issues are never discussed. This particular conference is but one example among many. Indeed, the erasure of trans issues is a reality in many Francophone events and Francophone feminist studies programs in Quebec. For example, in

Quebec, two Francophone universities offer programs in feminist studies: Université du Québec à Montréal and Université Laval.<sup>1</sup> Considering the recent creation of new courses and changes to their feminist studies programs, it is both surprising and disappointing to see that none of the official course titles includes the words “queer,” “genderqueer,” “trans,” or similar terms and that none of the official course descriptions mentions trans people.

Given that a high-profile Francophone feminist like Christine Delphy publicly depicts trans claims as a personal matter, this silence is not surprising. Delphy recently stated in an interview that, by engaging with trans issues, “we lose sight of the feminist fight for the eradication of gender...[it] is not a political battle, in the sense that it does not propose changing societal structures” (Merckx 2013; original translation). Certain Francophone feminists’ resistance to trans issues and sometimes violent reactions to trans people’s demands are beyond the scope of this article. Instead, my goal is to highlight the serious lack of discussion, problematization, theorization, and politicization of trans issues by a majority of Francophone feminists with the exception of those listed above and despite the fact that many of these feminists have adopted intersectionality. This is particularly troubling given that gender identity and the fact of being cis/trans are profoundly enmeshed with other experiences of oppression, including but not limited to racism, classism, sexism, and ableism (Baril 2015). As I will now show, the experience of transness is also influenced by linguistic identity, an intersection thus far neglected by Anglophone and Francophone feminists.

### **“But Some of Us Are Brave...”: Being Trans and Francophone**

As a Francophone scholar, the lack of problematization of language power relations in Anglophone feminist intersectional analyses is disappointing. As a trans man, I am similarly disappointed by the absence of trans issues in Francophone feminists’ discussions. Inspired by the intersectional argument made by Black women that the anti-racist movement inadequately considers sexism and the feminist movement inadequately considers racism, I argue that Anglophone feminist analyses of language power relations and Francophone feminist analyses of cisnormativity are both insufficient.

By repurposing the phrase “but some of us are brave...,” which highlights the experience of Black women at the intersection of sexism and racism, I hope to stimulate critical reflection on the concrete repercussions felt by some of us who are both trans and Francophone by offering an auto-ethnographic perspective on these intersections in my own life. My goal is not to generalize about how intersections between gender and linguistic identities work, but rather to share my own experience and living archive in order to illustrate the complex entanglements between transness and language that remain invisible in the two literatures analyzed above.

Because I am an academic, the realization that I wanted to transition was immediately followed by the instinct to gather as much information as possible about hormones, surgeries, and so on. I was shocked to discover how little information was available. I was puzzled by the lack of online resources on transgender issues in 2008, until I realized my search terms were in French. As a scholar working on gender, queer, trans, and disability issues, I am accustomed to searching in English; most material relevant to my work is in English. However, when dealing with such deep, emotional, personal issues, default behaviors often reassert themselves, language skills among them. A person’s first language arises “naturally” in difficult situations, moments of crisis, and extraordinary circumstances. Because my linguistic identity is Francophone, I first conceptualized my awakening trans consciousness in French. Five years later, in 2013, I underwent surgery in a country where neither English nor French is widely spoken. Imagine my surprise when I was informed that, semi-conscious after general anesthesia, I spoke to the medical team in English. So internalized was the idea that receiving appropriate care after surgery meant speaking English that I spoke English from the moment I woke up, apparently overriding my first language instincts in an exceptional situation.

Placed side by side, these two experiences provide an interesting starting point for reflection on how the linguistic dimension intersects with trans embodiments and identities. This may help us to think critically about how language power relations and Anglonormativity affect non-Anglophone people’s lives, particularly those already marginalized, including poor and working-class people, immigrants, and others. I examine the case of trans and Francophone peo-

ple to argue that Anglonormativity places a burden on trans people for whom English is not a first language, a burden I call “trans-crip-t time” (Baril 2016a). This concept is inspired by the concept of “crip time” (Kaf-fer 2013, 25-46) that refers, among other things, to the “extra” time disabled people often require to perform certain tasks and the temporal burden they experience in ableist societies not adapted to their abilities. I developed the idea of “trans-crip-t time” to extend these reflections to trans people (trans time) and linguistic minorities (non-Anglophones in Anglonorma-tive contexts who experience “transcript/translation time”). The following example is a useful illustration of this temporal burden.

The Internet is undoubtedly a powerful tool capable of empowering and providing access to information for many marginalized communities, including trans communities. However, the consequences of the ubiquity of the English language for people who do not speak it or for whom English is a second, third, or fourth language must be considered. I wish to demonstrate that non-Anglophone trans people attempting to access relevant information, health care, and other services experience an additional, transition-related burden in terms of time, energy, and sometimes cost (for trans-lation services). My own experience as a Francophone trans man seeking medical information online is used to shed light on these issues. I am very conscious of my many privileges as a white, middle-class, well-educated trans man; it is not my intention to complain. However, I do wish to make visible what is normally invisible to an Anglonormative gaze, specifically the unpaid (or costly) work that non-Anglophones, including myself, must perform in order to function in ways similar to native English speakers in an Anglonormative world (and Internet).

As a Francophone Canadian, I took English classes in elementary and high school, but this is rarely sufficient to become bilingual. Although largely invis-ible, considerable work is required for a non-Anglo- phone to successfully navigate the social, economic, academic, virtual, and other spheres of an Anglophone world (Descarries 2003, 2014). The time it took to learn English while writing my Master’s and PhD theses rep-resents hundreds of hours. I have also dedicated consid-erable time to improving my English skills, including a summer immersion session and private lessons. These

activities consume not only time and energy, but are also expensive. For example, the cost of private lessons varies from \$35 CAD to \$100 CAD an hour. Transla-tion fees for an article of this length (7000 words) are often between \$1,200 CAD and \$2000 CAD. Without a tenure-track job to cover professional expenses, these fees, up to several thousand dollars every year, must be paid out-of-pocket. The extra time and energy required to function in a second language are particularly prob-lematic when it comes to realities poorly documented in languages other than English (French-language reci-pes are easy to locate, French-language information on marginalized sexualities and identities less so).

A Google search (performed on May 24, 2015) for the term “transgender” produced 497,000,000 re-sults while its French equivalent, “transgenre,” pro-duced 520,000 results. The term “phalloplasty” pro-duced 261,000 results in comparison to 20,700 results for “phalloplastie” in French. This difference is more than obvious; it is exponential. In addition to being more rare, French-language information on these top-ics is also less recent, less frequently updated, less ac-curate, and often less relevant than what is available in English despite the fact that French is a very common (colonial) language. I scarcely dare to imagine the dis-mal results produced by searches on these subjects in less common languages, such as some Indigenous lan-guages and sign languages. For all of these reasons, Anglonormativity can have a profound impact on the temporality of non-Anglophone trans people who must translate and understand words, concepts, theories, and medical terms in a language other than their first lan-guage. Whereas more privileged trans people have the financial, educational, and social opportunities to learn a second language, many trans people who suffer from bullying at school and are forced drop out to protect themselves, are fired because of their gender presen-tation or trans status, or are incarcerated do not have access to the same resources and privileges. Together, these factors make it more difficult to learn, improve, or master a second language and decrease linguistic mo-bility. In spite of all my privileges, the difficulties I en-counter using the Internet in English have nonetheless had an impact on my transition process.

The energy required to search in a second (or third, or fourth) language when complications, infec-tions, medication side effects, or other problems arise

after surgery can present a significant problem. At this vulnerable, challenging time, finding the right information in a first language can be difficult enough. Having to redouble these efforts in order to translate specific vocabulary can make the difference between optimism and abandoning the search and waiting for the courage to start over. How do trans people find peer support in the trans community when no support groups exist in their first language? How do they find the information, time, and energy required to participate in discussion groups in another language and understand a variety of linguistic codes, abbreviations (e.g., UL for urethra lengthening), and cultural referents? How do they find information about surgeons in their own country, province, or state if no one posting relevant information or pictures speaks their language or lives in their region? This is the essence of “trans-crip-t time” (Baril 2016a), the linguistic and cultural transcript-ion/translation work non-Anglophone trans people must perform in order to access English-language information about transitioning, hormonal treatments, surgeries, health care, and so on.

This kind of work is not unique to trans people, of course. People with marginalized identities and those functioning in environments where their first language is not spoken face similar issues. In addition to denouncing sexism, racism, classism, ableism, heteronormativity, cishnormativity, and other forms of oppression reproduced within social movements, trans communities must also begin thinking critically about language power relations and their impact on specific groups. This is part of what Mauro Cabral means by “decolonizing transgender studies” (Boellstorff et al. 2014). Because the Internet is primarily an English-speaking environment to which the term *institutio-anglicization* also applies, my experience of information access, health care choices, and peer support (online groups and forums), the construction of my trans identity, and the development of theoretical and political perspectives related to my transition would have been very different were I an Anglophone. In this Anglonormative context, it is fair to say that my transition consisted not only of masculinizing my body, but also, in a way, of Anglicizing my identity and language. Although I am very satisfied with my trans journey and improved English skills and am proud, as a Francophone trans man, to “bravely” point out certain limits of Anglophone and Franco-

phone feminist intersectional analyses, this “bravery” often comes at a cost. Indeed, those of us who are brave bear the burden of educating peer activists, colleagues, and relatives and the urgency to fight for social justice at multiple levels at the same time. (Re)thinking these under-theorized inter-sections is therefore an invitation to share the cost of this bravery, a call to everyone to be brave and cultivate accountability toward marginalized groups.

### **(Re)thinking Inter-Sections between Anglophone and Francophone Intersectionality**

Often the intersectional subject gets tokenized or manipulated as a foil such that the presence of this subject actually then prohibits accountability toward broader alliances. Such approaches produce these intersectional subjects from which people can disavow their responsibility and implicated interface while maintaining that the representational mandate for diversity has been satisfied—in other words, a gestural intersectionality that can perform a citational practice of alliance without actually doing intersectional research or analyses. (Puar 2014, 78)

Jasbir Puar is not alone in warning us against tokenism and the superficial use of intersectionality sometimes prevalent in analyses that fail to recognize the co-constitution of identities and lived oppressions. Crenshaw (2011) and other authors, including Sirma Bilge (2014) and Gudrun-Axeli Knapp (2011), also denounce politically correct applications of intersectionality that name oppressed groups without serious discussion of the issues they face. As this paper demonstrates, the infrequent treatment of language power relations in Anglophone feminist intersectional analyses and the rare mention of trans issues in their Francophone counterparts, if in fact they are mentioned at all, suggests that “a gestural intersectionality” is at work. It would seem that Anglophone feminists have disregarded their language (English), Francophone feminists have disregarded their gender identity (cisgender), and each of these groups has disregarded the possibility of enriching their analyses by engaging with the other. These omissions overlook crucial questions about the co-construction of gender identity and language<sup>2</sup>: How do specific languages and related gender codes influence the construction of gender identity? How

could specific languages be used to deconstruct gender identity or make gender self-identification easier or more difficult? What impact does gender identity have on language use? How does gender identity influence, or even determine, the linguistic communities we decide to live in (many Francophone genderqueer people I know have decided to live in Anglophone provinces or countries because more non-gendered options are available in English than in French) and, by extension, affect our social relationships, professional decisions, nationality, and more? Beyond issues of the influence gender and linguistic identities exert on each other, as illustrated in these questions and which future articles could investigate, examining their intersecting oppressions is crucial. As Crenshaw (1991) rightly points out, language power relations can have life and death consequences for people already marginalized and discriminated against, as in the case of the Latino woman denied shelter services because of her language skills; the same is true for gender identity. Trans women (and trans people in general) are turned away from women's and other shelters because Quebec has no official policies regarding the inclusion of trans people (ASTTEQ 2012) and many feminist organizations and women's shelters have yet to deconstruct their cisnormative practices.

I believe it is crucial to develop an ethics of responsibility that will help us (re)think intersections and solidarities between Anglophone and Francophone feminists. It is time for Anglophone feminists to recognize Anglonormativity, as well as its many consequences for non-Anglophone people (Lutz, Vivar, and Supik 2011, 6), and (re)conceptualize language-based communication difficulties not as the linguistic minority's problem, but instead as resulting from the linguistic majority's systemic monolingualist perspective, norms, structures, and institutions. I invite Anglophone feminist communities to cultivate a deep understanding of the positive and negative impacts of linguistic, cultural, social, and political translation and develop a respectful and accountable response to linguistic minorities. I think it is also time for Francophone feminists to recognize cisnormativity and the impact it has on trans people's daily lives. I would like to invite Francophone feminist communities to start discussing trans issues in ways that avoid further stigmatizing and discriminating against trans people and begin developing respectful, accountable responses to this marginalized group.

According to Crenshaw (2011), "That it is easier to call for intersectional analysis rather than to perform it is not a failing of the concept but a recognition that performing intersectional analysis is neither a simplistic symbolic signifier nor is it a paint-by-numbers analytic enterprise" (231). I believe, like Crenshaw, that despite the institutio-anglicization and sometimes questionable uses of intersectionality and notwithstanding its past, present, and future "failures," this tool, like many other political and conceptual tools, has the potential to shed light on some of our social movements' less-examined realities and improve solidarities between marginalized groups.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Concordia University and McGill University, both in Quebec, offer courses on or including trans issues, but both are Anglophone universities offering courses in English. The University of Ottawa offers bilingual programs in feminist and gender studies, but only one course that includes trans issues. However, the University of Ottawa is in Ontario, a province with an Anglophone majority and, currently, the majority of faculty members and students at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies are Anglophones.

<sup>2</sup> Work in the field of translation studies, which I cannot address here due to space limitations, has shown the impact of language on gender identity. It would be relevant to complexify the notion of gender identity by including trans identity as well.

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# Theory in Perpetual Motion and Translation: Assemblage and Intersectionality in Feminist Studies<sup>1</sup>

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**Anna Bogic** holds a PhD in women's studies and a Master's degree in translation studies from the University of Ottawa, Canada. Her research interests include feminist translation studies, sociology of translation, women's reproductive rights, feminism in post-socialist Eastern Europe, and translations of Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy.  
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## **Abstract**

The article examines the French theoretical concept of *agencement* developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and its English translation as *assemblage* which has been widely used in feminist, philosophical, and theoretical work. Starting with Jasbir Puar's critique of intersectionality, I argue that although assemblage may now be called upon to provide a corrective to intersectionality, not too long ago, intersectionality, with very similar arguments, was viewed as the most promising alternative to categorical thinking.  
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## **Résumé**

Cet article traite du concept théorique français de *l'agencement* élaboré par Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari et de sa traduction en anglais comme *assemblage* qui a été largement utilisé dans les recherches universitaires, y compris les analyses féministes ainsi que les travaux philosophiques et théoriques. Bien que l'assemblage puisse maintenant être appelé à fournir un correctif à l'intersectionnalité, il n'y a pas si longtemps, l'intersectionnalité, avec des arguments très similaires, était considérée comme l'alternative la plus prometteuse à la pensée catégorique.  
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## **Introduction**

In her recent work on assemblages, Jasbir Puar (2011, 2012) formulates a critique of intersectionality within feminist studies and calls for its supplementing and complication. Puar (2007) posits that "intersectional identities are the byproducts of attempts to still and quell the perpetual motion of assemblages, to capture and reduce them, to harness their threatening mobility" (213). Intersectionality can become an alibi for re-centering the white, middle-class woman as the universal subject of feminism since feminist theorizing on the question of difference continues to be "difference from" and, in particular, "difference from white woman" (Puar 2012, 53). Intersectionality as a method, Puar (2012) argues, has contributed to the reification of identity categories. Instead, intersectionality should be re-read as assemblage in order to highlight movement and mobility: the subject should be viewed as composed of dissipating, indiscreet elements always in the process of becoming.

Intersectionality can be broadly defined as "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis 2008, 68). Intersectionality is often traced back to Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) writing on violence against women of colour and the intersection of race and sex with roots in Black feminism and critical race theory. Now more than 20 years later, scholars engage in a rich production of intersectional scholarship but also in its critique. In her reading of intersectionality, in her work on the "queer terrorist," Puar (2005) concludes that some of the main limitations of intersectionality include the presumption that components (race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion) are separable analytics but also the notion that intersectionality can become the state's "tool of diversity management" or "a mantra of liberal multiculturalism" (127-128).

In this article, I argue that a re-reading of intersectionality as assemblage calls for a further examination of assemblage as a theoretical concept, its translational history (from French to English, from *agencement* to assemblage), its reception in feminist theory, and its potential to supplement or even supplant intersectionality or, more pointedly, to act as a cure to the ills that have beset the feminist method of intersectionality.<sup>2</sup> My main claim is two-fold: i) the project of supplementing intersectionality with assemblage theory needs to re-examine the parallels between the two theories, paying particular attention to the notion of fluidity in intersectionality; and ii) a historical and linguistic contextualizing can help us understand what is at stake in a feminist appropriation of the concept of assemblage. A focus on translation is meant to destabilize and challenge the dominant position of English in theoretical writing and to bring to the fore the complexities involved in adopting a concept from one language to another, an aspect rarely discussed in English-language literature (see Lima Costa and Alvarez 2014).

I first trace the philosophical origin of assemblage in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophical writings (*agencement*), including the challenge of rendering *agencement* as assemblage by the translators (Dana Polan, Brian Massumi, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, among others). Second, I present the feminist reception of Deleuzian philosophy and suggest that this initial reluctant reception needs to be taken into further account, given the growing scholarship employing the concept of assemblage. Third, I argue that there are a number of parallels between the arguments highlighting the productive uses of assemblages and those arguments calling for introduction of intersectionality in feminist studies. Both assemblages and intersectionality encourage interrogations of what a theoretical concept *does* as opposed to what it *is*. Depending on the way they are developed, both notions can be seen to emphasize fluidity and fluctuating processes. They have both, at different times, been called upon to displace and deconstruct binary logics, universalism, and categorical thinking. Moreover, I return to Crenshaw's (1989) traffic metaphor where discrimination, rather than identity, is caught in the accident. This re-visiting of the traffic metaphor can explain why intersectionality is sometimes viewed as reifying identity categories. I conclude with two brief examples of the use

of assemblage in recent research and a consideration of some of the concept's limitations, in particular as it pertains to power relations.

### **Assemblage and Agencement**

The introduction of the concept of assemblage in social sciences announces a paradigm shift from "dualistic to relational ontological thinking" (Dewsbury 2011, 148). Conceived of as an *ad hoc* grouping of diverse elements (Kennedy et al. 2013), assemblage focuses on process and unpredictable, fast-changing relations, thus not on essence but on adaptivity (Venn 2006, 107). As such, it has been welcomed by social scientists as a kind of thinking that can help us make sense of globalization, including connections, flows, and multiple configurations that seem to characterize it:

New assemblages of social research are clearly required to fit together all the ways in which the world is now characterised by flows, connections and becomings whose functioning logic is more about folds than structures, more complex than linear, more recursive than dialectical, more emergent than totalising. (Dewsbury 2011, 148)

Other scholars have also observed an important shift in theorization and methodology in social sciences. In addition to a number of other theoretical concepts, such as multiplicity, flow, continuum, and structure, assemblage was derived from developments in natural sciences and mathematics in order to explain the complexity of cultural and social phenomena (Venn 2006; Tasić 2001). Assemblage appears at a time when the notion of discrete determination supported by positivism and various forms of structuralism continues to fail "to account adequately for change, resistance, agency and the event: that is, the irruption of the unexpected or unpredictable" (Venn 2006, 107). The borrowing of theoretical concepts from mathematics by postmodern theorists is not without its problems and has invited its share of criticism, most notably for the misuse of mathematical and scientific concepts by postmodernism in academia (Sokal and Bricmont 1998).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, borrowing a theoretical concept from French theory could also potentially open a space for misuse, given the difficulty of finding an adequate equivalent for such a philosophically loaded term with roots in the sciences.

## *Theoretical Origins and Context of Agencement in French*

Deleuze and Guattari first write of *agencement* in *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), translated into English in 1986, within the context of enunciation and the desiring-production (Bacchetta 2015). For Deleuze and Guattari, an *agencement* is an open multiplicity, with points of deterritorialization and lines of escape (or flight) (1975, 153; 1986, 86). It is a combination of heterogeneous elements adjusted one to another (Callon 2006, 13). Deleuze and Guattari's theorizing must be understood within a specific historical context: their writing on *agencement* invokes disparate elements, dynamic constituents, caught in the process of connection and disconnection, at a time when the dominant theories treated social reality as a closed, organic system (Bacchetta 2015, para. 19). *Agencement* is a common French word that means "arrangement" or "fitting" and is used in many different contexts such as arranging parts of a machine (Phillips 2006, 108). In theoretical writings, there are two main philosophical principles that underpin the concept of *agencement*. First is the notion that *agencement* includes both the subject who is acting and the act of arranging, on the one hand, and the resultant arrangement itself, on the other. Second, *agencement* includes both human and non-human elements.

*Agencement* can suggest the act of arranging but also the arrangement itself, therefore encompassing both the subject (the agent) and the object (the result). What this implies for knowledge production is, as John Phillips (2006) explains, that the subject of knowledge is not simply "separated out from his [*sic*] objects, which he transforms by making them his project" (108-109); the emphasis is on the connection. Thus, in this sense, Deleuze and Guattari's insistence on relations between concepts and things, as opposed to an isolated subject separated from its objects, can also be seen in Michel Callon, John Law, and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and sociology of associations and relations (Latour 2005).<sup>4</sup> The emphasis is on connectivity, beyond a focus on meaning-making and representation, and on the question of what exceeds representation (Kennedy et al. 2013, 46). This aspect of *agencement* then, as I will show below, becomes important for theorizing intersectionality.

Elucidating the term further, Callon (2006) un-

derscores the concept of agency in *agencement*. Arguing against the idea that there is a divide between those who arrange and the resultant arrangements, Callon writes: "This is why Deleuze and Guattari (1998) proposed the notion of *agencement*. *Agencement* has the same root as agency: *agencements* are arrangements endowed with the capacity of acting in different ways depending on their configuration" (13). Rather than viewing an *agencement* as an arrangement separated from the acting subject, we are encouraged to see *agencement* as already imbued with agency. The non-discreet parts that constitute *agencement* have agentic capacities, that is, *agencements* in their different configurations are a form of distributive agency (Bennett in Kennedy et al. 2013).

Second, *agencement* includes both human and non-human elements. Precisely by rejecting the division between those who arrange (presumably humans) and that which is being arranged (non-humans), Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *agencement* brings into play an intermingling of bodies. One example includes the feudal *agencement* which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, comprises "the body of the earth and the social body; the body of the overlord, vassal, and serf; the body of the knight and the horse and their new relation to the stirrup; the weapons and the tools assuring a symbiosis of bodies – a whole machinic assemblage" (2004/1987, 98). Including both humans and non-humans then dismantles the delineation between the social and nature, leaving nothing outside of *agencement*. Deleuze and Guattari (2004/1987) in *A Thousand Plateaus* further identify *agencement* as featuring a horizontal and a vertical axis. A horizontal axis comprises two segments, content (bodies, actions, passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another) and expression (acts and statements) (97-98). The vertical axis, however, refers to the processes of reterritorialization which stabilizes the *agencement* and deterritorialization which carries it away; or, in other words, *agencements* are continuously being made and becoming unmade (98).

### *A Translation History: From Agencement to Assemblage*

Not surprisingly, the term *agencement* has no exact counterpart in English. Some translations, however, can be labelled 'mistranslations' when they fail to carry over the core meaning contained in the original. In this respect, "assemblage" as a translation solution can be

viewed as a mistranslation. There are two potential ways of dealing with this slippage. First, we can ask whether this mistranslation can have productive effects (Puar 2011, para. 12). Second, we can adopt a point of view that treats the notion of translation as catachresis, “as an always already misuse of words, an impropriety and inadequacy that underpins all systems of representation” (Lima Costa and Alvarez 2014, 562; Spivak 1999). Not only is translation always embedded in a specific cultural and historical context, it also always produces an imperfect rendering, not unlike the processes of representation. The instability of translation leaves space for new meanings that can have, it is hoped, productive effects in further knowledge production.

In the case of assemblage, however, the two philosophical principles outlined above complicate the translation. In particular, the difficult part about translating *agencement* into English is that, in French, it implies both a process and a state of being: both the act of fitting/arranging and the arrangement itself. As in French, the English word assemblage tends to imply only the state of being, therefore eliminating the active aspect, the process. Both in English and French, the term assemblage emphasizes collection, collage, and content as opposed to relations. *Agencement* was first translated as assemblage by Paul Foss and Paul Patton in their translation of Deleuze and Guattari’s article “Rhizome” which appeared in the journal *I & C* in 1981 (Phillips 2006). This translation solution was subsequently maintained by other translators, Brian Massumi, Dana Polan, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, among others, who are also scholars and authors in their own fields such as philosophy, law, politics, and social theory. Translation solutions provided by Brian Massumi in the English rendition of *Mille plateaux* (*A Thousand Plateaus*) in 1987 have been influential and have served as examples for later English translations (Habberjam and Tomlinson 2006/1987, x). Translators Tomlinson and Habberjam (2006/1987) explain in their translators’ introduction to *Dialogues II* that they followed “earlier translations in rendering *agencement* as assemblage” but that the French word has both an active and a passive sense (x).

The translators, whether working on their own or in pairs like Tomlinson and Habberjam, through their translation solutions necessarily expand the philosophical field in the target language, that is, in English

in this case. The translators are not only finding linguistic equivalents but are also bending, expanding, and pulling Anglo-American philosophy in new directions through translational innovation. The responsibility is great since the new terms introduced in this way are taken up over and over again in further translations and theoretical writings. But the great responsibility that comes with translating more or less celebrated thinkers, and frequently French authors, can also catapult academics into the wider international academic scene as was the case with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Derrida’s *De la grammatologie*), Brian Massumi (Deleuze and Guattari), and Hazel Barnes (Sartre). As translators, they act as intermediaries or as cultural brokers (Spivak 2001). Translation studies scholar André Lefevere (1992) argues that translators act as re-writers and that translation is effectively a re-writing process which is responsible for the general reception and survival of original works (or source texts). Viewed in this light, assemblage as a translation solution can be seen as an act of re-writing which opens up whole new imaginary and theoretical spaces.

As *agencement* has travelled from French-language philosophical frameworks into English academic ones as assemblage, this movement has created a slight shift in meaning. The word-play evident in the French term *agencement* – highlighting the role of agency and the active aspects in the concept – is erased in English, exposing only the state of affairs at the detriment of relations and connections. For this reason, some scholars in social sciences choose to keep the French word *agencement* in their otherwise English writing (Hardie and MacKenzie 2007, 58). In more recent translations of Guattari, however, *agencement* is at times rendered as arrangement as follows: “Now the notion of arrangement can be useful here, because it shows that social entities are not made up of bipolar oppositions. Complex arrangements place parameters like race, sex, age, nationality, etc., into relief” (Guattari quoted in Puar 2012, 59). But one could argue that the translation solution *arrangement* is still not satisfactory since it fails to account for the actual process of arranging and the connectivity between heterogeneous elements.

If the concept is to gain in currency in the English academic work, then the “mistranslation” in question in English calls for some caution.<sup>5</sup> What is lost in

translation is a sense of the relationship “between ‘the capacity to act [and] the coming together of things’ as ‘a necessary and prior condition for any action to occur,’ be that human or non-human, organic or inorganic (Braun 2008 quoted in Dewsbury 2011, 149). One way out of this conundrum, Puar (2012) suggests, is to look at what assemblages do as opposed to what they are.

A linguistic contextualizing through an examination of translation issues challenges a taken-for-granted practice of adopting theoretical concepts in translation, particularly in English-language academic literature (see Descarries 2014). Similarly, a historical contextualizing helps us understand what is at stake in a feminist appropriation of the concept of assemblage. In the following section, I propose to bring the focus on the ways in which both the concept of assemblage and intersectionality can be thought through the notions of fluidity and (in)separability.

### **From Assemblage to Intersectionality: Making the Connections**

An overview of the feminist reception of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy reveals that in the past feminist scholars have been highly critical but have nonetheless proceeded cautiously to engage with their philosophy of connectivity. As a growing number of scholars apply Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts, a revisiting of this reception and initial reservations offers a platform for critical engagement. I highlight a number of parallels in arguments proposing assemblages and intersectionality to show that their deployment in research arises from a similar set of concerns, in particular from the attempts to find alternatives to reification and static conceptualization of identity.

Elizabeth Grosz (1993, 1994) was one of the first scholars to weigh in on feminist engagement and reception of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. Grosz (1994) observes a paradoxical vacillation in feminist writing between equally strong criticism of and fascination with their philosophy: “[Rosi Braidotti] is clear in her ambivalences, her unresolved relation to and against Deleuze’s writings—as, it seems to me, feminists must be if they are on one hand to benefit from men’s modes of production of knowledges while on the other hand moving beyond them in recognizing their limitations” (162). In her summary of feminist critique of Deleuzian philosophy, Grosz (1993) argues that there

are valid reasons feminist scholars should remain suspicious of masculine interests and metaphors, models of machines, assemblages and connections, as well as references to manifestly misogynist writers. Feminist scholars should remain “critical of an apparently phallic drive to plug things, make connections, link with things” (167). Nonetheless, it is a worthwhile endeavour, Grosz maintains, to examine concepts, such as rhizomatics, assemblages, multiplicity, and becoming, in the hope that they can help feminist theory displace the binary logic in Western philosophy which has been so pervasive in regimes of oppression, including the oppression of women.

In their edited volume titled *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*, Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook (2000) address directly the question of compatibility between Deleuzian philosophy and feminist theory. The relationship between feminist theory and Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical concepts seems to be a rather difficult one, full of hesitation and distrust but also of curiosity. The main issue raised by feminist scholars revolves around Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming and, in particular, becoming-woman.<sup>6</sup> In the volume’s introduction, Colebrook (2000) engages with their philosophy but is never quite at ease with it. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s writings on Virginia Woolf, becoming-woman, and molar identities (based on divisions, binary codes, and oppositions), she asks: “Just what are Deleuze and Guattari doing when they take Woolf and the women’s movement away from the concepts of identity, recognition, emancipation and the subject towards a new plane of becoming?” (3). Although Grosz (1993) remains highly suspicious of Deleuze and Guattari’s process of becoming-woman, she maintains that feminist theory should not shun or ignore Deleuzian philosophy but has much to gain from it without having to abandon feminist political projects. Grosz understands *becoming-woman* as “destabilization of molar (feminine) identity” (177) and Jerry Aline Flieger (2000) describes it as “the paradigmatic instance of changing one’s perspective, one’s very essence, one’s very status as ‘one’” (39). Assemblages, as conglomerates of heterogeneous elements in symbiosis and in constant transformation, are understood in their connection with *becoming*, a continuous process between two states, a “betweenness” which displaces and disorients the subject and identities (43). Within this framework

then, becoming-woman is about transforming and transgressing identity.

While some feminist theorists (Grosz 1993, 1994; Braidotti 2011) remain critical of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, they nonetheless call for an engagement with their concepts which, if theorized with caution, can offer a number of solutions to challenges currently posed by feminist theory. Viewed in this light, Puar (2012) posits that Deleuze-Guattarian assemblages can be a productive way of formulating epistemological correctives to the feminist knowledge production which, mainly driven by intersectional analysis, has produced a normative subject of feminism. Neither assemblages nor intersectionality are to be dismissed but assemblages are useful since they "encompass not only ongoing attempts to destabilize identities and grids, but also the forces that continue to mandate and enforce them" (63). It is suggested that what intersectionality sees as separate, assemblages bring together as there is nothing outside the assemblage.

Within the context of intersectionality, the notion of separability is pertinent since it raises the question of whether the intersecting entities are indeed discreet and distinct from one another. Lena Gunnarsson (2015) takes up the either/or thinking which characterizes much of the intersectionality scholarship regarding the debate on in/separability of intersectional categories. Gunnarsson uses Roy Bhaskar's dialectical critical realist philosophy, in particular the figure of unity-in-difference, to argue that intersectional categories are both separate and unified. She questions the unclear meaning of 'inseparability' and exposes the ambiguity in stating that different categories (gender, sexuality, race, class, etc.) are not separable while at the same time separating them in the very statements (4-5). Nira Yuval-Davis' (2006) influential writing on intersectionality warns that intersectional analysis is not meant to discover several neat identities under one since this would reinscribe the notion of the fragmented, additive model of oppression. However, she cautions that we need to differentiate between different kinds of difference, that is, between different social divisions: "[The] ontological basis of each of these divisions is autonomous, and each prioritizes different spheres of social relations" (200-201). Gunnarsson (2015) complicates Yuval-Davis' position and stresses "that even if analysed on the deepest level of abstraction, I doubt that we can think of

economic, gendered, sexual and racialized relations as absolutely independent from one another. I am unsure how starkly Yuval-Davis' claim about autonomy should be [*sic*] interpreted" (6).

This notion of separateness or autonomy of ontological bases of social divisions or intersectional categories can be seen in stark contrast to Deleuzian philosophy which refuses to engage in traditional metaphysics and questions of the ontological identity of an entity. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari ask what things do as opposed to what they are. Entities enter assemblages through connections and engage in movement that should be thought as movement "rather than arrested and identified" (Currier 2003, 332). Dianne Currier (2003) sees this refusal to engage with ontological differences between beings, which are based on their essential identities, not as unification and creation of sameness but rather as a "refusal of a mode of knowledge ordered by identity" (332). Currier further explains:

To claim that assemblages are not grounded on a framework of identity is not, however, to claim an exemption for assemblages from the matrices of power/knowledge through which the logic of identity has proliferated and been active historically. It is to claim that the concept of assemblage is not elaborated through and cannot be grasped by the epistemological frameworks of identity. (333)

This move then signifies a more complex relationship with the matrices of power and a move away from being to becoming, that is, a move away from identity, the One, and the oppositional binary logic of Western philosophy, as Grosz (1993) argues, leading to an open-ended epistemological horizon.

It appears at first that the fundamental modes of knowledge production in assemblages are in contradiction with intersectionality. While Puar's (2012) re-reading of Crenshaw's (1989) foundational text—to show that intersectionality can be seen as more invested in movement and flows than in reified identities—is instructive, it can be further nuanced. In her attempt to illustrate the ways in which Black women experience "double-discrimination" (on the basis of both race and sex), Crenshaw (1989) writes:

The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction

arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (149)

After quoting Crenshaw's passage on the now-famous metaphor of the traffic accident, Puar (2012) concludes that "identification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact" (59). Puar makes an interesting shift in her reading of the traffic metaphor: where Crenshaw is referring to "discrimination," Puar is reading "identification."

Rather than viewing *identity* as that which is caught in the accident, as arrested movement on the grid, Crenshaw's metaphor invokes *discrimination* as that which is flowing through the intersection. In this re-visiting of Crenshaw's metaphor, intersectionality is intended to emphasize *structures of inequality*. In their introduction to an issue of the journal *Signs* dedicated to intersectionality, Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) provide a critique of those works which treat intersectionality as a theory fascinated with overlapping identities: "While this theme has surfaced in a variety of texts, particularly those that might be framed as projects that seek intersectionality's rescue, in this issue we emphasize an understanding of intersectionality that is not exclusively or even primarily preoccupied with categories, identities, and subjectivities" (797). Instead, the authors foreground political and structural inequalities.

Moreover, Puar (2012) uses this re-reading of Crenshaw to argue for the usefulness of assemblages as a theoretical concept that can "focus on the patters of relations—not the entities themselves, but the patterns within which they are arranged with each other...Not Assemblage, but *Agencement*." (60-61). However, an offering of such a re-reading needs to be contextualized and placed in dialogue with the works of other intersectionality scholars who have theorized intersectionality through the lens of *doing* rather than *being*: "Intersectionality primarily concerns the way things *work*

rather than who people *are*" (Chun et al. cited in Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 797; my emphasis). Here, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) see critiques of intersectionality's supposed reification of categories as reflecting distorted understandings of identity politics. In a similar vein, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall reflect on the astonishing growth of intersectionality scholarship and observe that "[This] framing—conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is" (795). Once again, a renewed emphasis on *doing* (actions, events) and a distancing from *being* (descriptions of entities) reconstruct a familiar perspective that is also seen in writings on assemblages.

Kathy Davis (2008) in her article "Intersectionality as Buzzword" notes that, while intersectionality is most often associated with the U.S. Black feminist theory and the political project of theorizing the relationships between gender, class, and race, it has also been taken up by feminist scholars working with postmodern theories. These scholars welcomed intersectionality as a "helpmeet in their project of deconstructing the binary oppositions and universalism inherent in the modernist paradigms of Western philosophy and science" (71). Moreover, they viewed intersectionality as capable of neatly fitting into the "postmodern project of conceptualizing multiple and shifting identities" (71).

In her account of the history of intersectionality in feminist theory and feminist political projects, Davis (2008) highlights a point that is instructive for the issues at stake here. As intersectionality was taken up, in the 1980s and onwards, by both feminist political projects and feminist theorists inspired by postmodern theoretical concepts, their motivations differed. For the theorists of class/race/gender, intersectionality and identity politics were an effective strategy of resistance, while for the postmodern feminist theorists, intersectionality provided a way out of gender essentialism and toward abandoning categorical thinking (73). Intersectionality has provided a common footing for both groups of feminists since it is able to tackle the feminist political project "of making the social and material consequences of the categories of gender/race/class visible, but does so by employing methodologies compatible with the post-structuralist project of deconstructing categories, un-



masking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power” (74). Davis shows the ways in which the introduction of intersectionality had the potential to reconcile the two strands of feminist scholarship. In this light, Puar’s (2012) suggestion to supplement intersectionality with assemblages can be seen as further expansion. However, depending on the theoretical point of view, such supplementing may be viewed as unnecessary, given that re-readings of originating literature on intersectionality, as argued by Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), may suffice in resolving the current tensions in intersectionality scholarship (788). The re-visiting of the traffic-accident metaphor is a case in point.

### Assemblage in Social Science Research

While feminist reception of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy has been marked by hesitation, as illustrated above, a number of examples show that scholars are cautiously proceeding and finding productive ways of deploying assemblages in their research. I suggest that it is worth exploring the ways in which these more recent formulations of research questions may not supplement but rather supplant intersectionality. The following two examples illustrate the shift that assemblages can bring to social sciences research and to highlight the ways in which they can differ from intersectionality. The authors deploy the concepts from Deleuze and Guattari but their primary aim is not the usage itself of Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts but rather the rearticulation of their research questions within the context of their own disciplines. The themes taken up by these two studies, sexuality and masculinities, on the one hand, and race and gender on the other, could have been interpreted through the lens of intersectionality; however, the authors advocate explicitly for an approach that emphasizes process, connections, effects, and doing rather than being or meaning-making. Their choices of methodology are telling of the paradigmatic shift that proposes capturing encounters, events, and affect.

One example is the way male sexuality and masculinity can be studied through the lens of the “sexuality-assemblages” of teen boys and young men (Alldred and Fox 2015). Pam Alldred and Nick Fox (2015) take the focus away from socialization and/or identity-construction and explore sexuality, sexual desire, and the physicality of sexual practices. The authors foreground

the fluctuating assemblages and the events they produce in order to “firmly [shift] the focus away from bodies and individuals toward relationality and assemblages, to affective flows in place of human agency, toward capacities to act, feel and desire rather than bodily attributes” (910). Moreover, they opt to focus on “an impersonal affective flow within assemblages of bodies, things, ideas and social institutions” and not on an individual sexed body (907). In this approach, hegemonic masculinity is not viewed as an explanation of young men’s heterosexual identities but is to be “explained at the level of actions, interactions and event” (917).

Similar to the first example, the authors in the second example use a language that clearly announces a move away from concerns around the “foundation” of a subject’s identity. Rosanne Kennedy et al. (2013) are interested in moving the concept of agency beyond the human body to include nonhuman entities. In one of the three case studies, Kennedy et al. analyse Miley Cyrus’s performance at the Video Music Awards through assemblage theory. Instead of focusing solely on Miley Cyrus as the subject who *twerked*, Kennedy et al. study the assemblage of the Twerking Miley Cyrus Body (TMCB) as a recurrent event, affect, and ongoing process. This formulation allows them to ask not what TMCB *means* with regards to race and gender but rather to identify TMCB’s *capacity*. The wide and repetitive availability (through GIFs, YouTube, etc.) of TMCB prompts the authors to ask: if TMCB is happening again and again, what *is it doing* as opposed to what *did it once do*? Importantly, the authors consider the ways in which TMCB contributed to re-fixing identities (the black versus white body, the female body as sexual) as well as the role of sensations (56). Both examples are excellent illustrations of a flexible, innovative but also critical approach to Deleuzian concepts. Spaces for a “frictional,” but complementing, dialogue between assemblage and intersectionality are, however, less obvious. These examples, among others, illustrate a form of distancing from the body, identity (assumed to be fixed), representation, and social institutions to focus on movement, entities, and events. The appeal of the concept of assemblage seems to lie in the apparent possibility to grasp the effect of encounters produced by assemblages.

Assemblages, however, have their own limitations. Paola Bacchetta (2015) posits that, while assemblages can supplement intersectionality, they do not nec-

essarily take into account certain power relations, which can remain invisible, such as the role of colonialism in the construction of queer subjects in the West (para. 23). To counter these limitations, Bacchetta proposes two other theoretical concepts, that is, *co-formations* and *co-productions*. Co-formations are used to think through dynamic, contextual, and localized power relations such as gender, sexuality, racism, class, caste, disability, and speciesism; and co-productions allow us to think through broad, thick, and intense power relations spanning over wide spatiotemporalities such as global capitalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and occupation (para. 27-28). Once again, there is an attempt to supplement intersectionality while co-production and co-formation are seen as attempts to further decolonize feminism. Nevertheless, the shift away from identity is still seen as unsettling. Alexander G. Weheliye (2014) calls for caution regarding “the complete disavowal of subjectivity in theoretical discourse, because within the context of the Anglo-American academy more often than not an insistence on transcending limited notions of the subject or identity leads to the neglect of race as a critical category” (48).<sup>7</sup> This critique brings us yet again to the thorny questions of power relations and identity, as the limitations of the assemblages lie in their evacuation of the notions of power, ideology, and the political. One solution, however, can be to “put [assemblages] to work in milieus” such as racialized minority discourse and queer theory (47).

## Conclusion

When evaluating possibilities of re-reading intersectionality as assemblage, I have argued that it is instructive to pay attention to translation as an innovative research approach. Translation is itself a very political act and translation flows in academia and elsewhere are not coincidental but are rather reflections of geopolitics, socio-historical moments, and power relations (Descaries 2014). When we grasp the difficulties of translating a theoretical term into English (or into any language), we are able to evaluate it more critically, including its functions and productive possibilities. I have also suggested that there are a number of parallels between the arguments highlighting the productive uses of assemblages and those arguments reaffirming the importance of intersectionality. Both assemblages and intersectionality encourage interrogations of what a theoretical

concept does as opposed to what it is; both notions can be seen to emphasize fluidity and changing processes with the potential to displace and deconstruct binary logics, universalism, and categorical thinking. These parallels, or repetitions, reveal the continuing struggle to unseat dualisms and reification in Western modes of knowledge production. Although assemblage may be now called in to provide a corrective to intersectionality, not too long ago, intersectionality was viewed to be the most promising alternative to reification of identity. While feminist scholars have been reluctant to engage with Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy in the past, the new research signals that cautious use of assemblages in academic research may appear increasingly attractive to some scholars. The two examples, with their attention focused on events, affects, and relationality, illustrate the ways in which assemblages can be deployed in social science research, potentially signalling the so-called paradigm shift. Within this type of research, intersectionality just may be more likely to be supplanted rather than supplemented by assemblages. In this article, I have argued that suggestions to employ assemblages should keep in view the particularities of previous historical searches for alternatives. Lastly, in an age of advanced capitalist globalization, the functioning logic of the world we live in today is “more about folds than structures, more complex than linear, more recursive than dialectical, more emergent than totalising” (Dewsbury 2011, 148). In such a nondialectical and multiloal world, then, we are left with an increasingly difficult task of mapping sites of power and its effects and intersectionality and assemblage are examples of this enduring struggle for theoretical alternatives.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A version of this article was presented in April 2013 at the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers as well as Deniz Durmuz for their insightful suggestions for improvement.

<sup>2</sup> Legal scholars such as Devon Carbado (2013) and Sumi Cho (2013) have argued that making space for “new and improved” analytical frameworks need not culminate in calls to erase or supersede intersectionality (Cho 2013, 389). Carbado (2013) cites “cosynthesis,” “inter-connectivity,” “multidimensionality,” and “assemblages” as improved candidates: “Proponents of these theories implicitly and sometimes explicitly suggest that each has the inherent ability to do something—discursively and substantively – that

intersectionality cannot do or does considerably less well” (815-816).

<sup>3</sup>Mathematicians, however, question postmodern theorists, including Deleuze and Guattari’s, use of mathematical concepts. Vladimir Tasić (2001) asserts that “postmodern theorists produced a series of brave utterances that make little sense mathematically” (149).

<sup>4</sup>For an overview of the differences and similarities between Latour, Callon, and Law’s actor-network theory and Deleuze-Guattarian assemblages, see Muller (2015).

<sup>5</sup>Francine Descarries (2014) writes: “While translation makes it possible to disseminate ideas to a certain extent, there are nevertheless few concepts or models of interpretation that can be shared among different cultures in a completely analogous fashion” (566). The case of the assemblage is a good illustration of the ways in which theoretical concepts carry their own theoretical and cultural baggage.

<sup>6</sup>Due to space restrictions, I focus on the concept of assemblage. However, Deleuze and Guattari employ a number of other crucial concepts such as becoming, becoming-woman, Body without Organs, rhizome, multiplicities, molar, molecular, lines of flight, territorialization, etc., all of which work together to elucidate their philosophical principles. For a detailed analysis of these concepts, see Currier (2003), Grosz (1993, 1994), among many others and in addition to Deleuze and Guattari (2004/1987).

<sup>7</sup>For a critique of the ways in which intersectionality has been neutralized and race erased in intersectionality scholarship (and, in particular, in sociology), see Sirma Bilge’s (2013) work.

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# Intersectionality in Austere Times: Boundary Crossing Conversations<sup>1</sup>

## Cluster Editors

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**Tammy Findlay** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political and Canadian Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University. Her research interests include: gender and social policy, intersectional policy, child care, feminist political economy, federalism, women's representation, and democratic governance. She is the author of *Femocratic Administration: Gender, Governance and Democracy in Ontario* (University of Toronto Press 2015).

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**Deborah Stienstra** is a Professor of Disability Studies at University of Manitoba and author of *About Canada: Disability Rights* (Fernwood 2012). Her research and publications explore the intersections of disabilities, gender, childhood, and Indigenesness, identifying barriers to, as well as possibilities for, engagement and transformative change.

Finlay and Stienstra are co-investigators on the project *Changing Public Services: Women and Intersectional Analysis* with the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

The papers in this cluster were originally part of a workshop at the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA) annual conference at Brock University in 2014. Its starting point was the 2013 edition of *Signs* dedicated to the theme of intersectionality in which Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall state that intersectionality has provided “a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities” (788). The workshop, co-organized between the Race, Ethnicity, Indigenous Peoples, and Politics section and the Women and Politics section of the CPSA, sought to host such a gathering place of conversations and collaboration. In the same way, this special cluster of *Atlantis* offers a venue to explore theoretical, methodological, public policy, and strategic questions related to intersectionality as a tool of social analysis.

The workshop, and this cluster are also located within the current moment of austerity in Canada and globally when interrogating the systems of power that produce and reinforce multiple axes of oppression is particularly pressing. Austerity is not handed out evenly – social and economic policy making in austere times has had a greater impact on women, racialized groups, Indigenous populations, people with disabilities, and queer communities. Globally, cuts to social spending on health care, education, and social welfare and increased privatization, commodification, militarization, and securitization are having devastating effects on marginalized peoples. In this context, intersectionality is at once more challenging and more necessary. As can be seen in articles by Dan Irving and Deborah Stienstra in this thematic cluster, austerity intensifies the misdirected hostility and scapegoating already experienced by stigmatized and dispossessed communities.

While the papers in this cluster draw from a variety of influences including: feminism, critical race theory, political economy, post-structuralism,

institutionalism, queer theory, and critical disability studies, they have a common interest in understanding and challenging complex relations of power and oppression. They are also drawn together by some shared themes. The articles show how the restructuring of the state (including cuts to social programs and services) and the economy (growth of service sector and precarious employment) has brought increased economic insecurity and weakened social citizenship for marginalized groups. Social and structural factors are sidelined through individualizing discourses and policies.

These articles also reflect the importance of scale, place, and complexity. Political economists and critical geographers use the concept of scale to describe “the focal setting at which spatial boundaries are defined for a specific social claim, activity or behaviour” (Agnew qtd in Mahon and Keil 2009, 8). Rianne Mahon and Roger Keil (2009) add that “each scale needs to be understood in terms of its relation to other scales ... Rather than assuming set dimensions of social reality and the structuring of the human condition, scales are socially produced and reproduced through myriad, sometimes purposeful, sometimes erratic, social, economic, political, and cultural actions” (8). Scale is also central to intersectional analysis. As Olena Hankivsky (2014) explains,

Intersectionality is concerned with understanding the effects between and across various levels in society, including macro (global and national-level institutions and policies), meso or intermediate (provincial and regional-level institutions and policies), and micro levels (community-level, grassroots institutions and policies as well as the individual or ‘self’). Attending to this *multi-level* dimension of intersectionality also requires addressing processes of inequity and differentiation across levels of structure, identity and representation.” (9)

The authors in this thematic cluster cover the individual, interpersonal, familial, local, subnational, regional, national, and international, demonstrating how austerity is played out on the terrain of the body to the global system. Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez describes austerity as a “contradictory and messy process that materializes differently across diverse geo-political spaces yet, has important commonalities that account for patterns.”

Finally, each of the articles speaks to intersectionality as a guide for political action. They

consider intersectional policy analysis, divisions and solidarities, and the building of resistance strategies. Citing Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011), Stienstra suggests that “the experience of misfitting can produce subjugated knowledges from which an oppositional and politicized identity might arise” (597).

In Deborah Stienstra’s article, “DisAbling Women and Girls in Austere Times,” the intersection of gender and disability provides the foundation for applying concepts of fitting/misfitting, debility, and capacity to her analysis of austerity. She argues that neoliberalism, and the resulting decline of public supports, rely on an ideology of self-sacrifice, self-investment, and independence. People with disabilities, particularly women, are blamed for their under/unemployment and precarious work. She goes further by relating Wendy Brown’s (2016) notion of “sacrificial citizenship” to recent debates in Canada about physician-assisted death. Stienstra problematizes a discourse of individualism, choice, and personal responsibility as it exists in the absence of adequate public health and social services for people with disabilities. In tracing the embodied implications of austerity, there is an interesting dialogue between Stienstra and Dan Irving.

Dan Irving’s piece, “Gender Transition and Job In/Security: Trans\* Un/der/employment Experiences and Labour Anxieties in Post-Fordist Society,” examines the tension between the expectations of the growing service industry (or immaterial labour) and non-normative gender performance. He shows that the post-Fordist service economy, heavily reliant on emotional labour, marks gender-conforming bodies as desirable and relegates trans\* people to conditions of under/unemployment and precarious work. The politics of individualization, which make workers responsible for their own employability and risk management, leads to invisibility and erasure of trans\* workers and even to violence. Using narratives from interviews, Irving conveys both the socioeconomic and the psychological impacts of the austere labour market in which gender variation is positioned as a threat to customer service and relationships with co-workers.

Christina Gabriel also highlights the current individualization and human capital fixation in “Framing Families: Neo-Liberalism and the Family Class within Canadian Immigration Policy.” She assesses the extent to which the required gender-

based analysis (GBA) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is able to challenge the neoliberal and criminalizing orientation of recent changes to the family category. Critics have argued that efforts by the previous Conservative government to tackle “marriage fraud” through the Conditional Permanent Residence (CPR) measure would increase the vulnerability of sponsored spouses. Gabriel maintains that, although gender mainstreaming brought some responsive changes to the legislation in this regard, it ultimately suffers from a lack of intersectional policy analysis. An intersectional lens would pose deeper questions about which communities are likely targets for state suspicion and how immigration policy is framed in a limited, market-driven way.

Similarly, Bailey Gerrits draws attention to processes of individualization, *responsibilization*, securitization, and criminalization in “An Analysis of Two Albertan Anti-Domestic Violence Public Service Campaigns: Governance in Austere Times.” Employing an anti-oppression feminist critical discourse analysis, Gerrits studies public service advertisements as a form of discursive politics. In addition to drawing attention to their racialized, gendered, and heteronormative imagery, Gerrits situates these ads within the austerity backdrop of declining social provisioning and supports. They reflect, she contends, the minimal government and maximum individual responsibility doctrines characteristic of neoliberal disciplinary governance techniques.

Governance as a mode of management and disciplinary power is also taken up in Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez’s essay “How do Real Indigenous Forest Dwellers Live? Neoliberal Conservation in Oaxaca, Mexico.” Altamirano-Jiménez outlines the ways in which conservation schemes in the Zapotec community of Santiago Lachiguiri advance marketization, capital accumulation, and (neo)colonialism. She “reveals neo-liberal conservation as a racialized and gendered process that downloads the burden of protecting the environment onto the most vulnerable social groups” and that serves to dislocate and dispossess Indigenous peoples. Altamirano-Jiménez embraces a form of intersectional analysis that highlights not only identities, but also intersecting relations of power, domination, and oppression.

Our cluster concludes with “Intersectionality

and the United Nations World Conference Against Racism” by Abigail Bakan and Yasmeen Abu-Laban. Bakan and Abu-Laban view the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa as a significant site of feminist intersectional discussion within the United Nations. Even though, as the authors argue, it certainly was not immune to the “limitations of liberal anti-discrimination politics” and its contribution has been overshadowed by geopolitical events, namely the withdrawal of the US and Israel from the proceedings, Bakan and Abu-Laban revisit the WCAR. They view the conference as a pivotal intervention into gender and race, feminism and anti-racism. For instance, they foreground the “politics of emotion” (as also seen in Irving’s paper), noting that WCAR allowed for deliberation on the trauma of racism, colonialism, and oppression. They urge a reconceptualization of what they call the “Durban moment” as a case of intersectionality “going global.”

These articles raise difficult, timely, and critical questions for all of us. What constitutes an intersectional analysis? What are the challenges of doing intersectional work? How would public policy be different if it was informed by intersectionality? What does intersectional political practice look like? How can intersectionality build solidarity? In these austere times, there is no better time to create spaces for intersectional scholarship and strategy.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Davina Bhandar for co-organizing the 2014 workshop.

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# DisAbling Women and Girls in Austere Times

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**Deborah Stienstra** is a Professor of Disability Studies at University of Manitoba and author of *About Canada: Disability Rights* (Fernwood 2012). Her research and publications explore the intersections of disabilities, gender, childhood, and Indigenoussness, identifying barriers to, as well as possibilities for, engagement and transformative change.  
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## Abstract

During the waves of neoliberal governments in the global North, disabled women and men have been greatly affected by austerity measures. Drawing on feminist disability theory and recent discussions of debility, I argue that neoliberalism and its austerity practices are evident in recent Canadian policies. In particular, feminist analysis of fitting/misfitting, debility, and capacity help us to understand the particular impacts on women with disabilities of these policy changes. In addition, building on Wendy Brown's (2016) concept of sacrificial citizenship under neoliberalism, I illustrate the pervasive neoliberal tendencies at work in ongoing Canadian discussions of physician-assisted dying. These challenge and extend our understandings of the interplay between gender and disability in austere times.  
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## Résumé

Durant les vagues de gouvernements néo-libéraux dans l'hémisphère Nord, les femmes et les hommes handicapés ont été gravement touchés par les mesures d'austérité. En m'appuyant sur la théorie féministe de l'invalidité et les récentes discussions sur la débilité, je soutiens que le néo-libéralisme et ses pratiques d'austérité sont en évidence dans les récentes politiques canadiennes. En particulier, l'analyse féministe de l'adaptation/inadaptation, de la débilité et de la capacité nous aide à comprendre les impacts particuliers de ces changements de politique sur les femmes handicapées. De plus, à partir du concept de citoyenneté sacrificielle sous le néo-libéralisme de Wendy Brown (2016), j'illus-

tre les tendances néo-libérales omniprésentes qui sont en jeu dans les discussions canadiennes en cours sur la mort assistée par un médecin. Cela défie et élargit notre compréhension de l'interaction entre le genre et l'invalidité dans les périodes d'austérité.

During the waves of neoliberal governments in the global North, disabled women and men have been greatly affected by austerity measures, especially in terms of cuts to social programs. How do we understand and explain these experiences of austerity and neoliberalism? To what extent are they shaped by particular understandings of disability or ability? How does gender reinforce or challenge experiences of austerity by women with disabilities? What does feminist theory have to say about austerity, neoliberalism, and disability? Drawing on feminist disability theory and recent discussions of debility, I argue that neoliberalism, with its manifestations in austerity practices, is evident in recent Canadian policies in two ways. First, feminist analysis of fitting/misfitting, debility, and capacity help us to understand how the effects of austerity policy changes are gendered. Second, building on Wendy Brown's (2016) concept of sacrificial citizenship under neoliberalism, I illustrate neoliberal tendencies at work in ongoing Canadian discussions of physician-assisted dying. Both of these challenge and extend our understandings of the interplay between gender and disability in austere times.

### **Debility, Feminism, and Disability**

To undertake an analysis of gender and disability in neoliberal Canada, we need to lay the foundation by discussing some key concepts in feminist disability theory that assist in identifying the impacts of neoliberalism and austerity on women with disabilities. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (2011) concepts of fitting and misfitting help us to understand how diverse bodies and ways of being engage with particular environments, policies, and practices. While much of feminist theory ignores disability or focuses exclusively on disability, Garland-Thomson's approach makes more visible the experiences of women with disabilities without requiring disability to be the particular focus of analysis. For Garland-Thomson, fitting is being in sync or union with one's circumstances while misfitting refers to being in contradiction or disjuncture. For example, we may fit when we can move through a public space with ease and without meeting barriers. We misfit when our passage through that space, if we use a wheelchair for mobility, is blocked by stairs or a broken elevator. When we fit, we are relatively invisible because of the ease between our way of being and the circumstances in which we find

ourselves. When we misfit, the contradiction between our experiences and our circumstances propels us to identify our experiences and insert ourselves. Wheelchair users who meet a set of stairs or broken elevator will need to get help and assert their presence in that space or they will have to leave and not use the space. Garland-Thomson suggests that "a good enough fit produces material anonymity" (596) while "the experience of misfitting can produce subjugated knowledges from which an oppositional and politicized identity might arise" (597). Wheelchair users who meet the stairs or broken elevator may be propelled to advocate for better access and thus identify themselves as a wheelchair user. They may not have asserted that identity had the stairs not been present or the elevator not broken. In many spaces where they fit with ease, their presence as a wheelchair user remains invisible. Fitting and misfitting focus on the interactions between individuals, their bodies, and their environments. Garland-Thomson argues that identities emerge as a result of a lack of fit with one's environment. While policy analysis often paints a static picture of impacts and effects, she maintains that fitting and misfitting are dynamic processes, constantly in motion within an ever-shifting environment, thus creating and recreating identities in these movements.

Coming from feminist theory, Jasbir Puar (2009, 2012) initiates discussions about debility and capacity and their implications under neoliberalism. Puar argues that the pursuit of profit creates debility through the slow depletion of particular groups of people. Debility, following from Julie Livingston's (2005) research in Botswana, is defined as "the impairment, lack or loss of certain bodily abilities" (113) and is contrasted to an understanding of capacity or ability. Debility, then, is not only found in the exceptionality of the bodies of people with disabilities, but could also be evident in all workers, or, as Puar (2012) argues, in queer suicides. Puar's complex analysis examines shifting understandings of bodily capacity with "neoliberal understandings of failed and capacitated bodies" (155). Puar suggests that debility and capacity could supplant disability as a way of answering the question: what can a body do? This shift to debility endeavours to delink bodily capacity from identity and thus move from the dualism of ability and disability, which creates some (disabled) bodies as exceptional with other (not-disabled) bodies as normative.

The 2015 special issue of *Feminist Review* on Frailty and Debility takes up Puar's work. As a number of scholars note, Puar has not been entirely successful in moving beyond the duality of ability and disability. Kay Inckle (2015) argues "debility is conflated with incapacity and therefore apparently functions in much the same way as impairment" (48). Margrit Shildrick (2015) submits that, "although the concept of debility works in a positive way to disrupt the binary distinction between disabled and non-disabled embodiment, it may do so at the costs of failing to distinguish what is unique to disability" (19). Dan Goodley and Rebecca Lawthom (2015) suggest that the common platform of debility may, in effect, erase experiences of people with disabilities and much of the politics upon which the disability movement was built:

Our own sense is that the distinction between humanness (embodied in neoliberal-able humanist discourses) and disability (a dominant signifier of being very much Other than human) is very much alive and well in our late capitalist society. In collapsing this binary—in calling out to debility—we risk ignoring the very material, immaterial and phenomenological ways in which disabled people are excluded from the rigid humanist human category and, perhaps even more importantly, bypassing the radical work done by disability to the human world. (n.p.)

The concepts of debility and capacity offer significant traction to understanding the workings of neoliberalism and particularly the relationships between capitalism and productive citizenship. Capitalism itself relies on human labour being available until we wear out: "the structural organization of economic relations under capitalism produces debility as its by-product in the very material sense of exhausted bodies and minds... To a greater or lesser extent bodies are literally worn out, with debility figured as a way of life" (Shildrick 2015, 14). This builds on Lauren Berlant's (2007) work on the slow death, which is used by Dan Goodley, Rebecca Lawthom, and Katherine Runswick-Cole (2014) to understand the place of people with disabilities in neoliberal capitalism. Shildrick (2015) goes further to argue that the slow death of capitalism is not unique to neoliberalism, but what is particular is the recovery of profit in the context of debility: "capitalism has always drained the body of its vitality—but

what makes the term fizz with significance is the way in which the specific traits of neoliberal capital are invested—and successfully so—in recuperating profit even in the face of inexorable deterioration" (15). And it is when we recognize not only the wide swath of debility under neoliberalism, but also the unequal distribution of these impacts, that we return to dis/ability. Drawing on examples of the impacts of austerity in the U.K., Shildrick suggests that "disabled people have borne the brunt not only of the cumulative welfare cuts, but also of a marked emergence of negative representations and feelings directed against them" (18).

Brown (2016) takes us further to understanding the interplay between productive citizenship and neoliberalism, although she does not develop the disability-related implications of her analysis. In particular, Brown argues that neoliberalism has transcended market and state relations and applies its normative logic to almost every aspect of life: "When it takes shape as a political rationality, this form of normative reason displaces other modes of valuation for judgment and action... and configures every kind of human activity in terms of rational self-investment" (5). The logic for the individual is one of self-investing and being "responsible for our success or failure, condemned for dependency or expectations of entitlements" (10). This self-investment logic leads a fusing of economic and citizen interests "into the common project of economic growth, and morally fuses hyperbolic self-reliance with readiness to be sacrificed" (11). That sacrifice may be evident in unemployment or underemployment or in a loss of protections in society. But Brown argues that the citizen "accepts neoliberalism's intensification of inequalities as basic to capitalism's health... This citizen releases state, law and economy from responsibility for and responsiveness to its own condition and predicaments, and is willing to sacrifice to the cause of economic growth and fiscal constraints when called to do so" (12).

Drawing on Brown's argument, we can take Puar's notion of the place of debility in neoliberalism to a different level. Not only are bodies debilitated as a result of capitalism and the driving profit motive of neoliberalism, but there is also a moral imperative for the individual under neoliberalism to make sacrifices for the larger good. In many cases, it may mean lower wages, poorer working conditions, or other sacrifices. But there is the ultimate sacrifice to death that hovers at

the edge of this analysis. When does a neoliberal citizen see their own death as part of the self-investment logic? For some, it is when that citizen perceives or is told they are no longer productive, or when the costs of dependency are perceived as too high, or when they believe their lives are no longer worth living that the only sacrifice left is death. In this case, the movement to death is one that enables us to be self-reliant, to be responsible for our own choices, and to end our dependencies. It is not a call to increase state resources to support quality of living; rather what will lead to economic growth is the sacrifice of the non-productive citizen. This understanding of productive and non-productive citizen is integrally related to disability and gender. As Brown (2016) argues, human capital does not have sex, gender, ability, or other social location, but “intersects with extant powers of stratification, marginalization, and stigma to generate new configurations and iterations of these powers” (13). These configurations have the effect of isolating individuals and making them more vulnerable and unprotected, ready to sacrifice themselves at the altar of capital. Not surprisingly, those who are often most vulnerable in society are those who rely on others for care or support and cannot be the self-reliant citizen. To understand neoliberalism, austerity, gender, and disability, we look not only to where capital makes a profit on debility or capacity, but to where citizens sacrifice themselves willingly in order to end dependency and invest in their own sense of well-being.

### **Dis/ability, Neoliberalism, and Austerity**

There is a remarkable similarity in the experiences of women and men with disabilities in the context of neoliberalism in different countries in the global North. The effects of austerity policies—both material and representational—for women and men with disabilities appear to be very similar in Canada, the UK, and Australia. At least three sets of effects exist—the push and pull of income and labour; the stigmatizing representations of disability; and the emergence of neoliberal-ableism.

In each of these countries, women and men with disabilities consistently rely on government income support programs (Grover and Soldatic 2012; Crawford 2015). When governments implement austerity measures, these supports for people with disabilities are often reduced and the definitions of who is disabled may

be further constrained in order to reduce the demands on governments. For many living in neoliberal regimes, this comes by shifting income assistance programs to a work-related benefit system, thus requiring recipients to illustrate their inability to work in order to receive benefits. Chris Grover and Karen Soldatic (2012) suggest that in the UK and Australia, “while the ‘disabled body’ has changed little, the systems and processes that classify them as being capable/incapable of working has undergone a radical shift to limit the number of people categorised as disabled” (217). Vera Chouinard and Valorie A. Crooks (2005) offer a similar analysis of the impacts of neoliberalism on women with disabilities in Ontario, Canada during a period of austerity and substantive changes to income assistance programs linking income assistance to the ability to work. Claudia Malacrida (2010) argues that women face additional barriers to income support because of gendered impacts, including as care providers, and surveillance by governments of their roles, including as parents. Disabled people in Britain have experienced a significant change since 2010 with the introduction of Work Capacity Assessment and the cuts to the Disability Living Allowance (Cross 2013; Goodley, Lawthom, and Runswick-Cole 2014; Beatty and Fothergill 2015).

The results of this tightening of eligibility for income assistance have been to try to shift people with disabilities from a reliance on income support into the labour force. While moving into employment can be positive, those who are no longer eligible for income assistance often move into precarious jobs that are primarily part-time and low-waged: “The restricting of disability benefits through tightening eligibility access is to move disabled people into part-time work, and place downward pressure on wage rates with the neoliberal labour market restructuring where low-wage part-time work has dominated” (Grover and Soldatic 2012, 228).

In Canada, despite longstanding neoliberal policies, this shift is especially evident in response to the 2008-2009 financial crisis. While the employment rate of women and men with disabilities increased prior to 2007, there has been a substantial decline in employment of both women and men with disabilities since 2008: “in the economic expansion of the late 1990s to about 2006, people with disabilities made notable gains. At the threshold of the major recession and during the

Canadian economy's subsequent fragile recovery, the overall gains made by people with disabilities in the labour force were eroded" (Prince 2014, 10). When we look at women with disabilities in Canada, we recognize that the material effects of these neoliberal policies are particularly sharp since women with disabilities earn less than women without disabilities and men with disabilities (Galarneau and Radulescu 2009). They disproportionately experience precarious work and have additional barriers to their participation in the work force as a result of the precarious nature of their work, including a lack of flexibility to adapt their work to the fluid needs of their bodies (Vick and Lightman 2010; Shuey and Jovic 2013).

In addition, attempts at entering or re-entering the labour force are undermined by a lack of the necessary supports for people with disabilities to participate and remain in the labour force. In Canada, despite employment equity legislation in place since 1986 (and applied to the federal public service since 1995), people with disabilities have seen a decrease in workplace accommodations (Canada, HRSDC 2009). This intensifies a disturbing trend in the implementation of employment equity in Canada. While the federal public service has succeeded in having people with disabilities represented above their availability in the labour force, there is some concern that federal departments may be reaching their employment equity targets for persons with disabilities because of aging rather than through hiring (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights 2013, 18). People with disabilities continue to have a low rate of applying and being hired to work in the public service (18). As well, there is a higher separation rate (rate at which people leave the public service) than appointment rate (rate at which people are hired for the public service) for persons with disabilities that could indicate that disabled people are not being adequately accommodated in the workplace. In conjunction with recent cuts to public service employment and disability management practices that may prioritize return to work over appropriate workplace accommodation, the employment of people with disabilities in the federal public service may decrease at a substantial rate in the coming years.

A second shift resulting from neoliberalism and austerity measures is representational, with an intensification of stigma and hostile attitudes directed towards

those who are obviously or visibly disabled (Birrell 2016). The obvious "misfits" become the targets of hostility and scapegoats for widespread anxiety. Shildrick (2015) argues that there is an increasing number of incidences where people with visible impairments become targets of more generalized antagonism and that this results from a widespread feeling of precarity, especially after a major crisis like the financial crisis in 2008: "the relatively hopeful mainstream may feed on the anxiety occasioned by widespread economic insecurity to create the perfect storm of antagonism towards people with disabilities. The contemporary moment of socio-political shock in the face of imposed austerities and a generation that knows it is not getting better, that implicitly understands debility as the new norm, demands its scapegoats" (19). These representations are substantively different from earlier portrayals of people with disabilities as the "deserving" poor. This perhaps suggests that, when people feel secure, they can afford to support policies to enable those who do not fit to benefit. But when a discourse of crisis and contraction is in place, there is a desire to find scapegoats. In this case, the discourse is also about who can contribute to capitalism as well as who takes from it. Disabled people are "held to be financially burdensome (hence, a potential drag on the profit of capitalism), they are also held to have detrimental supply-side effects that are also held to reduce profitability" (Grover and Soldatic 2012, 226). People with disabilities are seen to fail on both accounts—they are seen to not contribute to the economy and they require significant resources to live and therefore are a burden.

A final shift under neoliberalism is the emergence of neoliberal-ableism. Goodley, Lawthom, and Runswick-Cole (2014) suggest that "neoliberalism provides an ecosystem for the nourishment of ableism, which we can define as neoliberal-ableism. We are all expected to overcome economic downturn and respond to austerity through adhering to ableism's ideals" (981). Neoliberal-ableism has a number of features—promoting inclusion and diversity while cutting social programs and failing to address the material effects of these cuts on those who rely on these programs: "disability continues to be taken up in both political and cultural arenas as a superficial indication of liberal progress under discourses of 'inclusion,' 'accessibility,' and 'diversity' in ways that erase the material effects of living with

disabilities” (Hande and Kelly 2015, 962). In addition, Mary Jean Hande and Christine Kelly (2015) argue that the substantial cuts to health and care provision have forced survival strategies for women and men with disabilities who give and receive care services, including through self-care: “As austerity measures intensify and affect healthcare spending, it is perhaps unsurprising that the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility results in increasing attention to ‘self-care’ in and beyond policy contexts” (964).

Neoliberalism has reorganized the structures of care provision/receipt as well as who receives and provides it. Models of care, including Independent Living, community care, home care, and self-care, have been “reformulated to suit neoliberal goals for labour flexibilization, funding cuts, and individual responsibility over collective interests and actions” (Hande and Kelly 2015, 971). Neoliberal-ableism has also had an impact on the strategies of the disability advocacy movement. For example, disability care in some Canadian provinces has been changed to direct funding to some care recipients to allow them to manage their own care services. As Hande and Kelly (2015) argue, “Direct funding is a clear example of neoliberal downshifting to the level of the individual, yet at the same time remains an essential and even transformative experience of support for those who are able to meet the eligibility criteria and use the funding successfully” (966). While direct funding is not available to people with intellectual disabilities and those who are not seen to be able to manage their own care, it has become a rallying cry for the Independent Living movement in Canada. The model of direct funding does not support more collective forms of care, such as care collectives, that have emerged among those ineligible for direct funding (969). Thus, the effects of neoliberal-ableism are seen in support for direct funding for those individuals able to manage their own care while leaving adrift those ineligible and those who seek more collective forms of care.

With these three broad shifts in mind, we turn to the particular Canadian context of austerity, disability, and gender and examine several recent policies in light of the theoretical tools discussed above.

### **Shifting Policy Terrains: Disability and Gender in Times of Austerity**

Little has been written about the effects of aus-

terity on people with disabilities in the Canadian context and even less on the impacts on women and girls with disabilities. But at least two moments stand out to illustrate how austerity and neoliberalism sustain ableism and shape experiences of disability and gender in Canada.

#### *Squeezed on All Sides: Income and Employment*

To understand the impacts of austerity measures on women with disabilities in Canada, we first need to understand the extent of low income and the reliance on particular income sources for women with disabilities. In general, women with disabilities are employed less than women without disabilities and men with disabilities. When they work, it is most often part-time work and their incomes are lower than women without disabilities as well as men with disabilities. This means they rely very heavily on government income sources and as a result are disproportionately among the low income in Canada.

Specifically, fewer than half (49%) of working age women and men with disabilities in Canada are employed (Till et al. 2015). This is a significantly lower employment rate than among those without disabilities, which in 2011 was 79% (Turcotte 2014). Significantly more women with disabilities work part-time than women without disabilities and have a lower employment income than women without disabilities and men with or without disabilities (Turcotte 2014). Not surprisingly, given this, there are significant gendered differences in income, particularly as women and men with disabilities age.

In general, people with disabilities are about twice as likely as those without disabilities to live in low income (Crawford 2015). Cameron Crawford (2015) illustrates the gendered distinctions for women and men living with disabilities as follows. The proportion of women with disabilities living in low income is highest for those between 55 and 64 years old with a low-income rate of 26.6%. Men with disabilities in the same age group have a rate of 25.9% and women without disabilities in that age group have a low-income rate of 10.8%. The disparity between women and men with disabilities increases after the age of 65 with men with disabilities having a low-income rate of 6.5% and women with disabilities having a rate of 17.5%. Women without disabilities over 65 have a low-income rate of 9.2%.

Disability supports and income assistance in Canada are geographically checkered with different programs and levels of supports available in each province (Stapleton et al. 2015). Add to that complexity, the jurisdictional juggernauts for Indigenous people with disabilities who may have to also deal with Indigenous governments and/or the federal government programs responsible for benefits for people with disabilities. But what is clear throughout is that women and men with disabilities rely disproportionately on government transfer programs and increasingly on social assistance programs.

Crawford (2015) documents that government transfers make up 75.5% of the income of low income women with disabilities compared with 63.1% for low income men with disabilities and 50.3% for low income women without disabilities (62-63). The reliance on government transfers increases as women and men with disabilities age. Crawford (2013) notes some specific gendered differences in different income sources. For example, low-income young women with disabilities between 16 and 29 are almost twice as likely (23.3% to 14.4%) to receive social assistance as low-income young men with disabilities in the same age group. Almost 40% of low-income female lone parents with disabilities rely on social assistance for income. Low-income women with disabilities in general rely more on child benefits than low-income men with disabilities; almost 1/3 of women with disabilities between 30 and 44 rely on child benefits compared with less than 1% of men with disabilities in the same age group. But twice as many low-income men with disabilities between 55 to 64 years receive C/QPP (an employment-related pension benefit) than low-income women with disabilities (26.7% compared with 15.4%). Finally, low-income women with disabilities over 65 have a greater proportion of their income from OAS/GIS (non-employment related seniors' benefit) than men with disabilities (69% compared with 65.5%).

The costs of government disability benefits have grown significantly since before the 2008-2009 recession. John Stapleton et al. (2015) suggest that Canada's total disability assistance benefits have grown substantively between 2005 and 2011 to approximately \$28.6 billion in 2010-2011, an increase of almost 23% since 2005-2006. Most of this growth is in social assistance benefits—thus at the provincial level.

In this context, some of the austerity measures undertaken by provincial and federal governments since 2009 have disproportionate impacts on women with disabilities. While Canadian governments have not yet taken the draconian measures initiated in the UK, some governments have tightened the eligibility requirements for, or eliminated programs, that were of particular use to people with disabilities. These measures do not target women with disabilities, but the changes have unequal effects given the significant place of government transfers, especially social assistance, in the lives of women with disabilities.

Several provincial governments have changed or restricted eligibility to some measures under social assistance programs that will especially affect people with disabilities. The Ontario 2010 budget eliminated the special diet allowance for people on social assistance and replaced it with a health supplement that is medically assessed and will only assist those with severe medical needs. In the 2010 British Columbia budget, similar cuts were made to the range of medical equipment and supplies funded by the government. Eligibility for the monthly nutritional supplement was also tightened, including applicants now having to demonstrate they have at least two symptoms rather than one under the existing criteria (Stienstra 2013). More recently, eligibility for transit has been an area of concern for people with disabilities. While, in 2016, British Columbia raised its disability social assistance rates for the first time since 2007 by \$77 per month, they also eliminated the transit subsidies for people with disabilities (Bailey 2016), which substantially reduces the increase because people must pay much more for transit. In Nova Scotia, eligibility for government funded bus passes has been tightened with at least 12 medical appointments per month required (Devet 2015).

The federal Conservative government proposed changes in the 2012 budget to Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) that would have disproportionate impacts on people with disabilities and especially women with disabilities. By increasing the eligible age from 65 to 67 for the OAS and GIS, people who were born after 1958 would have had to sustain their income for an additional two years. This would have had a particular impact on women with disabilities who rely heavily on government transfers for their income. These eligibili-



ty changes were reversed by the Liberal government in the 2016 budget.

Income is a significant factor in achieving access and inclusion for women and men with disabilities, but there are other public services that substantially affect access and inclusion. Many of these fall under provincial or municipal responsibilities. When we think broadly about changes in public services related to women and men, girls and boys with disabilities, we must also consider public transportation, healthcare, education, information and communications technologies, and food security (Stienstra 2012). Unfortunately, literature in these areas rarely uses an intersectional lens that includes analysis of both gender and disability.

From this data, it is clear that women with disabilities will be disproportionately affected by the austerity measures that restrict eligibility to social assistance. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (2016) argue that this reflects the increased social and economic vulnerability women and girls with disabilities face as a result of the intersections of gender and disability. This vulnerability and the sense of being a burden are at the foundation of the experiences of many women with disabilities (Dale Stone 2010). While austerity measures can intensify those experiences, getting rid of these measures will not eliminate the underlying neoliberal-ableism at work in Canadian society nor the exhaustion of trying to live without adequate income and disability-related supports. In short, the vulnerability for women with disabilities created and deepened by neoliberal policies and practices, and intensified through austerity measures, may create fertile ground for sacrificial citizenship and an early death through physician-assisted dying policies.

### *Unimagined and Unimaginable: Living and Dying with Disabilities*

One stark illustration of the impacts of austerity in relation to disability in Canada is evident in the legislation providing medical assistance in dying (MAID) and the discussions surrounding its adoption in 2016. Together these suggest, in my view, evidence of neoliberalism's hold on Canadian society. The widely held willingness to see disability as a reason for an early death suggests "a generation that knows it is not getting better, that implicitly understands debility as the new

norm" (Shildrick 2015, 19) and wants a way out. This builds on the link between vulnerability and disability, as suggested by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, which needs to be explored before we turn to discussions of austerity, neoliberalism, and MAID.

By virtue of being human, every person is vulnerable. Yet, as Catherine Frazee (2016a) suggests, there is a paradox because many of us do not realize that we are vulnerable until something changes in our system of protections: "for each and every one of us throughout life, vulnerability is situational, experienced when our defenses are stripped away...If we are vulnerable but don't know it, that is because the social contract is working in our favour" (n.p.). These systems of defense are the resources or supports that enable people to survive and flourish. Even in situations of significant challenges, including acquiring impairments, we are able to rally assets, which can be material or social, that enable us to remain resilient in our vulnerabilities. This resilience also allows us to endure suffering: "When we are better protected from vulnerability, we are less likely to suffer intolerably. That is not to say that our suffering is reduced, but rather that our tolerance for it is boosted" (n.p.). The inverse is also true. For those who are less able to draw upon the necessary resources for resilience, they are more likely to "experience the full force of their vulnerability when calamity strikes" (n.p.). Major life situations, including acquiring impairments or conditions as well as end of life, create particular vulnerabilities (Stienstra and Chochinov 2006). These variations in resilience and meeting vulnerabilities shape the landscape for people considering MAID. Frazee (2016a) argues that those who advocate for and actively pursue MAID are those who enjoyed lifetimes of physical well-being and access to education and income. She suggests that it is not surprising that "the very prospect of experiencing one's innate embodied vulnerability may itself constitute intolerable suffering. Data from Oregon confirms that "worries about loss of dignity and future losses of independence, quality of life and self-care ability' were far more prevalent in motivating requests to die than were issues of actual pain or symptom control" (n.p.). On the other hand, she suggests that people with long-standing impairments have found ways to live with the particular vulnerabilities they experience and have developed resiliencies to flourish in their lives. These variations in vulnerability

and resilience suggest that the playing field is not level coming into discussions of MAID in Canada.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled unanimously in *Carter v. Canada* (2015 SCC 5) that physician-assisted dying or MAID would be allowed and granted the federal government one year to implement legislation to enable this. The Court extended the time-frame by four months following the general election and change of government in 2015. New federal legislation, Bill C-14, came into force on June 17, 2016 allowing medical assistance in dying to those who meet the following criteria:

(a) they have a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability; (b) they are in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability; (c) that illness, disease or disability or that state of decline causes them enduring physical or psychological suffering that is intolerable to them and that cannot be relieved under conditions that they consider acceptable; and their natural death has become reasonably foreseeable, taking into account all of their medical circumstances, without a prognosis necessarily having been made as to the specific length of time that they have remaining. (Parliament of Canada 2016)

In what ways does this decision and its implementation provide evidence of neoliberalism and austerity? How does our understanding of vulnerability shape these discussions and link with understandings and approaches to disability? Several areas suggest the public discussion surrounding the Supreme Court legislation and Bill C-14 relies on neoliberal ideas and an austerity approach: the focus on the individual and individual choice; discussions of inducement and coercion; and varying access to publicly provided resources. I will illustrate how I understand each of these as suggestive of neoliberalism and austerity.

The Supreme Court decision and Bill C-14 depict those who are able to opt into MAID as individuals having serious and incurable illness, disease, or disability. In each criterion, the individual and their body are at the forefront. These individuals are not portrayed as members of families, communities, or in other relationships. In doing this, the Court resides firmly in liberal thought where individuals are the primary subject of law and are autonomous. Illness, disease, and disability are portrayed as individually embodied problems or

conditions and their regulation is planted firmly within the medical system. As critical disability scholars note, this ignores the relational autonomy embedded in the caring relationships required for many disabled women and men to survive (Kelly 2013, 2014). Harvey Max Chochinov (2016) notes that a majority of those requesting assisted suicide in the Netherlands were women and many with mental health concerns. He argues that assisted dying will “crack that relational foundation” between patients and health care providers and remove the protections that can be provided through “a caring and committed therapeutic relationship” (n.p.).

Bill C-14, the Supreme Court decision, and the Parliamentary discussions prior to the Bill’s adoption suggest that a key element in MAID is individual choice. This requires that individuals must be competent and consent to their death. As Brown (2016) submits, individual choice and autonomy under neoliberalism are shaped by the political rationality of self-investment. We make decisions in every area of life attempting to maximize our successes and minimize our failures. We want to reduce our dependencies as well as our expectations of entitlements. Much of the discussion related to MAID suggests individual choice is the critical element of this debate. For some, including Gillian Bennett (2014), that choice is linked to the costs associated with disability: “I can live or vegetate for perhaps 10 years in hospital at Canada’s expense, costing anywhere from \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year. That is only the beginning of the damage. Nurses, who thought they were embarked on a career that had great meaning, find themselves perpetually changing my diapers and reporting on the physical changes of an empty husk. It is ludicrous, wasteful and unfair” (n.p.).

To others, it is about the constrained choices in terms of living with disabilities. Léa Simard described the reasons her mother Louise LaPlante wanted MAID, even though under the Quebec legislation (and under Bill C-14), she was not eligible because her death was not reasonably foreseen:

She had been diagnosed 15 years previously and, in the past five years, her situation deteriorated after she fell and broke her hip and clavicle. She ended up in a wheelchair. There was a serious decline in her situation after this, especially in the six months before her death... So we met with a social worker to try and get an intermediate resource,

but things did not work and, after an assessment, we were referred to a residential and long-term care centre, or CHSLD. Moving in to the CHSLD was the turning point in her decision. It was hell for her, at 66 years of age, to be among residents who were on average 85 years old, and who were not at all there. These were atrocious conditions for someone who was solitary, independent and who, all of a sudden, became totally dependent, in an environment she hated. (Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs 2016, n.p.)

Little of the debate, however, has been framed about how individual choice is affected by the contexts within which we live, about increasing options and quality of life when living with impairments, nor about how austerity shapes the contexts within which disabled women and men live. David Baker, a disability lawyer, raised this point in his submission to the External Panel on Canada's Legislative Options for Physician-Assisted Dying: "[d]isabled people and terminally ill people need to have access to independent living and the full range of support services. Choices about death should not be made because life has been made unbearable through a lack of choices and control" (External Panel 2015, 130). When half of women with disabilities do not have employment, three quarters of low-income women with disabilities rely on eroding government transfers for income, and many do not have the supports they require to live, can their desire for MAID be seen to be without coercion or inducement? Disability groups in Canada suggest that at times of crisis, like those described by Léa Simard, "the very offer of an assisted death is in and of itself, an inducement toward suicide" (Frazee 2016b, n.p.; CACL 2016). Or are they being coerced by a neoliberal logic of self-investment to choose MAID as opposed to a slow death and debility in conditions in which they know they will suffer? In what ways are the conditions for people with disabilities to choose death produced by the gaps in and lack of disability-related supports required to live?

Finally, does Bill C-14 help us to understand what Shildrick (2015) describes as fizzing with significance "the way in which the specific traits of neoliberal capital are invested—and successfully so—in recuperating profit even in the face of inexorable deterioration" (15)? To what extent is there profit at play in this decision? On the face of it, Bill C-14 and its implementation

are unlikely to ensure any significant profit for industry in Canada except perhaps for the lawyers or medical personnel who assist with MAID requests. In our publicly funded health care system, private profit is not as obvious as in other countries like the United States. If we recognize that neoliberalism is evident in reducing and redirecting government expenses, the picture becomes clearer. Given the heavy reliance on government transfers for income by many women and men with disabilities as well as the high use of health services notably by women with disabilities (McCull 2005), we may see a decrease in the expenses of governments should a significant number of people with disabilities choose an early death. We do not know whether this will happen, but we need to pay attention to how many and which people are requesting MAID. We need to recognize that, without adequate public services, we may never know the answer.

Current government spending choices may also reinforce the self-investment logic leading to choosing death. For example, palliative care in Canada is fragmented across jurisdictions and underfunded in the public health care system with significant differences in funding and access in rural and urban areas (Giesbrecht et al. 2016; Dumont et al. 2015; Freeman et al. 2013). These differences mean that many Canadians still do not have access to supports they require to address concerns about pain and other aspects of their end of life and, as a result, may believe their suffering is intolerable. For women and men with disabilities, it is not only access to palliative care that provides challenges; being a person with disabilities can heighten vulnerabilities in end of life care, especially with separation from existing care providers and a lack of coordination between disability-related care and other health care (Stienstra, D'Aubin, and Derksen 2012). Lack of access to necessary disability supports and significant costs associated with obtaining the necessary disability supports can create conditions of vulnerability that reinforce the perception that life is not worth living for a person with disabilities. Approximately 40% of people with disabilities in Canada do not get the disability supports they require, including many families with children with disabilities (Canada, HRSDC 2009). Of those who do not have the supports they need, roughly 60% cannot access the needed supports because of their costs (Canada, HRSDC 2009). With these gaps in access to needed

supports to live with disabilities and palliative care, we see government funding choices reinforcing a logic that could choose death by MAID over a slow death as a result of constrained quality of living with disabilities.

## Conclusion

Despite changes in government, austerity and neoliberalism continue to shape Canadian society and the lives of women and girls with disabilities. In particular, we recognize that, in much of the labour force, women with disabilities misfit—with inadequate or inappropriate supports to enable their participation. This leads them out of the labour force with a substantial reliance on government transfers, like social assistance, for their income. This reliance also makes them more vulnerable to austerity measures when governments propose cuts or change the eligibility requirements for programs they use or when they do not have access to the care and supports they require to live. This vulnerability also leads some women and men with disabilities to embrace the sacrificial logic of self-investment and call for physician-assisted dying. Austerity measures and neoliberal rationalities continue to disable women and girls by depicting and reinforcing that their lives are not worth living.

Governments in Canada would do well to recognize the sacrificial logic at work in the lives of women and men with disabilities. They can address some of the critical pieces that heighten the vulnerability of women, men, girls, and boys with disabilities by ensuring access to palliative care across Canada; guaranteeing that people with disabilities have access to the supports they require to live and work; and, proactively addressing disability-related poverty by means other than social assistance. These measures require recognizing how vulnerability is created and supported by government policies and working to undermine the sacrificial self-investment logic of neoliberalism.

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# Gender Transition and Job In/Security: Trans\* Un/der/employment Experiences and Labour Anxieties in Post-Fordist Society

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**Dan Irving** is an Associate Professor in the Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies at Carleton University. He is the co-editor of *Trans Activism in Canada: A Reader* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 2014). His work has been published in *Transgender Studies Reader 2*, *Sexuality Studies*, and *Australian Feminist Studies*.  
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## Abstract

Undergoing gender transition is a risky endeavor in these violent times. Transitioning signifies the affirmative of self and new beginnings; however, the extent to which transition can mark the start of a new life is framed by one's social location vis-a-vis material power relations. Un(der)employment allows a glimpse into why particular bodies are rendered worthless. This article draws from my larger qualitative study addressing trans\* un(der)employment in Ontario, British Columbia, and Washington State.  
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## Résumé

Se soumettre à une transition de genre est une entreprise risquée à cette époque violente. La transition signifie l'affirmation de soi et de nouveaux débuts; toutefois, la mesure dans laquelle la transition peut marquer le début d'une nouvelle vie est formulée par l'emplacement social de la personne vis-à-vis des relations de pouvoir matériel. Le chômage et le sous-emploi nous donnent un aperçu de la raison pour laquelle certains corps sont rendus sans valeur. Cet article s'inspire de mon étude qualitative plus étendue portant sur le chômage et le sous-emploi parmi la population transgenre en Ontario, en Colombie-Britannique et dans l'État de Washington.  
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## Introduction

My main gripe with capitalism is this idea that *every human* is disposable, or replaceable. Humans are not widgets. We are not fucking iphones. We are not inanimate objects. We are living breathing souls. Emotions. People rely on us.

The quotation above offered by a trans\*<sup>1</sup> woman with a history of un/deremployment reflects the emotional and material stakes of the increasing dehumanization of marginalized subjects in contemporary Canadian society. Employment and income security are becoming increasingly precarious (Fanelli and Thomas 2011) in the midst of these austere times. Like other Western countries, the post-industrial service economy (i.e. post-Fordism) is the dominant regime of production in Canada. Post-Fordism is structured around “interactive service relations” (Haynes 2012, 497) between management, employees, and consumer publics. Immaterial labour, or affective labour, is paramount to post-Fordist service relations. Employees must use their bodies and working personas to create pleasant interactions and good experiences for customers and clientele.

Given the primacy of such emotional labour within all sectors of post-industrial economies, it is important to consider the significant ways that normative gender performance mediates one's employability. The young trans\* woman quoted above represents the sentiments of those who are devalued or risk being discarded from formal spheres of employment. Only those bodies that can be recognized as being able to excite, satisfy, and set co-workers and customers at ease are valued as employable. Individuals whose embodied gender performances are perceived as non-normative and therefore disruptive to positive feeling states are deemed to be worth-less.

The devaluation of non-normative economic subjects is not limited to trans\* populations. Racialized and other non-gender conforming subjects are increas-



ingly categorized as “existentially surplus” (Hong 2012). The devaluing of individuals as employable subjects erodes their psychological and physical wellbeing. The visible cues of worn down individuals who are struggling to survive perpetuates further abjection from employment. Managers often view such individuals in terms of “negative value” (Skeggs 2011, 503) because their outward expression of “ugly feelings” (Ngai 2009) render them unfit to perform the emotional labour necessary to generate revenue in the post-Fordist economy. Furthermore, the logic of “disposability” (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 1) is seeping into the lives of many White and gender conforming members of the working and middle classes. As some of the narratives provided in this article by trans\* job seekers and employees demonstrate, such vulnerability increases the potential for workplace violence against gender non-conforming employees.

This article focuses on the following question: how do the experiences of un(der)employed trans\* individuals highlight the interconnectedness between proper gender expression and immaterial labour, negative affects (e.g. anxiety and depression), and the broader dynamics of socio-economic uncertainty? To demonstrate the relationship between negative feeling states, affective labour, and economic insecurity, I concentrate on three themes arising from narratives of trans\* participants’ labour histories. First, I focus on trans\* individuals’ acknowledgment of—and struggles to grapple with—employers’ concerns regarding employing gender non-conforming subjects. Second, I address the burden that un/deremployed trans\* individuals bear given the often conflicting relationship between gender self-determination and the obligation of economic subjects to invest in themselves as a future “subject of value” (Skeggs 2011, 502). Third, I shift the focus to co-workers’ reactions to trans\* employees to draw attention to the ways that gender non-conforming subjects are often interpreted as the personification of in-between states of being, gender and labour insecurity, and future uncertainty.

My argument is threefold. First, I argue that normative gender expressions are a key determinant of employability given the primacy of immaterial labour to post-Fordism. Trans\* individuals’ recounting their employment experiences provide evidence of the ways in which detectable gender alterity often compromises

business relations. Second, I maintain that trans\* individuals’ psychological health is impacted when they must negotiate their need for gender self-determination and neoliberalism’s “moral imperative to accrue value to oneself” (Skeggs 2011, 499). Third, I focus on one trans\* man’s account of workplace violence to demonstrate that gender conformity functions to ease anxiety during socio-economic upheaval. Trans\* individuals are configured as deceptive and their bodies become battle grounds as their co-workers struggle against the uncertainty of attaining the “good life” to which they feel entitled.

I draw from my larger qualitative research project addressing trans\* un(der)employment in Ontario, British Columbia, and Washington State. Between 2012 and 2015, I recruited participants by posting on various community based listservs, forwarding a call for participants throughout my own scholarly and activist networks, and through the use of snowball sampling after meeting with initial respondents. I met with 38 trans\* individuals in various locations to conduct semi-structured interviews. Participants were invited to narrate their own labour history pre-, during, and post-transition. They were also asked about the most significant issues that trans\* individuals face in the workplace and what factors they believe contribute to the high rates of un(der)employment amongst trans\* populations. The interviews, which ranged in duration from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were coded using NVIVO software.

### **Setting the Material Context**

The present environment shaped by austerity includes the deteriorating quality of standard employment (Clement et al. 2009) and the proliferation of precarious labour defined as part-time or temporary employment with low income and little to no benefits or employee protections (Vosko and Clark 2009). Precarious employment is more deeply understood when accompanied by the concept of precarious lives (Clement et al. 2009). Fear, anxiety, anger, and depression have increasingly come to define the socio-political atmosphere in Canada. Vulnerability or the feeling that one’s income, health, and family life is not “automatically sustainable” (241) impacts members of the middle and working classes.

In the midst of this atmosphere, the proper subject is held accountable for investing in themselves as human capital. The pressure to fashion one's body, mind, and spirit as employable is especially acute at this present austere moment. Fear, anxiety, and anger are mediated through, and exacerbated by, neoliberal discourses concerning personal responsibility, risk, and investment in the self (Brown 2015). As Geeta Patel (2006) offers, "...risk is coupled with life ...Here life is a form of capital engaged through the laboring body. Life is something in which you invest" (34).

Properly embodied and expressed gender—the ability to be recognized as normatively feminine or hegemonically masculine—is paramount to one's chances of success in the post-industrial labour market. Post-Fordism is a regime of accumulation defined by the increasing significance of service relations (Lazzarato 1996); therefore, many scholars emphasize shifts in the nature of work (Rau 2013; Adkins 2012; Perrons et al. 2005). Immaterial or emotional labour is integral to produce value for capital in sectors including, but not limited to, service industries (Lazzarato 1996; Hardt 1999; McRobbie 2011). Workers must invest their whole selves into honing their capacity to produce positive feeling states to foster a productive team atmosphere at work and enrich consumer experiences. Employees' appearance, personality, and conduct exceed the value of education and practical skill sets. Whether one is understood as suitable for employment depends greatly on whether one presents as attractive, composed in demeanor, and are deemed a "good person" who is not too "much out of the ordinary" (Garsten and Jacobson 2013, 841). Such "soft skills" lend themselves to creating feelings of security, satisfaction, excitement, and validation among consumers (Hochschild 2012; Hardt 1999; Rau 2013). Whether or not individuals are recognized or judged as capable of producing positive affects are mediated by gender and race (Schilt 2010; Haynes 2012; Chertkovskaya et al. 2013; Rau 2013; Adkins and Lury 1999). The security of trans\* individuals' employment prospects depend on whether employers believe that their appearance, the register of their voices, and their conduct on the job can translate into producing positive feeling states among their co-workers and with consumers (Irving 2015, 2016).

### Trans\* Identifications with Employers

When attempting to explain their chronic un/deremployment, some trans\* participants gestured towards the ways that disruptive bodies threaten business. One woman put it bluntly: "...people see the appearance of the trans\* individual and depending on how far they are along or if they're ever wanting to transition, they won't hire. They are not meaning to be prejudiced but they look at the package and say, I don't need the hassles." The experience of another trans\* woman confirms the hostility that transitioning can garner in the workplace and the implications for trans\* job seekers:

There are friends of mine who have a lot of trouble being trans\* in the workforce...Like employers talk shit about them behind their back and they won't get hired because they don't pass. Oh god, a friend of mine just filed a lawsuit against her company. They fired her because they said 'your transition would cause a—quote— "disruption in the workforce" and she had been working there for ten years and she was the manager! So the higher ups just knocked her off just for saying: 'hey I am going to transition now.'

Many unemployed trans\* women were hesitant to accuse potential or past employers of transphobia. Nevertheless, numerous trans\* women spoke more generally of the ways that one's employability is contingent upon attractiveness and adherence to non-ambiguous presentations of femininity. One younger woman connected normative femininity to corporate hiring practices, which reinforces the scholarly claim that "corporeality has in effect become a defining feature of post-industrial society" (McRobbie 2015, 6). She stated: "...the retail level and the level of the restaurants, like waiters/waitresses, the whole environment is insanely sexist. They are only going to put the pretty girls on cash...and only a specific type of pretty girl...people who don't look threatening..." Trans\* women frequently returned to physical appearance when discussing their difficulties navigating public spaces. As one woman shared: "Most trans\* women don't pass well. Every time I go out the door...everywhere I go there's people looking and you have to build up a wall against that...And part of my way of dealing with that is trying not to care about it and just live my life but it is always challenging."

The economic value placed on particular embodiments and performances of gender conformity contribute to feelings of depression, fear, and anxiety among trans\* people. The outward expression of such injury can impact trans\* job seekers or employees negatively and they risk further marginalization from, or within, the workplace.

The affective impacts of “walking while transgender” (Edelman 2014, 172) impacted participants’ ability to embody positive traits and articulate emotional intelligence during job interviews. One woman spoke of the impact of homelessness and suicidal ideation on her self-presentation. Her comments demonstrate the ways in which she internalized responsibility for projecting a positive image to assuage any hesitation that potential employers may have regarding hiring marginalized subjects: “The more confidence you have, the more people will accept you...it will show in your gait, your attitude, the smile on your face, the way you carry yourself, the way you dress...I stand up way more straight than I used to...occasionally I still do the slouchy and, my gosh, I can be terribly slouchy.” A participant who self-identifies as a “lady” shared: “...the whole prospect of working was very scary but I still went out and tried to get a job. I was just very scared and fidgety and had trouble faking confidence. So it makes sense no one would hire me.”

Some trans\* women blamed themselves for their unemployment. One transgender woman explained: “...I couldn’t afford make-up, I couldn’t afford hair...I didn’t know how to get all the beard off my face? Yeah, I was a guy in a dress. I didn’t know how to act like a woman.” Such knowledge is reflective of post-Fordist socio-economic logics that render bodies in service of profit. Gender self-determination is vital to the lives of trans\* individuals and communities. Nevertheless, one’s gender self-determination is mediated by neoliberal moral economic imperatives that hold individuals accountable for optimizing their bodies as “physical capital” (Haynes 2012, 494).

The comments provided above signal that trans\* participants recognize employers’ expectations given the nature of post-Fordist service work, which is optimally performed through proper gender performance. Appearance and demeanor create the positive feeling states among consumers that contribute to sustaining a profitable business. In fact, the experiences shared by

un(der)employed trans\* people exhibit their understanding of the ways in which normative femininity and hegemonic masculinity function as a “proxy for qualifications” (Schilt 2010, 91).

### Post-Fordist Transitions: Investing in the Self

Shrouded in the rhetoric concerning crises, debt, economic recovery, and global competitiveness, the economic subject in post-industrial Western societies is rebranded from entrepreneur *of* the self (Foucault 2008) to an investor *in* the self (Brown 2015). Individuals are held personally responsible for shaping themselves *as* human capital. Individuals are obligated to invest in their employability or “job readiness” (McDowell 2005; Atkins 2012, 635). Individuals are understood as failing to do risk banishment from the workplace (Newman 1999). Those cast among these surplus populations are not positioned to “ever be incorporated into capitalist populations as labor...they are valueless, unprotectable, vulnerable and dead” (Hong 2012, 92; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 1).

Gender transition is often approached with trepidation because job insecurity is tied to gender non-conformity. Therefore, trans\* people engage in intense mental negotiations as they weigh their desire for gender self-determination against their future employability. As Lauren Berlant (2007) posits, “working life exhausts...the exercise of the will as one faces the scene of the contingency of survival” (778). One woman explained:

...we are looking at folks who are like—do I transition? Should I transition? What’s going to happen to my career?...the kinds of fear and the kinds of negative emotion that may exist in people as they are facing this monumental choice. The choice to live silently in the closet because you are pretty darn sure you are going to lose your job if you transition or the people who are like—you know what? I have reached a moment of clarity and I can’t not transition.

One trans\* man offered: “...a lot of people that are in better paying jobs don’t want to transition for fear they will lose their—I mean the stats back that up. And those who don’t have those jobs but want them will often compromise how they will transition, if at all.” Another participant shared:

During transition I was in [state] working for [company] ... they are fairly forward thinking but I wasn't ready personally to rock the boat. I knew I was going to be returning to Canada towards the end of my transition anyway ... and I probably wouldn't have been comfortable transitioning at work there. And it would have been disruptive without being any additional benefit to myself. But by the time I was ready to leave I had been transitioning actively for about two years and I was ready to start living full time.

The above participant's thought process reveals the ways in which the economic consequences of gender transition are understood in terms of personal responsibility. She holds herself accountable for not disturbing the workplace atmosphere. In these "hard times" when citizens gain recognition through "warranting" inclusion (Shapiro 2011, n.p.), it makes sense that trans\* subjects as investors in themselves must weigh their options carefully.

In the face of un(der)employment, trans\* subjects engage in a form of risk management. Investing in the self makes sense amidst the "affective atmosphere" (Anderson 2009) rooted in anxiety, fear, and depression that significantly impacts people's ordinary lives. While the state and capital offer no guarantees concerning job creation and employment opportunities, individuals must continuously hone their ability to meet the demands of post-Fordist service relations. As one woman shared, this willingness is often propelled by precarious workers' own need to feel less vulnerable. She stated: "I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to get work...at the beginning of my transition...You are kind of at that awkward stage where you are kind of trying to grow out your hair...You are trying to figure out who you are and it shows, there is no two ways about it ... So I went for a safe harbour. I'm safe but I am not free."

Given that affective labour demands normative "bodily capacity" (Puar 2012, 153), many participants indicated that they hide their trans\* identities on the job. One trans\* woman stated: "I am never going to tell anybody that I work for that I am trans\*. That would just be stupid, unfortunately." A trans\* man explained: "I am...very stealth at work...I would worry about people knowing for my job security. I think that people... might worry about getting fired for some bullshit reason that's a cover up because they don't want a trans\* person working there." A few trans\* men detailed how

they hid their recovery from gender reassignment surgery. One man offered:

When it came time for my chest surgery...I had to go up to my manager and say: 'I have to take time off.' 'Why?' 'Well it's pretty personal— medical related.' She said: 'You're still a temp. If you take too much time off, we are going to get rid of you.'...I was very much pressured into taking as little time as possible off. And you are completely disposable. So I ended up disclosing because I didn't know if that would make a difference...She didn't say anything horrible but she [like] all of my employers tended to want to see transition as this completely elective cosmetic thing...I was given three days off total including the day of surgery and I went back into work with drains in my chest...I was sort of healing while at work, going into the washroom to empty my drains and passing that off as standing to pee in the stall.

The same participant recollected another instance when he was denied time off to recover while working at a different job. Similar to his other job, he was forced to return to work immediately following major surgery. He explained how he was constantly "excusing myself and going back to the washroom—eight wound dressing changes a day. Let me tell you, you're bleeding and bleeding and bleeding...The system will not let me have time off with pay so I arrive at work bleeding." Another guy shared:

I was working down here for this restaurant...That really was my first job passing as male...when I went to have my hysterectomy. I wanted to give them some notice just to be courteous...and I thought how the fuck do I do this without faking a last minute crisis so I can get the time off. So I researched carefully surgeries that were similar to hysterectomy that would prevent me from lifting and also have injury and trauma in the same body area and came up with an inguinal hernia. So intestine perforating my abdomen. Those aren't acute enough that you need surgery [immediately] so I was able to give them a couple weeks' notice. I corroborated it with a friend's parent who is a physician...because I had to construct this lie. I...had my story all worked out in my head and was like '...this is the risk. It could cut off blood supply to your intestines.' And I had a doctor write me a letter, the surgeon, just saying that I had surgery and not what it was because it is

none of anybody's business...It got me the time I need off work without losing my job.

Trans\* men can often pass as men in the workplace. They are often viewed as competent, reliable, and efficient employees; however, requesting leave from work renders them disruptive to workplace operations. They risk being placed under further scrutiny if they disclose their trans\* identity or experiences. Such scrutiny is not limited to being seen as disruptive; rather being trans\* can translate into being devalued as a judicious investor in oneself. Undergoing medical transition processes, taking time off work to attend doctor's appointments, or attending to bureaucratic matters, such as changing one's identification, are misunderstood by employers as a frivolous activity that endangers rather than strengthens an individual's employability. A rational investor will, if we read between the lines in the narratives provided above, embark on the development of the self in ways that enrich one's productivity and job performance rather than take time away from it. Such expectations, whether stated outright by employers or assumed by trans\* employees, contribute to understanding post-Fordist work demands in terms of gendered aspects of the moral economy. Proper, committed, or decent men do not seek time off. Hence, trans\* men opt to hide their compromised physical states and recover on the job.

In times of austerity, capitalism bares its teeth and reveals its intrinsic logic—workers are increasingly faced with the choice to work or starve. Fear and anxiety set the affective landscape and it is within these constricted conditions that the specter of reverse transition arises. This applies to trans\* people, particularly trans\* women, who cannot pass as employees with the physical and emotional capacity to engage in customer care. One transgender identified woman stated:

I lost my self-esteem. I lost my energy. I lost my financial security. I lost a little of everything. And I mean, I lost everything...When you are down in the dumps, and again there is no place to turn to is it suicide or what? When you lose, everybody loses and does anybody really care?...Yeah, we do lose our jobs. I talk to people all the time, even at the [name of hospital that provided long-term mental health care] doctors say: 'well, go back to being a boy.'

Some trans\* women *do* decide to present as male to earn a living. Some participants spoke of women they knew reverting back to presenting as male. One trans\* woman offered a glimpse into her decision to halt her transition five years into her treatment at a gender identity clinic. She spoke of being a woman in her heart and soul. She became initially aware that she was a "girl in a boy's body" at age six, was bullied at school, and began to cross-dress when she was in her early 20s. She discussed her struggles with depression and anxiety, having been diagnosed with a personality disorder, and her suicide attempt. She described the workplace as the "White man's world" where women, racialized, and other minority groups earn less, have fewer opportunities for advancement, face bigotry, and constantly feel undervalued. She was wary of the costs of transitioning given that, in her support group at the gender clinic, only two people were "gainfully" employed—one woman delivered newspapers and the rest were unemployed. Her experience is reflected in other research into transgender employment that found that trans\* women as human capital are valued less than women as human capital (Schilt 2010, 38). She worked as a graphic artist and ran a small printing press. When the press went bankrupt, she pursued a career as a writer. Not only did she decide not to transition but she felt that writing about trans\* issues would close doors for her. While her wife, social networks, and the organization where she volunteers know she is trans\*, she shared with me that the beard she has worn for the last year and a half helps her hide from the rest of the world.

Embodied gender performances are crucial investments in oneself. The experiences of trans\* people quoted above demonstrate that those deemed unemployable face the often "banal workings of violence at the hands of the market" through processes of "confinement, removal and exhaustion" (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014, 4, 7).

### **Trans\* People and Co-Workers**

Trans\* individuals spoke of the work that fellow employees performed to stabilize gender in the workplace. The affective labour workers are expected to perform includes creating a productive space for one's co-workers by making them feel at ease. This is especially significant during this current period of increasing vulnerability among the middle and working classes

and their potentially volatile response to ruptures to the promise of the good life (Berlant 2008). The material grounds are shifting and they must confront increased costs of living, declining benefits, and job loss with little government support.

Whiteness and cisgender privilege produces feelings of “aggrieved entitlement” among members of the middle and working classes (Kimmel 2013; Stroud 2012, 2). In these times, the fear, anxieties, and rage that often erupt within hegemonically masculine subjects in response to looming threats of job loss in the midst of shrinking publicly funded social programs and state sponsored safety nets are projected onto individuals and communities constructed as the enemy. Trans\* identified individuals whose gender alterity is detectable visually, audibly, and behaviorally become scapegoats for such emotions. The consequences of income insecurity and job loss heighten labour market competitiveness and create a hostile atmosphere at work. Fear abounds and causes trans\* people to try to render themselves invisible. One woman addressed a non-trans\* public:

Imagine what that is like for a trans\* person. Someone at work finds out you're trans\*. You accidentally slip up; you accidentally say something. Someone at work makes a joke about trans\* people and you are visibly upset. They are all warning signs. And once that information is out there and once someone has decided...this person is trans\* then they can make your life really miserable.

A few participants spoke of the ways that sexual violence was used to reproduce and reinforce masculinity and femininity. One guy shared the following:

I had been there about a year and a half at this point...I had just started to transition...So suddenly my voice is starting to crack and, you know, starting to get the blemishes and little in-grown hairs here and there. So it started becoming more in their face. And I was on lunch break... and a guy walked up and said ‘Can I talk to you for a minute?’ I knew he belonged to a group of guys that had an issue with me...He waved me to go [to] the room where [the] computer guys were above the warehouse...They had cleared the room out and there were eight guys and they locked me in the room. One guy stood and guard-

ed the door while they proceeded to tell me why...I had no business lying to them. I tricked them. What kind of fucking human being am I? They were going to teach me what it was like, or show me that I wasn't a man. They were going to teach me what it was like to be a woman because I should be a woman. And they started getting physically aggressive...I am like going under desks as they are pinning desks up against me against the wall. I had a guy grab me and I really thought that was it. And, as the sparks start to unfold, a guy broke the goddamn door open because he couldn't figure out why the door had been locked...I just fuckin'...bolted out of the room...I go to the supervisor's office- ‘this has just happened. You know, I can't stay.’ Panic started happening.

He spent a period on disability supports to recover from this incident. After returning to work at a new job as a welder, he was re-traumatized. He explained:

I was sitting in the lunch room at the end of one of those long rectangular tables. I am...reading the paper and they start having a discussion around the table about [name of a trans\* woman whose job is to recertify the welders]. How it is not right, how it is disgusting, and ‘who lets these fuckin' homos in these places? I can't believe that these fuckin' trannies get to do this and that.’ And I am just sitting in my chair reading my paper and I am going ‘Don't meltdown. Don't meltdown. You're okay.’ And, all of a sudden, now they are talking about physically assaulting her. ‘We're going to teach her a lesson.’ And I snapped, folded the paper, threw it down, walked up out of the shop straight downstairs into the admin office: ‘I have to go.’ ‘What's going on?...’ ‘Here are my keys. There's a family emergency. I don't know when and if I can come back, but I have to go.’ And I walked out. Called my doctor the next morning to say that I essentially melted down. I have nothing left and you need to fix me because I don't know that I can actually survive in society anymore. I have got nothing. There is no way I can be anymore. And she goes: ‘Did they hurt you?’ And I am like: ‘No, they didn't have to. Just hearing everything. What if they find out? I just heard what they are going to do to her. So what are they going to do to me in my own shop where nobody knows where I am at and stuff?...I can't take that chance. I need to be safe.’ And I took about a year off of working...I couldn't cope with anything anybody said or if somebody would touch me it was the same thing.

The experiences above enable us to garner further insight into the interconnectivity between political economy, affective economies, gender, and labour. Trans\* bodies are the harbingers of the fabricated nature of gender. While such denaturalization is always disorientating, the visibility of trans\* bodies is especially fraught in the midst of the feminization of labour that characterizes post-Fordist regimes and economic crises that agitate the sense of entitlement and security among much of the working and middle classes. The shift from industrial to post-industrial production within the global North marked by the feminization of the labour force ushered in a “crisis of masculinity.” The feminization of the workforce is defined in terms of the influx of women into the workforce and the shifting nature of work towards value creation via emotive means. It signifies the erosion of the post-war compromise between the state, capital, and labour where hegemonic masculinity was constructed through men as primary breadwinners earning the “family wage.” This socio-economic shift created a gender transition of sorts, whereby the meanings of masculinity were destabilized.

The various outcries against such destabilization “are not the voices of power but the voices of entitlement to power” (Kimmel 2013, 46). The aggressive vocalizations of their contempt for Others on the job—as detailed above—and the physical and sexual violence that renders the workplace one of the most dangerous sites in contemporary society is reflective of the hostility of the “downwardly mobile White male, whose career never really panned out...and whose family life didn’t either...Everything was in place to partake in the American Dream, and it didn’t quite work out” (33).

These “neurotic citizen[s]” govern themselves through incitement to “respon[d] to anxieties and uncertainties” and work to eliminate threats to their well-being (Isin 2004, 223). The men who worked with the above participant witnessed embodied shifts from more androgynous to masculine. The undoing of one sex and the embodiment of another agitates them by bringing the shifting tide of gender, and perhaps their own uncertainty amidst this tide, in closer proximity to them. Their violent response (i.e. “you lied to me”) reflected the furious trepidation of men who were “promised so much and developed such an unrealistic sense of rights that they become confused about [their]...

actualisable rights” (233) in the midst of austerity. The sexual assault against a transitioning co-worker and the vocalization of a desire to attack a trans\* woman on whom they depend for recertification reflects the hostility of aggrieved men who believe that “what is ‘rightfully ours’ [is being] taken away from us...and given to ‘them,’ [the] undeserving minorities” (Kimmel 2013, 32).

At the time of the interview, this trans\* man could not work because of the lasting impacts of being traumatized on the job. This incident makes sense within a wider affective atmosphere that governs by fear, shame, disgust, and instability (Jensen 2013). Workers are more on edge as a result of austerity measures, which are framed in terms of necessary fiscal restraint and thrift to attend to the economic crisis perpetuated (supposedly) by those dependent on the welfare state (Jensen 2013). Their anxieties and anger gets misdirected towards marginalized subjects such as trans\* people whose visibility reminds them of the instability of gender—one of their naturalized anchors in the midst of a sea of socio-economic shifts. The visible presence of the Other at work fuels the discourse of undeserving minorities having access to resources that places the futures of proper economic subjects at risk. The violent lashing out against precarious gender non-conforming subjects can drive trans\* workers further into depression, trigger anxiety issues, and cause other conditions that disable their chances of obtaining or maintaining employment. Their worn down appearance, demeanor, and mental states become further unrecognizable as bodies capable of engaging in the immaterial labour necessary for business to thrive.

## Conclusion

The experiences of un/deremployed trans\* people help to uncover the connections between normative gender performance, employability, and immaterial labour, which is definitive of post-Fordism as a service economy. Trans\* women reveal the importance of physical attractiveness, as well as proper demeanor, as integral to the functioning of post-industrial service relations. It is not enough to be a woman. Women who embody normative femininity (i.e. are pretty, soft-spoken, and passive) can best contribute to a productive workplace atmosphere and incite feelings of excitement, security, and satisfaction among consumers.

The painstaking negotiations that trans\* people as investors in themselves as human capital engage in reveal the limitations of gender self-determination. In an age when individuals' employability hinges greatly on who they are as people, in addition to their education, skills, and work experience, one simply cannot afford to be seen as non-gender conforming or as a disruptive personality. Trans\* men hide having undergone gender reassignment surgeries or work while their bodies are seriously compromised out of fear of losing their jobs. Trans\* women carefully weigh their options and time their transitions around moving geographical locations or moves between contract positions, for example. Other trans\* people will choose to transition and then take positions for which they are overqualified or will not pursue career advancement because they do not wish to risk the meager job security they had at the time of transition. Others reverse their efforts to be gender self-determining because such an investment in their mental health and happiness will render them vulnerable to impoverishment.

Underemployed trans\* people, as well as some of their co-workers, also demonstrate the high stakes of ensuring that one is recognized as job ready or employable. The competitive labour market economy exists alongside an affective atmosphere where feelings of increasing vulnerability, insecurity, depression, anger, and entitlement are rife. Individuals are held accountable to ensure their own financial independence and their physical and mental health more so than ever before. "Working while trans\*" reveals the "exhaustion of people who feel compelled to manage...labour pressures" (Berlant 2007, 757). Many trans\* individuals are debilitated in the process of rendering themselves employable, which perpetuates their un/deremployment.

The experiences of trans\* un/deremployed subjects reveal the ways that detectable gender non-conformity increases the chances of people being cast outside of employment relations and into surplus populations that are "marked for wearing out" (Berlant 2007, 761). The violence against trans\* people in the workplace demonstrates the misdirection of anger and frustration as co-workers—especially non-trans\* men—grapple with changing meanings of masculinity in light of the feminization of the labour force. Additionally, attaining the good life is more elusive for many middle- and working-class men. Trans\* people, women,

racialized individuals, and others who personify shifts and changes are rendered the enemy and risk attempts at obliteration.

Trans\* individuals' experiences obtaining and maintaining employment uncover the ways that employers, workers, and consumers are called upon to invest in particular expressions of gender. The observations made by the trans\* woman quoted at the beginning of the article speak to the ways that all members of society are pressured to embody particular expressions of femininity or masculinity or else risk the possibility of being cast from the sphere of employment. Trans\* bodies reveal the ways in which increasing segments of the population are facing devaluation from human to disposable objects. How can we engage with vulnerable, exhausted, angry, and worn out populations to cultivate equitable socio-economic relations that values the contributions that all lives bring?

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Trans\* encompasses contemporary transgender identities and gestures towards the inclusion of future sexed and/or gendered identities. Trans\* also opens space to think through the ways that the sex/gender binary intersects with other systemic power relations such as capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism.

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# Framing Families: Neo-Liberalism and the Family Class within Canadian Immigration Policy

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**Christina Gabriel** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and the Institute of Political Economy at Carleton University. Her specific research interests focus on citizenship and migration, gender and politics, regional integration and globalization. She is the co-author of *Selling Diversity: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity and Globalization* (2002) and is a co-editor of *Governing International Labour Migration: Current Issues, Challenges and Dilemmas* (2008). She has contributed chapters and articles on issues such as migration, border control, transnational care labour, and North American regional integration.  
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qui définit les immigrants appartenant à la catégorie du regroupement familial comme « suspects » et « criminels ».

## Abstract

This paper examines the implications of changes to the family class category under Canada's *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and in particular the introduction of Conditional Permanent Residence (CPR) for sponsored spouses. It raises questions about the extent to which gender mainstreaming as an approach within immigration policy making can actually challenge recent developments, which are animated by familiar neo-liberal rationales but also gesture to a discourse that constructs family class immigrants as "suspicious" and "criminal."  
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## Résumé

Cet article examine les répercussions des modifications apportées à la catégorie du regroupement familial en vertu de la *Loi sur l'immigration et la protection des réfugiés* du Canada et en particulier l'introduction de la résidence permanente conditionnelle (RPC) pour les conjoints parrainés. Cela soulève la question de savoir dans quelle mesure l'intégration de la dimension de genre comme approche au sein de la politique d'immigration peut en fait remettre en cause les récents développements, qui sont animés par des logiques néolibérales familières, mais invoquent aussi un discours

We've also brought in new measures in recent years to deter foreign nationals entering into marriages of convenience to gain permanent resident status in Canada. This includes two-year conditional permanent resident status for certain sponsored spouses and of course, this builds on all the work we're doing in Canada in our immigration programs and around the world to ensure that forced marriage is less and less a phenomenon...

-Chris Alexander, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Keynote Address in Honour of International Women's Day, 2014.

## Introduction

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) recently noted that restrictions to family migration policies were a significant trend across member countries (47). Such restrictions included changes to marriage requirements, age, income, and language. Canada is no exception to the trend. The Conservative Government (2006-2015) enacted a series of sweeping changes to redesign Canada's family class category. In 2011, the government temporarily stopped accepting applications for parents and grandparents to address the immigration backlog. In place of sponsorship applications for this group, it introduced a super visa for parents and grandparents allowing multiple entry into the country over a 10-year period. More recently, there have been moves to increase sponsorship requirements—including higher minimum income thresholds, longer periods of sponsorship responsibility, and changes to dependents' age. Some analysts have linked the changes to the family reunification category to the broader Conservative agenda to extend and deepen a neoliberal project. Within this project, the potential short-term economic benefit of immigration is emphasized (Bragg and Wong 2016; Chen and Thorpe 2015; Root et al. 2014).

One key reform to the family class category was the introduction of Conditional Permanent Residence (CPR) for sponsored spouses. This change was implemented in 2012 and, according to the government, was a necessary measure to deter "marriages of convenience" and combat "marriage fraud." These imperatives triumphed over longstanding concerns expressed by civil society organizations that sponsorship entrenched dependency and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and that the CPR further intensified these possibilities. In

this paper, I use Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) legislated requirement to conduct a gender-based analysis (GBA) of the impact of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* as a starting point to consider the introduction of CPR. The paper proceeds in three sections. First, it outlines the broader neoliberal context against which changes to the family class have taken place. Second, it briefly sketches out an intersectional approach to policy analysis as a counterpoint to the more familiar gender mainstreaming approach that has been promoted in Canada and that finds expression within Immigration Canada's *Annual Report to Parliament*. These two sections frame the last portion of the paper, which focuses on the CPR and its implications. In doing so, the paper raises questions about the extent to which gender mainstreaming as an approach within immigration policy making can actually challenge recent developments, which are animated by familiar neo-liberal rationales but also gesture to a discourse that constructs family class immigrants as 'suspicious' and "criminal."

## Neoliberal Projects, Immigration and Family Sponsorship

The connection between changes in Canadian immigration policy and neo-liberalism were apparent prior to the introduction of the 2002 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA):

Canadian immigration policy...has emphasized the need to attract high-skilled, well-educated, flexible workers as prospective citizens, to compete in a rapidly changing global economy. This construction of the model citizen tends to favour male applicants from countries with extensive educational and training opportunities. (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002, 96)

This remains true today and, if anything, the figure of "*homo economicus*" has become more pronounced. On the one hand, the Harper administration maintained that: "The Government of Canada is committed to family reunification and Canada has one of the most generous family reunification programs in the world" (CIC 2013, 17). But, on the other hand, it continued to shift the balance between immigration categories—the family class has declined significantly while the economic category has increased.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, of the

257,887 new permanent residents admitted to Canada, 62.4% were in the economic category (includes spouses/partners and dependents), 25.2% were family class, and 12.4% were protected persons and others (CIC 2013, 13). From 2003 to 2012, women dominated the numbers of family class entrants with “female spouses accounting for the largest single group of sponsored family class entrants” (CIC 2013, 34). Consequently, changes to the category disproportionately affect women.

Relatedly, as Jessica Root et al. (2014) observe, the state’s embrace of an austerity paradigm has provided the incentive for the federal government to expand and further entrench a neoliberal project. The market driven economic growth promoted by austerity policies is “predicated on a highly-flexible labour force with abundant competitively-priced human capital assets” (15). Within this logic, the economic focus within immigration policy is emphasized. As many scholars have noted (see Abu-Laban 1998; Kraler et al. 2011, 14), within a neoliberal context, immigration policy constructs the family class as especially problematic for a variety of reasons, including “assumptions that ‘dependent’ family members lack skills and are unproductive, and that people of the ‘wrong’ origins make excessive use of the family reunification program” (Creese, Dyck, and McLaren 2008, 270). On another scale, the division between those immigrants selected through the economic class and those who enter through the provisions of the family class mirrors the division between production and social reproduction. The economic class includes the principal applicant *and* spouses and dependents of the applicant if they migrate together. However, the principal applicant is the public face of this category—a selected individual who through their human capital and ability to contribute to Canada’s global competitiveness is valorized (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Li 2003). Human capital rationales, a market orientation, and a short-term focus on the economic bottom line have become more prominent as evidenced by recent changes to Canadian immigration policy. This “just in time economic focus” has come at the expense of the family and humanitarian categories (Alboim and Cohl 2012, 61). Yet the productive and reproductive realms, as feminists have long argued, are intimately connected. Further, insofar as value is related to an individual’s contribution to the economic realm, the many other contributions that family members make are overlooked (Bragg and

Wong 2016; VanderPlaat, Ramos, and Yoshida 2012). As Gillian Creese, Isabel Dyck, and Arlene Tigar McLaren (2008) argue, families play an important role in immigrant decision making to migrate and family relations are often central in immigrant integration and participation in the labour force.

The valorization of the economic class results in the concomitant marginalization of the family class. For example, as Root et al. (2014) note, trends identified in Europe also find expression in Canada. Family migration has been associated with three problems:

First, abuse of the immigration system through marriages of convenience or so-called bogus marriages; second, welfare state burdens as a result of low rates of labour market participation by marriage migrants; and, third, a perception of the ‘migrant family’ as a patriarchal institution in which unequal gender roles, forced marriages and gender-based violence are prevalent. (Root et al. 2014, 16 citing Hampshire 2013, 78-79)

The changes enacted by the Conservative government, including the case of the CPR discussed below, were framed by these concerns. Further in employing the use of terms such as “bogus” and “fraudulent,” government officials associated some groups of immigrants with crime and consequently framed them as “less desirable.”

### **Family Migration and Sponsorship**

Scholars have distinguished between three forms of family migration. These include:

- (1) family reunification involving family members separated by migration;
- (2) whole family migration in which different members of the family (nuclear or otherwise) migrate jointly; and
- (3) family formation, including marriage migration, in which a migrant joins a settled migrant or non-migrant to form a family usually though not necessarily through marriage (Kraler and Kofman 2009, 2).

Regulatory changes in Canada have impacted all forms of family related migration but the primary focus of this article is on family formation.

The 1976 *Immigration Act* set out categories of immigrants, including the ‘family class.’ It also outlined

the objective of family reunification: “to facilitate the reunion in Canada of Canadian citizens and permanent residents with their close relatives abroad.” In the 1970s, the family class stream dominated total immigration to Canada accounting for 40-50% of the total flow (DeShaw 2006, 10). The subsequent 2002 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* also contained provisions for family reunification. Sponsors must meet eligibility criteria set out by IRPA and must sign an undertaking whereby they promise to provide for the sponsored person for a set period. “This means that the sponsor agrees to provide for the basic requirements of the sponsored persons and his or her family members who accompany him or her to Canada, (food, shelter, other health needs not provided by the public health care etc.). The sponsor also promises that their family members will not need to apply for social assistance” (Deshaw 2006, 12).

The spousal sponsorship provisions associated with the family class have been the subject of longstanding criticism. The National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) 2001 brief on the proposed *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Bill C-11)* pointed out:

In the context of a conjugal relationship, when a woman is sponsored by her husband the legal bond of dependency that is created by the sponsorship undertaking unbalances the power relations between the spouses in such a way as to exacerbate existing patterns of inequality in marriage. (NAWL 2001, 15)

The group further pointed out that the sponsorship undertaking itself amounted to a “de facto privatization of basic social security on the part of the federal government,” which further threatened immigrant women’s equality rights (15). A study funded by Status of Women Canada (SWC) also reported that:

The testimony of the sponsored women taking part in this research project has clearly shown that sponsorship often creates a demeaning situation that restricts or eliminates their personal autonomy, endangers their safety and undermines their self-esteem. Many women described how marginalized they felt. They have been marginalized and diminished by the sponsorship regime, which reinforces stereotypes of feminine depen-

dependency and second-class status...Many of them said they regarded sponsorship as discriminatory. (Côté, Kérisit, and Côté 2001, 143)

In sum, concerns by groups such as the National Association of Women and the Law and feminist scholars revolve around: the impact of entry category to access public goods and language or labour market training; precarious status and potential for illegality because legal status and the ability to remain in the country are dependent on a third party (Goldring, Berinstein, and Bernhard 2009, 240-241); and the exacerbation of spousal vulnerability in cases of abuse and neglect. As constructed in immigration architecture, relations of dependency underpin the family class sponsorship and this has been a significant issue for a wide range of feminists, including academics, legal activists, and members of non-governmental groups.

### **Approaches to Policy: Intersectionality and Gender Mainstreaming**

My analysis of changes in family class migration and the use of gender mainstreaming (GM) in Canadian immigration policy is informed by feminist scholarship on intersectionality. The analytical concept of intersectionality emphasizes the need to be attentive to how multiple axis of difference intersect to produce complex forms of inequality (Crenshaw 1989). An intersectional approach, according to Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik (2011), “serves as an instrument that helps us to grasp the complex interplay between disadvantage and privilege” (8). Nira Yuval-Davis’s (2011) approach to intersectionality refines the concept further when she calls for a recognition of the analytic distinction between different aspects of social analysis: “that of people’s positionings along socio-economic grids of power; that of people’s experiential and identificatory perspectives of where they belong; and that of their normative value systems. These different facets are related to each other but are also irreducible to each other” (158). These insights are an important corrective insofar as social relations, including gender, sexuality, and race, have often been sidelined in many migration studies (Manalansan IV 2006; Nawyn 2010), yet gendered and racialized assumptions and norms underwrite the differing migration experiences of men and women (Piper 2006).

These insights have also prompted an interest in applying an intersectional perspective to studies of public policy and policy analysis (Hankivsky and Cormier 2011; Hankivsky 2012). Such an analysis, according to Olena Hankivsky and Renee Cormier (2011), have the potential to reveal the deficiencies of traditional policy approaches because it “recognizes that to address complex inequities, a one-size-fits-all approach does not work” and it rejects focusing on single identity markers because its key premise is “people’s lives, their experiences and subject positions vis-à-vis policy are created by intersecting social locations” (218). An intersectional method also moves beyond policy approaches that address diversity from one vantage point, such as gender, and then adds others on. GM typifies the latter tendency insofar as it addresses differential effects of policy on men and women and pays insufficient attention to differences among men and women. Consequently, Hankivsky and Cormier (2011) argue:

What an intersectionality perspective does for public policy analysis is that it encourages a different way of looking at all aspect[s] of policy: how problems are defined, how solutions are developed and implemented and how policy is ultimately evaluated. This is because an intersectionality analysis encourages looking beyond the most clearly visible dimensions of inequality to recognize multiple and intersecting disadvantages underlying the construction of subject positions. (219)

This said, they acknowledge that there are considerable challenges attendant in implementing this approach into many policy areas due, in part, to the fact that research design and method remain somewhat underdeveloped. Further, they assert that, even when the importance of an intersectional perspective is recognized, the tendency remains to use one-dimensional approaches such as GM or GBA. There are concerns as to whether these can be adapted to accommodate multiple inequalities (Hankivsky and Cormier 2011, 220). In sum, intersectional policy analysis may have the potential to produce better policy outcomes for those positioned on the margins but its uptake in Canada has been slow.

#### *Gender Mainstreaming and its Limits*

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is

the only federal department that has a legislative requirement to undertake an annual gender-based analysis (GBA) of the impact of the Canadian *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. At the centre of feminist interrogations of gender mainstreaming is the disjuncture between theoretical conceptualizations of policy analysis and how gender analysis is actually practiced. GM is an approach to policy development and analysis that challenges conventional accounts that public policy is gender neutral. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), gender-based analysis involves:

Assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (cited in the House of Commons, Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women 2005, 1)

There has been considerable debate among feminist scholars about the potential of GM to promote gender equality (Bacchi and Eveline 2010; Hankivsky 2005; True and Mintrom 2001; Meier and Celis 2011). Particularly germane to the discussion of CPR are concerns regarding gender mainstreaming’s emphasis on process, its ex-post nature, and the singular focus on gender. Taken together, these criticisms raise questions about the ability of the model to promote wider social transformation.

#### *Substantive vs. Procedural*

Petra Meier and Karen Celis (2011) have argued that the ill-defined goals associated with GM compromise its efficacy. From the start gender mainstreaming’s goal was to enhance gender equality. However, what is neglected is that there is no consensus on the meaning of the term equality even among those organizations mandated to promote GM policies (471). Consequently,

[i]t is precisely the unspecified intention of gender mainstreaming, which assumes that the gender-mainstreaming

strategy will adopt substantive aims when implemented by regular policy actors, that opens the door for policies with limited ambitions that do not aim at gender equality as defined, for instance, by feminist scholars. (472-473)

Further, it is through the rational logic that underpins the strategy that GM runs the risk of becoming a formal exercise. There is an assumption that intentions can be translated into practice by techniques of measuring, reforming, and evaluating the policy cycle. This assumption, combined with a lack of definition of substantive goals, runs the “risk that gender mainstreaming will be reduced to a means of producing specific output through the use of these instruments, instead of forming an integral part of a global policy strategy aimed at realizing gender equality” (473).

### *Ex-Post Approaches*

There are various formulations of GM. According to Carol Bacchi and Joan Eveline (2010), the dominant approach used in many western democracies is an “idealized rational model” derived from a conventional policy development framework (50) in which policy follows a set of logical steps. They characterize the approach as an “ex post form of analysis,” which reviews current or proposed policy initiatives to assess their impact on women and men that makes it difficult to question rationales and goals of the policy being considered—whether these are neo-liberal or otherwise (52). They write:

Two things are missed here. Firstly, the way/s in which policies or policy proposals constitute or give shape to problems is not considered. Secondly, this understanding of policy fails to identify or address the ways in which policies encourage and hence produce particular social relations...this explains the lack of attention in dominant gender analysis frameworks to the ways in which policies produce women as ‘consumers’ or as ‘individual workers’ with goals similar to men, subject positions that fit neoliberal agendas. (52)

Carol Bacchi (2010) further argues that the dominant model “makes a case for policy to *respond* to ‘gender difference,’” rather than interrogating the ways in which gender is constituted by unequal relations within different sites such as household/family, state, market, and community. She writes: “Identifying

the state as one institution involved in the production of unequal gender relations constitutes public policy as a *gendering process* rather than a ‘response’ to assumed static ‘differences’ between women and men. Policy does not just ‘act upon’ people; it is itself active in ‘creating’ people” (26). In addition to the reactive nature of the model, there are other issues associated with an idealized rational model.

The goal of this framework is to identify differential outcomes for men and women at each stage of the process to mitigate the negative outcomes for women. Here, as Stephanie Paterson (2010) writes, “the cause of the ‘problem’ is not patriarchal structures or institutions, or even analysts and their frameworks... Rather, the cause of the ‘problem’ is limited information. With ‘better’ information—information that is ‘sex disaggregated’—analysts will be better equipped to make informed decisions to minimize differential impacts” (402-403). Within this representation, she argues, the broader context in which gender analysis is conducted—structures, institutions, and processes—is effectively sidelined. Other assessments of the dominant variant of gender mainstreaming have highlighted that “gender experts” are frequently privileged over civil society actors (Paterson 2010; Rankin and Wilcox 2004). Within these variants, bureaucrats are tasked with conducting gender impact analysis following the stage sequence. As such, Paterson (2010) characterizes the framework as an “expert-bureaucratic” approach, which introduces gender perspectives into existing policy models without necessarily interrogating them (397). GM, Paterson argues, constructs a “new form of worker: the gender expert” who is then given authority to analyse, monitor, and suggest interventions based on “expert analysis” (395).

### *Problematizing and Privileging of Gender*

According to Status of Women Canada’s 1996 *Gender-Based Analysis: A Guide Policy-Making*:

Gender is the culturally specific set of characteristics that identifies the social behaviour of women and men and the *relationship* between them. Gender, therefore, refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them, and the way it is socially constructed. Because it is a relational term, gender must include men *and* women. (SWC 1996, 3)



This is a useful starting point insofar as it embraces a relational understanding. However, the focus of the Canadian model of gender-based analysis has largely been on sex-disaggregated statistics (Bacchi 2010, 27; Hankivsky 2005; Paterson 2010). The measurement techniques and tools associated with gender mainstreaming, such as training manuals, equality indicators, impact assessments, centre on a very simplistic dichotomy between women and men (Hankivsky 2005, 986). Hankivsky (2005) points out that this accounts for “the ability of GM to cohabit with liberal political and economic structures, and its inability to provide the radical critique of existing power relations necessary for social justice” (986).

Relatedly, as many have observed, dominant models of gender mainstreaming prioritize gender over other social relations (Siltanen 2006; Hankivsky 2005). Consequently, other social relations such as race, class, and ability are “added” to the stable, unitary category of gender. The Canadian framework for gender equality highlighted the importance of diversity by recognizing:

...the many different realities for women in Canada. These realities are the outcome not only of gender, but also of age, race, class, national and ethnic origin, sexual orientation, mental and physical disability, region, language and religion. Equality...can be achieved only by valuing this diversity. (SWC 1995, i)

Janet Siltanen (2006) has observed that the idea that diversity was critical for gender-based analysis was present within federal government departments. But in practice, she charges that gender-based analysis was “more often than not limited to an analysis of inequalities between men and women as distinct and undifferentiated groups” (99).

In 2013, Status of Women Canada rolled out a new GBA+ approach, which attempts to address diversity and thus gestures to intersectionality:

Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an analytical tool the federal government uses to advance gender equality in Canada. The ‘plus’ in the name highlights that Gender-based Analysis goes beyond gender, and includes the examination of a range of other intersecting identity factors (such as age, education, language, geography, culture

and income). GBA+ is used to assess the potential impacts of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys, taking into account gender and other identity factors. GBA+ helps recognize and respond to the different situations and needs of the Canadian population. (SWC 2013, n.p.)

This is a relatively recent development and it remains to be seen how well this tool is adopted and whether it conforms to an additive approach or to a more intersectional approach.

In sum, GM is the strategy associated with the promotion of gender equality in Canada. In focusing on some of the critiques feminist scholars have made of gender mainstreaming, I am not suggesting that it should be abandoned or that those who promote it are wrong. Rather, I am of the view that it would be more prudent to consider carefully the context in which GM is promoted, who is calling for it, and what it means in practice. These questions can also be applied to intersectional approaches should they be adopted more fully in policy making.

### **Gender Analysis and Canadian Immigration Policy: Conditional Permanent Residence for Sponsored Spouses**

In this section, I focus on one recent direction within the family class—the introduction of the conditional permanent residence (CPR) for sponsored persons. I refer to the GBA section within CIC’s Annual Reports (2010-2013) to illustrate some aspects of the nature of gender mainstreaming at CIC. The GBA section is important insofar as it provides a public record of the results of legislated provisions to conduct a gender analysis. But the GBA section of the report is relatively short and I am not claiming to provide a comprehensive account of the history and scope of the implementation of gender analysis within CIC. Further, while this portion of the *Annual Report* only captures a part of the work CIC’s gender-based analysis unit is engaged in, the section is nevertheless useful insofar as it provides a window on what issues are prioritized, what is sidelined, and what is completely left out.

In Canada, the legislative commitment to report on gender impacts dates to the debate on the 2002 immigration legislation. Within each *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration* since 2005, there is a section called “Gender-Based Analysis of the Impact of

the Immigration and Refugee Act.” Within the 2010-2014 reports, the family class is discussed briefly under permanent immigration and, to some extent, changes and proposals are flagged within the GBA section. The 2014 report highlights that the gender gap in the Federal Skilled Workers Program may be closing as women’s human capital is being recognized:

CIC monitors trends in entry to ensure that males and females are both able to access permanent residency as principal applicants. Overall, a greater proportion of males are admitted as principal applicants and a greater proportion of females are admitted as sponsored dependents. Over the last 10 years, the Federal Skilled Workers (FSW) Program, CIC’s flagship economic program, has experienced a narrowing of the gender gap... This suggests that Canada’s FSW Program has been successfully recognizing the skills and experiences of women, as reflected through admissions. (CIC 2014, 24)

And yet what does gender parity mean vis-à-vis immigration categories themselves? For example, ensuring that equal numbers of men and women are present as sponsored dependents would not change the problematic nature of the program itself. Within the reports, the category of family class, however, remains unquestioned and its role in constituting unequal gender relations is largely ignored. In this sense, GM at CIC would appear to typify Bacchi and Eveline’s (2010) contention about idealized rational models and the limits of the ex-post models to question the logics, rationales, and goals of government policy. What is required, Bacchi and Eveline argue, is an ex ante (42) model of GM that can “critique the frameworks of meaning that underpin policies and to identify how policies produce particular kinds of subjects” (53). Thus, starting points for a more robust analysis of the conditional permanent residence for sponsored spouses would include revisiting the category of sponsorship and the nature of familism within neo-liberal inspired immigration policy as well as indicating how the regulatory change itself is underpinned by a set of problematic gendered and racialized assumptions.

The *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2008* seemed to gesture to an intersectional-based policy analysis:

Gender impact analysis focuses on important social and economic differences between men and women, and between different groups of men, women, including variables such as age, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion and culture over their life cycles. It seeks to examine existing and proposed policies, programs and legislation to ensure that they are having their intended effects and producing fair results. (CIC 2008, 44)

This conception of gender-based analysis outlined above draws attention to “differences” between groups of men and women. However, this remains somewhat unaddressed in subsequent reports. In 2010, the report notes: “To understand the gender impacts of CIC’s programs and policies, it is important to see the distribution of arrivals by gender across all immigration categories” (CIC 2010, 26). On the one hand, sex disaggregated statistics are important. However, on the other hand, the emphasis on statistics draws attention to men and women without contextual information and, as a result, tends to sideline more complex intersections. The focus remains on undifferentiated categories of men and women. We are also left with questions such as why do women predominate in the family class category or the Live-in-Caregiver program and why are some categories dominated by particular racial groups? Further, and somewhat ironically given this is Citizenship and Immigration, there is no reference in this type of definition to how immigration/entry status itself can be deeply implicated in social and economic differences (see Goldring, Berinstein, and Bernhard 2009).

### ***Conditional Permanent Residence for Sponsored Spouses***

The issue of marriage fraud had been on the government agenda as early as 2008 (Gaucher 2014). However, in 2010, following media reports and lobbying by a group called Canadians Against Immigration Fraud, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, launched a public consultation consisting of an online survey and three town hall meetings in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Those participating online were asked to read a short background document and then answer a 15-minute survey. CIC (2011b) reported that it received 2,431 responses, including 2,342 from the general public and 89 from stakeholder organizations. According to CIC:

- Overall, respondents indicated that fraudulent marriage is a threat or problem to Canada's immigration system, with three-quarters (77%) who reported it to be a *very serious* or *serious* threat.
- A strong majority (nearly 90%) of respondents felt that a sponsor should bear either *a lot* (65%) or *a moderate* (24%) degree of personal responsibility for ensuring that they are entering into a genuine relationship.
- The most frequently mentioned [actions to address marriages of convenience] were measures related to the punishment of fraudulent applicants and/or sponsors (including stricter enforcement of laws, deportation of fraudulent spouses and the introduction of financial penalties). (CIC 2011b, n.p.)

In 2011, the government presented amendments to IRPA regulations and introduced a two-step process into the sponsorship category:

Under the family class or the spouse and common-law in Canada class, a spouse or a common-law or conjugal partner who is in a relationship of two years or less with their sponsor at the time of sponsorship application would be subject to a period of conditional permanent residence. The condition would require that the sponsored spouse or partner remain in a bona fide relationship with their sponsor for a period of two years or more... Only cases targeted for fraud would be reviewed during the conditional period. Permanent residence could be revoked (leading to initiation of removal) if the condition of remaining in a bona fide relationship was not met. (*Canada Gazette* 2011, n.p.)

The provision did not apply if the spouse has children with the sponsor. Additionally, the government also introduced a measure prohibiting sponsored spouses from sponsoring a new spouse unless five years have passed since the time they received permanent resident status. According to the government, these measures were necessary to maintain the *integrity* of the immigration system and deter marriages of convenience (*Canada Gazette* 2012). It is unclear what role GBA played in the definition of the policy problem or what concerns it brought to the table.

The regulatory change was justified by the government's stated concern with marriage fraud. Consequently, one of the outcomes of the discourse and de-

bate around CPR was to link sponsored spouses with a set of undesirable associations, including fraud. These implications were flagged by the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) (2012):

The proposed conditional residence will foster negative stereotypes and discrimination against immigrants to Canada. Many immigrants—family-sponsored immigrants in particular—constitute a group already at risk of facing stereotypes and discrimination. Creating a class of conditional permanent residents will create a sub-group of partner-sponsored immigrants who will likely be pre-judged as 'frauds'—and 'who take advantage of the system.' (3)

The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, also relied on a series of negative tropes to justify the introduction of the regulation. For example, in his speech introducing changes to spousal sponsorship, he referred to "the abuse of Canadians and our immigration system by foreigners seeking to use marriage illegitimately as a tool to get into Canada" and asserted that Canadian were "being lied to and deceived" and scammed. He went on to say: "We must also not forget that, when a foreigner commits marriage fraud, it is not only the sponsor who suffers, but also our taxpayer benefits such as health care are also affected by these people who cheat their way into Canada" (Kenney 2012a, n.p.). CIC subsequently launched an ad campaign advising Canadians not to become victims of marriage fraud as part of its March 2013 Fraud Prevention Month (Mehta 2013). These negative tropes linking sponsored spouses to marriage fraud served to construct the family class as a source of a major problem.

The amendment was also justified in terms of policy harmonization. Other countries, notably United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, had adopted similar measures to the CPR. According to CIC, the adoption of CPR "would result in Canada no longer being regarded as a 'soft target' by those who might otherwise consider using a marriage of convenience to circumvent Canada's immigration laws, and provide another means for enforcement action in instances of marriage fraud" (*Canada Gazette* 2012, n.p.). The Canadian Bar Association, among others, called on the government to undertake a more detailed review of initiatives in oth-

er countries to determine the efficacy of such measures in preventing marriage fraud and whether such measures “have been successful in addressing risks created by conditional status for vulnerable persons, including victims of domestic violence” (Arsenault 2011, 3).

How were these changes treated in the *Annual Report to Parliament* GBA section? All reports between 2010 and 2013 note that women make up the largest proportion of the family class. The government’s notice of intent to file the CPR is briefly flagged in the 2011 *Report* (CIC 2011a, 8). The 2013 report details that the conditional permanent residence (CPR) regulatory amendments were the subject of a gender-based analysis and notes: “In 2009, 61 per cent of all overseas sponsored spouse/partners and 57% of all inland sponsored spouses were female” (CIC 2013, 37). Importantly, what is evident just from these statistics is that the CPR for sponsored spouses disproportionately affects women. A more robust assessment would have raised questions about the benefit of pursuing this measure at the cost of deepening existing vulnerabilities. As noted above, there were longstanding concerns about the sponsorship regime by civil society groups.

The CIC GBA reports did not present any specific information about scope of marriage fraud such as evidence to show the extent of the problem. This is not surprising since the government itself was also somewhat ambiguous on this point. The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism spoke of the “thousands” of stories of marriage fraud when announcing changes to sponsorship (Kenney 2012a, n.p.) and later asserted that “there are countless cases of marriage fraud across the country” (Kenney 2012b, n.p.). According to the *Canada Gazette* (2012), “While firm figures on the extent of relationships of convenience are not available, out of 46 300 immigration applications for spouses and partners processed in 2010, approximately 16% were refused. It is estimated that most of these cases were refused on the basis of a fraudulent relationship” (n.p.). These figures have been the source of some controversy. Some have argued that the front end screening of overseas spousal sponsorship applications is already rigorous and will identify out marriage fraud (Hrick 2012, 24; Macklin 2014, 6). Others have noted that the numbers presented are inconsistent. For example, Megan Gaucher (2014) points out that the CIC website claimed “1,000 fraudulent marriages are reported

annually, challenging CBSA [Canadian Border Services Agency] claim of 200 reports of marriage fraud over two years. Concrete rates of incidents of marriage fraud put forth by then Minister Kenney, CIC and CBSA have been varying at best” (195).

The differential positioning of country of origin is also at play in the debate on CPR. The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism visited India in 2010 and raised the issue of immigration fraud, including marriage of convenience with his counterparts (Torobin 2010). China and India have been discursively constructed as “countries of suspicion” (Gaucher 2014, 199) and identified as producing more marriages of convenience than others by CIC and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration despite the fact that there was little evidence to support this claim. Gaucher (2014) goes on to state that arranged marriages may be the subject of heightened scrutiny as a result of this discourse (200-201). Furthermore, some racialized minorities would be disproportionately affected by this initiative. The top three countries with the largest number of sponsored spouses under the CPR measure (2012-2014) were India, China, and the Philippines (Migrant Mothers Project 2015). This is not well addressed in the GBA section of the reports. Additionally, civil society organizations pointed out that marriages and common law relationships among Canadian citizens are also not always successful and “to hold sponsored immigrants to a punitive standard and more rigorously scrutinize their relationships is inappropriate and discriminatory” (Immigration Legal Committee 2011, n.p.). Under CPR, for example, CIC can initiate an “investigation and request evidence of compliance because there is ‘reason to believe’ that the sponsored spouse or partner ‘is not complying or has not complied’ with the condition (e.g. as a result of a complaint, tip or other information)” (Po 2013, 9).

#### *Legislated Exception*

A range of civil society organizations opposed the introduction of the two-year CPR. The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), for example, characterized the regulation as “a major step backwards in Canadian immigration policy” and argued that it “increases inequalities in relationships between spouses, and puts women in particular at heightened risk of violence” (CCR n.d.). Pam Hrick (2012), in her assessment of the

proposed regulation, pointed out that it was especially important to consider some of the dynamics that contribute to the vulnerability of immigrant women to domestic abuse and play a role in their decision to leave or remain in an abusive relationship. In particular, lack of “language skills, perceptions of law enforcement and fear of deportation contribute to creating a sense of isolation or dependency that leaves immigrant women more vulnerable to abuse than many other groups in Canadian society” (3-4). This critique was very similar to concerns about the sponsorship regime raised during the IRPA debate. Soon after the policy announcement, eighty organizations signed a joint statement prepared by CCR opposing the CPR measure as “an unnecessary and dangerous measure” and arguing that the policy would exacerbate domestic violence by “concentrating power in the hands of a sponsoring spouse or partner” (Bhuyan et al. 2014, 32).

The GBA unit played a role in addressing stakeholder concerns.<sup>2</sup> Following the 2012 announcement, consultations were held with provincial and territorial levels of government and other federal departments, including Canadian Border Services Agency, Status of Women Canada, and the RCMP. According to the 2013 *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration’s* GBA section, “CIC built an exception into the regulations that allows newly sponsored persons who are impacted by the conditional permanent residence measure and who are victims of abuse or neglect to come forward without having to worry they might face enforcement action” (CIC 2013, 37). Additional guidelines were also developed to train officers processing requests (38). Here is an attempt to be responsive to a real concern but it comes after the measure is announced. It is not clear how far or whether these measures will address the issues raised.

For example, the exception may be difficult to realize in practice. Audrey Macklin (2014), in her testimony before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, focused on the exception’s constraints for sponsored individuals:

The first is that she has to physically leave the house, leave the relationship. So she already has to initiate the separation—which could lead to her removal from Canada—without any assurance, of course, that she will be believed in her account of being abused.

Secondly, the requirements for demonstrating to the satisfaction of a Citizenship and Immigration Canada official that the woman is indeed subject to abuse are fairly strict and seem to rely heavily on forms of documentary evidence that may be difficult to obtain...court documents, protective orders, bail orders, letters from shelters or family services clinics, statements from medical doctors...police or incident reports, photos showing the victim with injuries...

Macklin goes on to point out that the difficulty in obtaining this type of proof affects whether a woman’s claim is seen as legitimate. Without the evidence, a woman may not be believed and be put at risk of removal. Here is an instance, according to Macklin, “of how immigration laws in place do not alleviate, but rather exacerbate, the vulnerability of women to experiencing domestic violence” (Macklin 2014, 3). More recently, the CCR (2015) surveyed 140 cross-country settlement organizations, legal clinics, and women’s shelters. Their findings indicate many organizations are not aware of all of the implications of the CPR and are unaware of or have incorrect information about the exception for women in vulnerable positions. Moreover, “the process of applying for the exception has sometimes resulted in re-traumatization, due to reported lack of sensitivity training of CIC officials, and long delays in processing.” Their findings led them to conclude that the CPR has “increased the vulnerability of many sponsored newcomers, particularly victims of domestic violence” (n.p.).

The government’s stated rationale in introducing the CPR was to address fraud and to ensure the integrity of Canada’s immigration system. However, the evidence to support the fraud charge is somewhat ambiguous and the efficacy of the policy to actually address and deter fraud is not clear either. However, the problematic nature of the sponsorship category and its potential to put women in risk has been the subject of considerable scholarship and grassroots activism long before the introduction of the CPR. Despite this the government chose to embark on CPR—a measure that further exacerbated and entrenched the existing tendencies within the sponsorship regime.

## Conclusion

Within a neoliberal context, family migration is

particularly politicized as it is constructed as a problem because family members are seen as dependent, lacking the requisite human capital, and as a possible drain on the system. As this article has demonstrated, the introduction of the CPR for spouses by the Harper administration needs to be placed against this context. The provision ostensibly to address marriage fraud—whose scope remains undefined and efficacy unclear—raises real concerns about its potential to increase vulnerability and precariousness of those sponsored. As one collaborative research project put it, it does so by placing immigrant women “under the control of both their spouse/partner and the Canadian government” (Bhuyan et al. 2014, 32).

The introduction of the CPR also raises concerns about gender mainstreaming within immigration policy and how gender equality is defined in immigration policy making. On the one hand, the GBA requirement in the Immigration Act did provide the disaggregated statistics necessary to demonstrate that women would be disproportionately impacted by the measure. Importantly, it also provided a space that helped to frame and channel stakeholder concerns that ultimately permitted an ‘exception’ in cases of abuse and neglect to be included in the provisions. This said, and despite the stated concern for ‘different groups of men and women,’ there was little attention within the GBA section of each *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration* to the multiple and intersecting axes of disadvantage that the CPR was implicated in—namely which families were rendered suspect or problems. But perhaps, most importantly, as an ‘ex-post’ practice, gender analysis in this case proved limited in addressing the way in which the policy problem was conceived or the manner in which the family category was characterized within a neoliberal discourse that prioritized individualized conceptions of human capital.

### Postscript

In October 2015, the Liberal Party under the leadership of Justin Trudeau came to power. The Prime Minister’s mandate letter to John McCallum, the new Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship outlined a number of priorities. Among them: “Bring forward a proposal regarding permanent residency for new spouses entering Canada” (Office of Prime Minister 2015). In February 2016, McCallum indicated that

changes to the provision were underway (Rana 2016).

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This is a longstanding trend that predates the Harper administration. CIC (2003) figures capture the shift: in 1980, the family category comprised 35.9% of permanent residents and the economic category accounted for 34.9%. By 2000, these figures had changed to family category 26.7% and the economic category 59.9%.

<sup>2</sup> CIC’s GBA unit outlined this at “GBA+: From Research to Policy to Measurement,” National Arts Centre, Ottawa, ON, May 7, 2014.

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# An Analysis of Two Albertan Anti-Domestic Violence Public Service Campaigns: Governance in Austere Times

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**Bailey Gerrits** is a PhD Candidate in Political Studies at Queen's University in Canada and a 2015 Pierre Elliott Trudeau Doctoral Scholar. Interested in the intersections between gender-based violence, racialization, news production, and engaged scholarship, her dissertation investigates recent discourses, patterns, and production of domestic violence news in Canada.  
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## Abstract

This article compares two anti-domestic violence campaigns created by the Edmonton Police Services and the Government of Alberta. This paper argues that both campaigns rely on and reinforce gendered and racialized schema, legitimize each institution, and simultaneously call upon you, the viewer, to address domestic violence.  
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## Résumé

Cet article compare deux campagnes de lutte contre la violence familiale lancées par les services de police d'Edmonton et le gouvernement de l'Alberta. Cet article fait valoir que les deux campagnes s'appuient sur un schéma fondé sur le sexe et la race et le renforcent, légitiment ces deux institutions et, font simultanément appel à vous, l'auditeur, pour lutter contre la violence familiale.  
.....

## Introduction

In response to what the police called “the worst mass murder in Edmonton’s history” (Dosser 2014, n.p.), the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) re-ran its 2012 anti-domestic violence television spot. It features three consecutive close-ups on battered and bruised women’s faces, silenced by duct tape, with 911 domestic violence calls playing in the background. This 15-second commercial is part of a larger public service announcement (PSA) campaign that also includes posters with those same women’s faces, along with three more women, battered and silenced by duct tape. This imagery is strikingly similar to the 2006 campaign developed for the Government of Alberta’s (GOA) Ministry of Children Services, entitled “Speak Up.” Seven posters feature a close-up of a victim, either a woman or man, with another person’s hand firmly grasping their mouth. This poster series accompanied an award-winning commercial, *Fight Circle*. The strikingly similar visual references drew my attention: what can one learn from comparing the similar visual representations of violence in two distinct campaigns? Approaching the texts as sites in which to study the “relations of power and ideology as they appertain to cultural processes and practices in the public sphere” (Lazar 2007, 156), this article employs anti-oppression feminist critical discourse analysis to specifically investigate: (1) Who are the subjects in each campaign? (2) What do these campaigns communicate about the relationships of power between the creating organization and the viewer and between the victims, perpetrators, and the viewer?

I argue that the pictorial and word choices in both campaigns activate gendered and racialized imagery to mark the subject of domestic violence; that is, those subjected to domestic violence and those who are responsible to end domestic violence. The GOA’s posters and television commercial also add a distinct feature: they locate violence in heteronormative, ethnically homogenous family units. The victims in both campaigns are visually marginalized by structures of

racism, colonialism, sexism, and economic inequality, but the campaigns fail to interrogate these structures. This conclusion seems rather obvious, as public agency-created PSAs are unlikely to be critical of the structures that those same public entities help to maintain. However, I further argue that studying how these PSAs define domestic violence and its solutions exposes the neoliberal rationalization underpinning both the Government of Alberta's and Edmonton Police Service's approach to managing domestic violence as well as the PSAs themselves as cost-effective tools of governance. Indeed, both campaigns hold the viewer responsible for addressing domestic violence while simultaneously justifying the minimal, but important, role of the respective public institutions.

### **Anti-Oppression Feminist CDA, PSAs, and Neoliberal Political Rationality**

To make these arguments, this article is framed by a method and theoretical commitment to an anti-oppression feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA), which aims to not only deconstruct texts, but also to connect the representational to the material (Lazar 2007, 142). Through the critique of text, anti-oppression feminist CDA highlights the intimate interrelationships between images, ideology, and socio-political contexts. Indeed, the basic assumption behind CDA is that both discourses—social practices and communications—and the social “are mutually constitutive” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak 2011, 370). An anti-oppression feminist CDA further explores how multiple systems of domination (racism and sexism, for example) interlock to augment depictions of oppression (Lazar 2007). Here, I take up Michelle Lazar's (2007) specific understanding of anti-oppression feminist CDA as “a political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology in discourse” (144). Thus, this article aims to elucidate the discursive construction of gender-based violence in the two public service campaigns with strikingly similar images and connect this to ideological commitments and material consequences.

Public service advertisements and announcements (PSA), as a type of discursive text, are well suited to an exploration of these interlocking relationships. A PSA is any educational or promotional material such as television commercial, poster, or radio spot that dis-

cusses social problems assumed to concern the general population (O'Keefe and Reid 1990, 67-68). As condensed, hyper-visual forms of political communication, PSAs reduce complex social problems into tiny, impactful morsels, often relying on stereotyping and exaggeration (Hernández Orellana and Kunert 2013) to visually support institutional definitions and solutions to social problems. Scholars often consider whether PSAs are effective (for example, Wray et al. 2004); however, I eschew questions of impact in favour of examining the texts as socially situated discourses. But first, I discuss the theoretical relationship between one ideological context—neoliberalism—and PSAs as discourses.

Neoliberalism is a political rationality (Brown 2006, 693). Borrowing from Michel Foucault, Wendy Brown (2006) states that “a political rationality is a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship” (693). To avoid a totalizing discourse, one must understand neoliberalism as a process, as incomplete, as inconsistent. This rationality emphasizes market rationality, privatization, commodification of social reproduction, and individualization of the public space (see Brodie 2008, 148; Koshan and Wieggers 2007, 147; Brown 2006, 693). Another salient feature is “austerity thinking,” referring to a government rhetoric that emphasizes reducing debt through cutting social services as well as the inverse—justifying the slashing of social services in order to reduce the debt. Indeed, a neoliberal political rationality seeks to justify—rationalize—political actions or inactions, highlighting the importance of studying political discourses.

While PSAs are not inherently neoliberal, they are inherently tools of political rationalization and are indeed important tools of neoliberal governance. Using the term ‘governance,’ I invoke Foucault's (1979) notion that power is productive rather than simply repressive. Here, public institutions discursively produce a way of understanding social problems and social norms by defining these social ills and expectations and by specifying modes of intervention and appropriate solutions (Lemke 2001, 191). In the case of domestic violence PSAs, it tells the viewer who may be a potential victim, what victimization looks like, who causes harm, and who is responsible for addressing the problem. By invoking Foucault and defining PSAs as discourses, I invite a tension—I will discuss some of the misrepre-

sentations of domestic violence in the campaigns while also refusing to settle on “truthful” representations of domestic violence. The point is to illuminate how two public institutions represent domestic violence and how these representations relate to ideological and socio-political contexts. More specifically, this article identifies how these PSAs, grounded in neoliberal political rationality, are tools of governance, discursively upholding systems of marginalization. Yet, the campaigns under review here are not disconnected from other forms of governance. Before engaging in a close examination of the texts, I will first briefly consider the recent shifting tools of governance around domestic violence in Canada and Alberta to contextualize the PSAs under review.

### Regulating Domestic Violence in Austere Times

Domestic violence is regulated on several governmental levels and this regulation occurs within the context of socio-political, ideological, and economic shifts. The federal government in Canada is largely involved in the definition of domestic violence as a crime. While the federal government added wife abuse to the *Criminal Code* in 1909 (McLean 2002, 59), marital rape was not criminalized until the federal government passed Bill C-127 in 1983. Adding marital rape to the *Criminal Code* is generally viewed positively, but Gotell (1998) reminds us that the political context surrounding the criminalization is also important. In the 1980s, the Canadian state moved towards a neoliberal governance model, eroding many welfare services (Brodie 2002, 392). The neoliberal governance model took hold in the 1980s with the federal government cutting social funding (Strikwerda 2014). In 1995, it shifted towards providing block funding to the provinces, amalgamating health care, post-secondary education, and social assistance funding into one lump payment under the *Canadian Health and Social Transfer*. The reduction in social service funds was accompanied by a discursive shift away from naming oppressive institutions to focusing on individuals as the source and solution to social problems in what Janine Brodie (2002) refers to as the individualization of social problems (392).

Spending cuts trickled down to the provinces, intensifying the ‘austerity thinking’ in Alberta. With the election of Ralph Klein in 1992 on a platform of funding cuts to social spending and a strict deficit reduction program (Barrie 2004, 266), the province began

systematically dismantling welfare programs (Strikwerda 2014) while creating the so-called “Alberta advantage”—low taxes (see McMillan and Warrack 1995, 2; Patten 2015, 262). The consequences for domestic violence shelters were dire. In a mere 18 months following Klein’s election, the GOA cut social services by \$397 million or 19%; following the cuts, 4,000 women were turned away from Albertan shelters in 1994 (Morrow, Hankivsky, and Varcoe 2004, 366-367). Recent research in other political contexts on the impact of the recession on women’s experiences of violence suggests that austerity increases some women’s vulnerability (see Spillane 2015, 151). For example, many police departments and crisis lines in the United States received increased calls following the 2008 recession (Buzawa and Buzawa 2013) or dealt with more domestic violence homicides (Weissman 2013, 235). Further research would help to confirm whether these dire consequences also occurred in the wake of Alberta’s decline in social service spending.

Some evidence suggests that incidents of domestic violence in Alberta may have increased during that time and this increase reportedly generated new domestic violence regulations. Namely, in 1993, Statistics Canada reported that Alberta had one of the highest rates of domestic abuse in Canada, prompting politicians to draft new domestic violence legislation (Tutty et al. 2005, 1). The *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA) passed in 1999 and it introduced new measures that authorized Emergency Protective Orders that removed alleged abusers from the home in an effort to prevent further victimization (Tutty et al. 2005, 1). The *Protection Against Family Violence Act* lumped all forms of family violence into the one category. However, this act did not cover same-sex couples until the *Adult Interdependent Relationship Act* passed in 2003 (Tutty et al. 2005, 31). The *Protection Against Family Violence Act* is explicitly gender-neutral (Koshan 2009, 850), prompting feminist ire critical of the “degendering” and “deracing” of family violence in Alberta (Lambert 2006, 42).

Despite the enactment of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*, incidents of domestic violence in Alberta remained high in the 2000s and remain high in the 2010s. As a result of continued high rates of violence, in 2004, then Premier Klein and his wife, Colleen Klein, convened a roundtable on family violence and bullying. As noted by individuals I interviewed and by Ruth

Mann (2008), the roundtable responded to both public concern about schoolyard bullying and several domestic homicides. After over 3,000 Albertans participated in discussions, either online or in-person (62), the GOA published the gender-neutral *Strategy for the Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying* in 2004 (henceforth 2004 Strategy), requiring action from various ministries. The Ministry of Children Services (now under the umbrella of Human Services) was tasked with raising awareness. At the time, Iris Evans was the minister in charge of Children Services and championed anti-bullying and anti-family violence programs. Deborah Hurford, the team lead on the project, collaborated with Edmonton-based creative firm Calder-Bateman to develop a comprehensive campaign that included the “Speak Up” poster series and *Fight Circle* commercial under review here. The commercial aired on Alberta television networks and the posters were plastered in various public locations throughout the province and both are now archived on the Ministry of Human Service’s website. Of note, since the release of the 2004 Strategy, shelters and anti-violence efforts have not received substantially more funding until allocations in the 2014 budget increased province-wide shelter capacity by seventy beds; at the same time, the Government of Alberta also unfunded beds and outreach positions at provincially-funded shelters (ACWS 2014, 3). What remains relevant is the 2006 PSA campaign, a direct consequence of the 2004 Strategy, is still listed on the GOA website—labelled as “Hand Over Mouth” even though Hurford told me that the title was “Speak Up”—as one of the more recent and the most acclaimed campaigns.

Edmonton Police Service’s PSA campaign, developed five years after the release of the “Speak Up” poster series and *Fight Circle* commercial, also needs to be contextualized. The commercial also aired on Edmonton-based television channels and the posters were plastered in targeted public locations, such as the LRT and billboards near busy roads, in Edmonton. Leading up to their creation, I note three relevant trends. First, police forces are focusing more on their public image and have become more media savvy, including joining social media sites and hiring media advisors (Mawby 2010, 135). For example, EPS has a YouTube Channel that opened on July 31, 2008 and active Twitter and Facebook accounts opened in August 2010. Second, in September 2010, EPS created the Domestic Offender

Crimes Section to replace the Spousal Violence Intervention Team and to respond to provincial guidelines for investigation and growing statistics of domestic violence in Edmonton (Edmonton Police Service 2014). Thus, before the 2012 campaign was developed, EPS was starting to become more media savvy and was focusing on Edmonton’s seemingly constant domestic violence problem. Third, unlike domestic violence shelters, EPS has consistently received increased funding. In fact, between 2001 and 2012, EPS’s budget had increased by 144% (Rodrigues 2012). Some of these increases were not for operating costs. For example, in 2011, when the PSA was created, the increase largely went towards annualization of pension funds and collective agreement requirements (Edmonton City Council 2010, 20-22). In the following year, plans for developing another PSA were abandoned as the police’s media advisor cited lack of funding in our interview. However, the Edmonton Police Service has received increased funds every year, which fits into a longer trajectory of the securitization of the Canadian state through increasing police capacity (Murphy 2007, 7) and the growing criminalization and policing of sexual violence cases (Bumiller 2009, 134).

Securitization and criminalization are not gender, race, or class-neutral. Rather, increased spending on policing and decreased spending on social services fits with neoliberal and neoconservative political rationalizations—that is, the focus on heterosexual families, traditional authority, and law and order (Koshan and Wiegers 2007, 147; Brodie 2002). In the United States, for example, hyper-incarceration of both domestic violence perpetrators and victims follows the logic of neoliberal “disinvestment in communities, diminishment of the welfare state, and harsh criminalization of immigration policy” (Coker and Macquoid 2015, 587). While relying on both racist and gendered logics, increased incarceration legitimizes state policing of certain communities and decreased funding for community-based anti-violence initiatives. Increased funding for police is the neoliberal and neoconservative flipside of decreased funding for anti-violence initiatives, illustrating the pervasiveness of neoliberal and neoconservative political rationalizations in Alberta.

### Analyzing the Texts

One of the goals of this analysis is to identify the relationship between the representational, the ideo-

logical, and the socio-political. How each PSA defines domestic violence and its solutions exposes the neoliberal rationalization underpinning the respective institutions' approaches to managing domestic violence and how each PSA is itself a tool of governance. It is worth noting that the GOA has created more recent anti-domestic violence campaigns that are more contemporaneous with the EPS's 2012 campaign. However, I created my corpus by identifying campaigns with starkly similar imagery in the same geographic area so that my analysis could consider the relationship between representation and place. Indeed, focusing on similar visuals allows for an exploration of the nuanced relationship between these images and political rationalizations. The temporal distance between the campaigns does not negate the impact of comparing the representational discourses. Instead, focusing on seemingly similar images builds a stronger case for the longevity and the pervasiveness of neoliberal political rationalization as visually manifested in the campaigns.

I now turn my attention to an analysis of the texts themselves. The texts under review are the two anti-domestic violence campaigns (including the posters and videos) as well as interviews with those involved in their creation and dissemination. From the Government of Alberta, I interviewed Iris Evans, the former Minister of Children Services, and Deborah Hurford, the project lead. From EPS, I interviewed Scott Pattison, the lead media advisor, and Jarad Robinson, the videographer. I also interviewed two members of an umbrella organization for women's shelters called Alberta's Council for Women's Shelters in order to add context to each campaign's development: Jan Reimer, the Executive Director; and Christie Lavan, the Communications and Partnerships Advisor. To analyze the texts, I followed four steps. First, I carefully examined the posters and interviews to identify themes. After identifying five themes: gender, racialization, victimization, perpetration, and responsibility, I re-examined how the posters and interviews relate to these themes and to the socio-political and ideological context. Third, I noted any discrepancies to ensure the reading is comprehensive. Finally, I shared various iterations of the analysis at conferences and with colleagues to receive feedback on my argumentation. Engaging in anti-oppression feminist CDA is often a solitary activity; yet, the evolution of my thinking is also the consequence of engagement with

several interlocutors to whom I am grateful. What follows is the close examination of two PSAs from Alberta, offering insight into the ways in which the messaging and the manifest content are themselves tools of neoliberal governance, espousing a gendered and racialized neoliberal political rationality.

### **Is victimization gendered?**

The GOA's two campaign materials present two different gendered pictures of domestic violence victimization. The video shows one example of domestic violence: a White man verbally assaulting, yelling at, and aggressively grabbing a White woman. The victim is depicted as resigned and scared. After two seconds of being verbally berated, she loudly whispers: "Please just don't do this here ok?" An able-bodied 30-something White woman with neatly coiffed blonde hair, she is mostly silent aside from the whisper. Seeing this commercial, one could imagine the GOA communicating that women are the sole victims of domestic violence.

However, the GOA's seven "Speak Up" posters depict more than just women. The website labels are very instructive as they list the victims portrayed: "young female," "young male," "Aboriginal female," "Métis male," "adult female," "immigrant female," and "older male." Women and men are almost evenly presented as victims, suggesting that this violence is likely unrelated to gender. This gender-neutral depiction is an effective tool of neoliberal governance as it moves the discussion away from processes (such as sexism) or structures (such as patriarchy) to individuals and families (Berns 2001, 277). Notably, there is one glaring absence in this cast: no adult man is featured. All of the men depicted are modified by positions of vulnerability: youth, Métis, and old. The absence of an unencumbered adult man hints at the fact that marginalization likely increases one's chances at experiencing family violence. Nevertheless, the GOA's posters depict gender-neutral victims while the commercial only depicts a blonde woman.

In stark contrast, both mediums for EPS's campaign depict only women. EPS also instructively labels the victims in the poster for internal categorization: "Asian," "Black," "Caucasian," and "Indian." The two other posters, another Caucasian woman and an Indigenous woman, did not come attached with labels. The video shows three of the six women in the posters: first the "Caucasian" woman, second the "Indian" woman,

and third the “Black” woman. Depicting only women ignores men who potentially experience violence as well as gender non-conforming people. In our interview, Pattison, the lead media advisor, envisioned a second stage that would “introduce more of those demographics...including a male” (Interview 2013). While stage two has been postponed indefinitely due to budget cuts, Pattison indicated that, if unlimited funding were available, EPS would have represented “everyone” (Interview 2013). Both of the campaign materials and the creators’ understanding of domestic violence illustrate a view that women are the primary victims of domestic violence; however, the planned second stage complicates the answer to the question of who is subjected to domestic violence.

### Is victimization racialized?

Each campaign also conveys a message about racialization and victimhood and each campaign itself can be understood as a form of racialization. Racialization refers to the process whereby certain people are classified racially (Gilchrist 2010, 374). A clear example of racialization is found when comparing the posters. Based on the labels for the posters, the GOA assumes all of the victims of domestic violence are white unless otherwise labelled while EPS uses labels to note both whiteness and non-whiteness. Here, the GOA racializes non-White people whereas EPS racializes everyone, including the “Caucasian” woman. A closer examination of the victims reveals an even more complicated story.

Aside from the “Immigrant Woman,” all the victims featured on the GOA’s posters and in the video are white or are so brightly lit they can pass as white. The GOA’s project lead noted how budget and medium challenges—notably limited money and space, may have led the consulting firm to choose ethnically ambiguous models to reach the largest demographic possible. Stated more strongly, they cast people who could pass as White. Passing can be defined as “the movement from one identity group to another, usually from margin to mainstream” (Moriel 2005, 167) and can be a survival strategy (Ginsberg 1996). However, by Whitewashing most of the so-labelled racialized victims, the posters advance the notion that these victims have escaped racialized oppression (see Ginsberg 1996, 3). The posters and video ignore racism while reinforcing Whiteness as the norm.

Along with passing, the depiction of Indigenous victims ignores colonialism. The posters depict one “Aboriginal female” and one “Metis male.” Hurford, the GOA’s project lead, noted that including Indigenous victims was a “conscious choice” (Interview 2014). Given that Indigenous women face higher rates of domestic violence than non-Indigenous women (Scrim 2015), the GOA’s campaigns commendably portray this reality. However, depicting two of seven victims as Indigenous could also be read as an over-representation of domestic violence in that context, which obscures both the colonial context that exacerbates experiences of such violence and the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women perpetrated by non-Indigenous people (see Delaney 2002, 8). Relating this campaign to the legislative context is also telling. The *Protection Against Family Violence Act* does not have jurisdiction on reserves while the posters locate family violence in Indigenous communities. The campaign can be read as largely focusing on problems within Indigenous communities without acknowledging the colonial or racist ideologies and structures that perpetuate intra-community violence.

How the GOA’s campaign depicts diversity pales in comparison to EPS’s understanding and visible depiction of non-White women. Robinson and Pattison indicated that EPS wanted to reach as many people as possible by presenting more diverse images. What the public saw was the less messy version of the campaign. One of the original ideas was to have all the posters written in the target audiences’ language. Pattison, a White man, posed this question: “did we want to speak to them predominately in our language or their languages?” (Interview 2013). Here, Pattison identified with the English-speaking, presumably White population. This idea was scrapped because of the issues associated with identifying and excluding groups, translation accuracy, cost, and possible accusations of racism for targeting certain people. Instead, the posters depict six victims from five communities (Indian, Indigenous, White, Somali, and Asian) who experience the highest rates of domestic violence in Edmonton as indicated by police statistics and are communicated to in English. The creators espoused a rationalization for obvious diversity that closely mirrors what Rogers Brubaker (2002) terms “groupism,” which is “the tendency to take discrete... internally homogenous and externally bounded groups



as basic constituents of social life” (164). Pattison stated: “this may be the epiphany [when] they see...the image of somebody in their own culture, maybe that would resonate...rather than...your stereotypical Caucasian” (Interview 2013). In this case, the women represent supposedly tightly bound cultures. In one sense, the ethnically ambiguous models in the GOA’s campaigns avoid a reification of cultural difference by assuming that one can identify with people with dissimilar skin color. However, the EPS posters and video do a better job of illustrating non-Whiteness.

### **What does victimization look like?**

Both campaigns diverge and have common understandings of domestic violence victimization. Common to both campaigns is the importance of silence. In the video and posters, EPS depicts victims with duct tape firmly across their mouths, clearly unable to speak for themselves. In the GOA’s poster, a firm hand is clasped across the victim’s mouth, clearly also unable to speak for themselves. Victimization, thus, is largely characterized by a silent helplessness.

The audio in EPS’s video tells a slightly different story as it includes what sounds like real 911 calls where women plead for help. At first, the screen visibly displays a close-up of a battered and bruised middle age White woman’s face with blonde hair with duct tape across her mouth. In the background, a warbled woman’s voice says, “If he finds me...” The screen cuts to another woman’s face that appears to be of Southeast Asian descent, also clearly bruised, tears welling, a cut on her nose, and duct tape over her mouth. The screen cuts to a Black woman’s face, visibly bruised and glistening with sweat, also silenced by duct tape. A woman’s voice says, “My husband’s beating me...” The screen darkens with the Black woman shutting her eyes. Juxtaposing the audio of people, some victims asking for help, and the imagery of women who are silenced by large pieces of duct tape presents a paradoxical view of silence. Yet, silence dominates the story of victimization in both the EPS and GOA campaigns.

The campaigns also diverge in understandings of victimization. The models in both the EPS’s posters and television spot are visibly battered and physically abused. The victims in the GOA’s posters show little signs of bruises or cuts. This can be read as emphasizing the ways in which abuse is not simply physical and

could include emotional, spiritual, financial, and verbal abuse. In the GOA’s video, however, the man yells and berates the woman, and aggressively grabs the visibly shaken woman’s upper arms and shakes her. Here the differences between the two campaigns are subtle. The EPS’s video and posters depict graphic physical violence while the GOA’s posters do not portray physical violence and the video depicts physical and verbal abuse. These differences are likely indicative of the purpose of each agency. The police may be called in to calm a loud argument if called by the neighbours, but treat forms of physical violence more seriously. The Government of Alberta defined family violence broadly and this is reflected in the visual representation of violence.

### **Who causes harm?**

The question becomes: who causes harm? The EPS’s posters and video do not explicitly represent the abuser aside from one woman’s voice stating: “My husband’s beating me...” in the video. Rather than focus on perpetrators, EPS concentrates on the women experiencing abuse. This leaves the question open as to who is causing harm, allowing for one to imagine it could be husbands, boyfriends, or even wives or girlfriends. In contrast, the GOA’s posters and video depict the abuser and, consequently, present a narrow picture of domestic violence.

In the posters, one can clearly see the neoconservative emphasis on the heteronormative family as each poster’s aggressor is a faceless hand of the opposite sex. This suggests that perpetrators are almost as likely to be women as they are men. The video similarly presents a heterosexual couple with a White man causing harm. The fact that the video depicts a man harming a woman suggests that the gender-neutral stance is lightened while reinforcing the understanding that family violence occurs in nuclear, heterosexual families. The Government of Alberta’s campaign also depicts the families as coming from similar ethnic communities. The video depicts a White couple and the posters depict faces and hands with noticeably similar skin colors. Comparing the hands of all the perpetrators reveals that the hand in the poster labelled “Immigrant Woman” is disproportionately larger than the other hands. Is there an implicit message that immigrant women are silenced more than non-immigrant women or that they are uniquely oppressed? Exploring gender perse-

cution cases brought before the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board, Sherene Razack (1995) argues that women's claims for asylum are most likely to succeed when they present themselves as victims of dysfunctional and exceptionally patriarchal cultures (46). In addition to the large man's hand silencing the immigrant woman, the absence of an immigrant male victim does suggest that racialized immigrant communities are more patriarchal. As such, the GOA's posters and video not only presents domestic violence exclusively within ethnically homogenous families, but it also subtly ranks oppression by depicting the immigrant woman as more oppressed.

One can compare the "Immigrant Woman" with the "Indian Woman" in the EPS campaign. The label of "Indian Woman" influenced where the posters are showcased—in a neighbourhood in Edmonton that has a large population of South Asians (Pattison, Interview 2013). Similar to reading immigrant as more distinct, the "Indian Woman" seemed to experience a special type of domestic violence. For example, "in a lot of East Indian communities, the husband and wife live in the husband's family...so the wife comes over, arranged marriage...And the mothers, the grandmother tend to be abusive" (Pattison, Interview 2013). Here, Indians are equated to immigrants just as the Government of Alberta labelled a South Asian woman as immigrant. Taking Razack's insights seriously, this label suggests that Indian or South Asian culture is inherently more abusive than "Canadian" culture. Pattison also nuances the Edmonton Police Service's understanding of domestic violence to include other family members, especially the older women in the extended immigrant family. What these comparisons suggest is that both agencies understand perpetration in complex ways that often rely on notions of the heterosexual couple, the nuclear family, and the supposedly uniquely oppressed immigrant/South Asian woman.

### **Who is responsible for addressing the problem?**

Each campaign includes a depiction or illusion of a third party. Most obviously, the Alberta Government's television spot depicts a crowd that witnesses violence. After the video introduces the fighting couple, the screen pans wider to reveal that the fighting couple are standing in a backyard at a social barbeque. The screen cuts to a frame that focuses on a White-pass-

ing middle age woman attending to an elderly White woman. As the audio cuts to the man's voice saying "so I'm the bad guy again," the White-passing middle age woman with brown hair looks up, presumably in the direction of the man's voice, cuing the viewer that she has heard the violence. The screen cuts to different groups of partygoers. As the abuser's voice gets louder, the screen cuts to a younger White woman with red hair and, as the man says "just wait until we get home," the young woman starts chanting "Fight!" The screen cuts to a group consisting of a Black man, a White man with a brown beard, and a White-passing woman with dark hair. The Black man joins in: "Fight." As the crowd starts chanting, the screen cuts back to the middle-aged White-passing woman and the elderly woman as the middle-aged woman whispers "fight." The screen pans out to focus on the crowd voyeuristically watching the violence. The camera angle is situated as though you, the viewer, are standing on the deck with the rest of the crowd. The video progresses from you, the viewer, watching the spectators and their reactions to the violence to placing you, the viewer, in the crowd. The GOA's video ends with a man's voice saying "family violence, when we are silent, we may as well be cheering it on." There are two notes here. One, the composition of the crowd reinforces Whiteness. Two, the framing implicates you, the viewer. The phrasing suggests that you, the viewer, are part of the royal "we" implicated in the perpetuation of domestic violence due to "our" silence. Without depicting spectators, the GOA's poster and the police campaign also responsabilize you, the viewer.

This responsabilization is most evident in the instructions. The GOA video ends: "You can help." The GOA's posters address the viewer: "Speak up for those who are silenced." Similarly, the police posters suggest the viewer is also responsible: "Speak Out. We need your help." After depicting victims' eyes focused on the viewer, pleading with the viewer to help, the police video cuts to the words: "Speak out. They need your help." It then cuts to a command: "Report Domestic Violence: 9-1-1." Similarly, both the GOA's video and posters direct the viewer to a 310 number, a specific family violence help line, where the viewer/helper will need to navigate several automated voices to receive information about domestic violence. Here, the Alberta state abdicates its responsibility and encourages citizens to help and police each other. These instructions and re-

sponsibilization of the viewer most distinctly illustrate the ways in which the campaigns become tools of governance—instructing viewers to police their neighbours and clearly suggesting that you, the viewer, are responsible for stopping domestic violence. These are neoliberal political rationalizations that look to individuals to solve complex social problems while, at the same time, legitimizing the somewhat limited efforts of public institutions to address the problem. These efforts include creating the domestic violence campaigns and the 310 help line. For the police, responsibility is slightly more nuanced. They will continue to respond to “domestics” as they cannot abdicate their position as community law enforcement. While these nuances are important, there is a striking similarity in focus on the viewer as a problem-solver that is consistent with a neoliberal political rationalization.

### Concluding Thoughts

Connecting these discursive tools of governance to neoliberal political rationality in Alberta highlights how these glossy promotional materials offload the responsibility of addressing domestic violence to individual audience members and simultaneously shore up the legitimacy of two public institutions. In this article, I identify how the two campaigns represented victims, perpetrators, spectators, and problem solvers. The subjects varied slightly. The Alberta Government presented both men and women as victims, although each was augmented by positions of marginalization. The police only represented women, but my interview with the creators suggested that a second campaign would have depicted men as victims. The police do not explicitly represent perpetrators aside from one police call that suggests a woman’s husband is beating her. The Government of Alberta, on the other hand, depicts heterosexual couples with similar skin colors. Importantly, both campaigns call on you, the viewer, to address domestic violence. As such, these PSAs are cost-effective governance strategies that gender, de-gender, racialize, and de-racialize those subjected to domestic violence.

If one recalls the worst mass murder in recent Edmonton history, one can understand the material implications of these discursive tools of governance. Phu Lam murdered seven people on December 28, 2014, including his wife Thuy Tien Truong. There is ample evidence to suggest that Lam’s wife told police that her

husband intended to murder them, yet no one took her seriously (Drinkwater 2015). How did the police respond after the atrocity? They condemned the violence and reran their “Speak Out” advertising campaign. As this article has argued, this campaign asks the viewer to speak up for victims. While generating public awareness about domestic violence is an important aspect to addressing domestic violence, it does not address structural and institutional failures that contribute to experiences of marginalization, including the ways in which the police and the Alberta Government failed Thuy Tien Truong. As such, this article contributes to the critical literature on domestic violence discourses. In examining institutional discourses, it reveals how neoliberal political rationalizations rely on and reinforce gendered and racialized schema and focus on individual subject-viewers as the solution to the problem.

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# How do Real Indigenous Forest Dwellers Live? Neoliberal Conservation in Oaxaca, Mexico

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**Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez** is Zapotec from the Tehuantepec Isthmus, Oaxaca, Mexico and an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Alberta where she teaches comparative Indigenous politics. Her research interrogates the connections between resource extraction, lands, bodies, and consent and explores the contemporary mechanisms and practices through which Indigenous land is accessed. Two of her most recent books are *Living on The Land. Indigenous Women's Knowledge*, co-edited with Nathalie Kermaol (AUP 2016), and *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism. Place, Women and the Environment* (UBC Press 2013).

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## **Abstract**

Protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, and forest reserves have become an important feature of the global economy. Using an intersectional lens, a critical political economy approach, and document analysis, this paper explores how power operates through the production of Indigenous difference, the greening of the economy, and the commodification of the environment. It also considers neoliberal conservation as a racialized process that downloads the burden of protecting the environment onto the most vulnerable Indigenous communities.

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## **Résumé**

Les zones protégées telles que les refuges fauniques, les parcs nationaux et les réserves forestières sont devenues un élément important de l'économie mondiale. À l'aide d'une optique intersectionnelle, d'une approche d'économie politique critique et d'une analyse documentaire, cet article explore comment le pouvoir fonctionne au moyen de la création de la différence indigène, de l'écologisation de l'économie et de la marchandisation de l'environnement. Il considère également la conservation néo-libérale comme un processus racialisé qui transfère le fardeau de la protection de l'environnement aux communautés autochtones les plus vulnérables.

## **Introduction**

Protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, and forest reserves have become an important feature of the global economy. In Mexico, the establishment of institutions devoted to conservation in the 1980s and neoliberal land reforms in the early 1990s fostered a wave of territorial reorganization that targeted the forests that have historically sustained Indigenous communities. It is estimated that as much as 80% of the forests are communally owned (Bray et al. 2008, 7). Oaxaca, besides being the most culturally diverse state in Mexico, has been praised for both its biodiversity and the existence of strong Indigenous governance institutions. A number of scholars have noted that the combination of self-regulated communities, high biodiversity, and the limited number of national ecological reserves create alluring conditions for conservation projects in this state (Bray et al. 2003; Chapela 2005; Bray et al. 2008). However, less attention has been paid to the impacts and effects that such conservation schemes have on Indigenous peoples' lives.

Tania Li (2010) notes that it is important to explore how conservation schemes distinguish between forested and agricultural lands and raises questions about how risks of dispossession are being downloaded onto communities (386). Similarly, Andrew Walker (2004) observes that this distinction works to "arbo-realize" or cast Indigenous peoples as primarily forest dwellers. Importantly, while conservation schemes have largely been at the expense of Indigenous peoples, women have been particularly invisible in forest governance. This paper asks: What kinds of gender impacts and effects do these schemes have in places devastated by austerity measures? How do these conservation schemes intersect with the market and the production of cultural difference? Although agriculture has been an integral part of Mesoamerican Indigenous peoples' ways of life, an understanding of conservation as void of people effectively displaces Indigenous farmers away from their lands. In this conservation framework, ag-

riculture is a problem that requires intervention while Indigenous peoples are constructed as “forest dwellers” who have a romanticized relationship with their environments (Matthews 2005, 796; Walker 2004, 314). Moreover, while these conservation schemes are constructed as “just,” alternative economic development, they lack a gender focus, thus concealing how patriarchy and the legacy of colonialism have shaped resource conservation.

This article uses an intersectional lens, a critical political economy approach, and document analysis to explore the political, social, and economic dimensions of forest conservation in the Zapotec community of Santiago Lachiguri, Oaxaca. It shows that a naturalised understanding of the relationships “forest dwellers” have with their territories serves to foster new forms of capital accumulation and is coercive. In the current neoliberal context, conservation is shaped by international policies, national concerns, and local circumstances. An intersectional analysis of how power operates through the production of Indigenous difference, the greening of the economy, and the environment reveals neoliberal conservation as a racialized and gendered process that downloads the burden of protecting the environment onto the most vulnerable social groups. From this perspective, the focus of the intersectional analysis is not only about identities but also intersecting processes by which power and penalties are produced, reproduced, and resisted in contingent and relational ways (Dhamoon 2011, 234). According to Rita Dhamoon (2015), integrating power in intersectional analysis is important for at least two reasons. First, gender differentiation cannot be separated from other systems of domination, including colonialism, capitalism, and racism within which people operate and distinctive degrees of privilege and penalty are accorded. Second, power and penalty can operate simultaneously within and among marginalized communities, shaping the structure that maintains the matrix of oppression (30-31). Thus, my use of feminist insights of intersectionality pays attention to the ways in which the state, indigeneity, colonialism, and the economy operationalize the different ways in which Indigenous men and women are regulated relative to one another in Oaxaca. As a case study, Oaxaca provides insights into how neoliberal conservation has ignited new territorialized conflicts.

To respond to the questions stated above, I use

document analysis, which is a relevant method for exploring the motivations, intent, and purposes driving specific phenomena within historical and contemporary contexts. In this article, document analysis relied on theoretical prepositions, highlighting how “problems” are constructed at different scales and “rendered technical” through different strategies (Li 2007). I analyzed different types of documents, including the World Bank reports, government records, agrarian legislation, a community self-study, and press releases, in an effort to illuminate how neoliberal conservation is tied to specific modes of governance and subjectivities, which have disciplinary effects on people. This article is organized as follows. First, it traces the continuities between colonial constructions of the Indigenous Other and the representations that transpire in contemporary policies and resource management practices. Second, the article maps discussions of neoliberalism and its intersection with indigeneity and the environment and highlights how “problems” are depoliticized and rendered technical. Third, it discusses what kinds of impacts and effects neoliberal conservation has in places that have already been devastated by austerity measures. The fourth and fifth sections are concerned with the community of Lachiguri’s experience with conservation. Finally, the paper offers some concluding remarks.

### **Indigeneity and Nature**

Peoples considered Indigenous have long fascinated travelers, anthropologists, and missionaries. The representation of Indigenous peoples as “living in nature,” as reminiscence of primitive stages of life, has long been deployed by colonial powers and post-colonial states. The distinction between nature and culture facilitated a utilitarian approach to nature, which became natural resources that existed for human consumption and accumulation of wealth. William Cronon (1995) argues that, through this separation, entire ecosystems were replaced by wheat and cattle and thrived more for their economic value and than for their natural adaptation to new environments. Where land did not have economic use, nature was preserved as wilderness, supposedly “free” from human beings’ presence (69). Moreover, these understandings of nature and community created clearly delineated borders between those who were considered people and what was found beyond them and also between people and “savages.” Thus, far from be-



ing untouched by human beings, wilderness is a social construction of specific societies and times (69). This construction has functioned to dispossess Indigenous peoples by collapsing them into the realm of nature (Braun 2002). Moreover, characterizations of the “noble savage” functioned to effeminate the colonized Other and create gendered relationships between the latter and Europeans. In this regard, Maria Mies (1986) notes that, when Indigenous peoples and peasants are described as being “closer to nature,” they are considered “housewives,” whose work has no value (106).

These colonial representations continue to shape state policies and practices regulating Indigenous peoples’ access to natural resources. Indeed, expectations of “authentic” Indigenous traditional economic practices coexist alongside various criteria for political recognition (Sisson 2005, 39). Indigenous peoples are recognized to the extent that they rendered themselves legible through the performance of subsistence “hunting gathering” practices, which are bounded to an idealized stewardship of the land (Altamirano-Jiménez 2013, 211). In their demands for recognition and other material rewards, Indigenous peoples themselves have replicated these stereotypical meanings of indigeneity, which have had the effect of freezing their identities in time. As I will show in this paper, in the current neoliberal context, the processes through which the economy is organized, indigeneity is recognized, and the environment is regulated reinscribe these patterns of colonial, racial, and gender inequalities.

### **Neoliberalism and the “Will to Improve”**

This section maps neoliberal conservation and its intersection with the will to improve people’s lives and highlights how “problems” are rendered technical through different disciplinary strategies. Neoliberalism has often been discussed as a governance process that emphasizes the efficiency of the market, the regulation of public services, individuals’ responsibility, and government deregulation. In this process, the economy, society, and the environment are governed by networked interactions between states, international financial institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Jessop 2002). Although considered a hegemonic force, there is no single or unitary neoliberalism. Rather, it is a contradictory and messy process that materializes differently across diverse geo-political

spaces yet has important commonalities that account for patterns (Larner 2003; Peck 2004; Castree 2009). By applying the concept of governance to the management of the environment, scholars have shown that the incorporation of environmentalism into the neoliberal economy shapes complex interactions between nature and society (Watts and Peet 2004), which are reworked through colonialism and economic development (Robbins 2006).

Market-driven conservation of the environment or “neoliberal conservation” is here understood as the process through which the expansion of capitalism and protection of the environment become mutually compatible by transforming previously untradeable entities, such as ecosystem services, into commodities. Neoliberal conservation emphasizes a set of institutions, management practices, and discourses aimed at facilitating the commodification of nature’s services (McAfee 1999; Hason 2007; Igoe, Neves, and Brockington 2010). This model of conservation relies on the assumption that ecosystems are self-functioning entities where the various outputs or “free” services can be valued and incorporated into the market (Vacanti Brondo 2013). Although conservation policies begin from the conceptual division of nature from society, such policies are reworked when applied to inhabited environments in order to be legitimized as both promoting development and conservation (McAfee and Shapiro 2010; Li 2010).

Conservation of ecosystems started in the 1970s but it was not until the 1980s that a model of “debt-for-nature,” involving international environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), debt-holding governments, and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was implemented in Mexico. In 1982, the Mexican government announced that it could no longer meet its debt obligations and threatened to default on its borrowing. In response, the IMF demanded the substitution of state-driven development for market-oriented policies, which coincided with ideas about the state’s incapacity to manage the economy (Altamirano-Jimenez 2013, 157). Between 1982 and 1991, Mexico received thirteen structural and sectoral adjustment loans (Barry 1995). The accompanying structural reforms included investment deregulation, the elimination of import substitution policies, the privatization of publicly owned corporations, and substan-

tial reductions in price supports (Liverman and Vilas 2006). The IMF also proposed to “swap a portion of the country’s national debt for the conservation of forests and the titling of Indigenous communal lands, arguably forcing the ‘inept’ and ‘inefficient’ state to protect both Indigenous inhabitants and forested areas” (Altamirano-Jiménez 2013, 158).

Because most forests were and are inhabited by Indigenous communities, a relevant question at this juncture was: how to prevent this model of conservation from being perceived as land encroachment by Indigenous communities? As I show elsewhere, the debt-for-nature approach was justified as a deal that would benefit everyone. Indigenous peoples would get their lands titled and countries would get help fostering development while protecting forested areas (Altamirano-Jiménez 2013, 158). Though neoliberal conservation advocates often blame “corrupt” and “inefficient” states as major obstacles to environmental protection, state sponsored protected areas continue to be a central pillar of this model of conservation worldwide.

As a major environmental policy trend, neoliberal conservation involves the superior efficiency of the market, a shrinking state, participation of local communities, transnational networks, and the creation of legal mechanisms to title and privatize property rights to land, forest, water, and fisheries. A critically important aspect of this model of conservation is that it centers the “community as a bounded unity of action” (Li 2001, 157). This understanding is central not only for how communities figure in conservation but also for how ecosystems, struggles over resources, and identity are delimited. According to Li, “Communities” are constructed as entities affected by actions from the outside, concealing how processes of state formation and market involvement have already produced negative effects in specific places (159). Former director of the Centre for International Forestry Research, David Kaimowitz (2003) suggested that in countries of the global South where the rule of law is weak and spotty, only Indigenous communities that are “truly” committed to conserving and protecting the forest can “save” the environment. Thus, far from being counter posed to the market and state, communities are a reflection of how boundaries are constructed for specific economic purposes (Li 2001, 159).

In legitimizing market-driven conservation

projects, the idea that such projects are win-win solutions for different “stake holders” and for fostering democracy in the global South has been advanced (Igoe and Brockington 2007). In this framework, Indigenous and local communities supposedly win because this model of conservation forces governments to simultaneously title Indigenous land and fight poverty.

An increasing body of literature shows that this picture is far more complicated than the promises listed by advocates. Benjamin Kohl (2002), for example, notes that, although the stabilization of property regimes is usually represented as promoting good governance in the global South, this policy is embedded in asymmetrical power relations between the global North and South. Similarly, Katja Neves and Jim Igoe (2012) show that there is a “sociogeographical disconnect between the concentration of financial capital in the global north and the concentration of ecosystem use value in the global south” (175). Thus, far from communities being separated from the market and the state, neoliberal conservation involves processes of territorialization that bring them into the realm of the state for the purposes of controlling their resources (Igoe and Brockington 2007, 437).

In this regard, Li (2007) points out that, because in market-driven conservation schemes, it is places and the resources contained in them that are valued not people, conservation projects need to appeal to communities. Such projects must be presented as a form of economic development, as something that “improves” people’s lives. She asserts that the “will to improve” justifies actions that deliberately move people from places and rationalize their land uses, reshaping their landscapes, livelihoods, and identities. As a hallmark of colonial relations, the will to improve is not to dominate others but to enhance a target population’s capacity to act in certain ways (17). Li identifies two strategies through which advocates and policy makers translate the will to improve into development projects. The first one is “problematization” or the process of identifying the deficiencies that need to be corrected in a target population. The second strategy is the process of “rendering technical,” which refers to the practices involved in making complex and contested problems into merely technical matters (5-7). These strategies are useful to illuminate how neoliberal conservation shapes people’s behaviors and responses to artificially introduced systemic changes. Moreover,

such strategies are helpful to explore how problematization and rendering technical operates at different scales, highlighting the contradictions and disciplinary strategies produced in and through the implementation of neoliberal conservation.

An analysis of different World Bank reports illustrates how these strategies operate. In its 1990 report, the World Bank identified private property as the problem causing much of the poverty in Asian and Latin American rural communities (1990, 65). The report stated that the solution was to regularize communal property. Because in Mexico, Indigenous peoples' control over their lands had been maintained and recognized in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, neoliberal land reforms were aimed at creating different land tenure regimes. Following Jim Igoe and Dan Brockington (2007, 437), I use the concept of "reregulation" to illustrate how the Mexican state transformed previously untradeable entities, such as the *ejidos* and communal lands, into tradable commodities through privatization and titling of collective land rights. While regularizing property may be seen as a way to protect Indigenous landholdings, I am interested in showing how titling is the prototype of primitive accumulation, allowing capital to access different types of resources (Scarritt 2015, 7). As a prototype of capitalist accumulation, titling has imposed Western understandings of land uses that has had the effect of 'housewifizing' the autonomy and sociality of Indigenous peoples as their unpaid or poorly paid labour is conceived of as having no value (Isla 2014, 6).

As the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was being negotiated, the federal government modified several constitutional articles. Importantly, Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was transformed to liberalize Indigenous and peasants' control over their agricultural communal lands and *ejidos*. The *ejido* system, a form of land tenure in which plots could be individually used but neither sold nor bought, was legalized with Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which opened new spaces for landless peasants to reclaim lands and for Indigenous communities to get their historical lands recognized by the state. Article 27 had effectively shielded about half of the Mexican territory from the market and recognized Indigenous communities' rights to woodlands and water (Altamirano-Jimenez 2013, 142). However, it had legalized the

term *campesino* or peasant, which mediated relationships between the state and communities and even the latter often insisted that people could simultaneously be peasant and Indigenous.

With the counter agrarian reforms of 1992, two important changes were made. First, privatization of *ejido* lands transformed them into a commodity that could be sold, mortgaged, and rented. Second, titling of communal lands redefined people's relationship to a property as a bundle of rights. A new forestry law was also passed at this time to actively promote forest management partnerships between communities and the private sector. According to the reformed Constitution and the Agrarian Law, forest dwellers maintain control of their forests as long as they observe their "customary" land use practices, reproducing the perception that Indigenous peoples live in the forest. According to Nora Haenn (2006), forests were maintained under the communal tenure regime in order for the state to continue to maintain control over how forest resources are used (144). I would add, however, that the distinctive regulations for managing agricultural and forested lands expanded access to goods and services beyond forest resources. The distinction between agricultural and forested lands produced boundaries in previously contiguous regions and a set of intercultural intricacies around how resources are managed. By distinguishing between "peasants" and "Indigenous" communities, risks of dispossession and management of dispossession were differently distributed among communities. Moreover, while land plots were previously granted mainly to males, women had historically participated in agricultural activities and accessed resources informally. Reregulation of land effectively prevented women from having access to the resources they used to and from the inheritance rights they enjoyed before the counter reforms (Deere and León, 2000).

The modification of Article 4 (now Article 2) in 1992 recognized Indigenous peoples' collective rights and solidified a one-dimensional understanding of their identity based on the economic activities they supposedly perform. The fifth paragraph of Article 4 states that, as part of their political autonomy, Indigenous peoples and communities have the right to "conserve, improve their habitat, and preserve the integrity of their lands according to the terms stated in the constitution" (emphasis mine). Thus, who and what is controlled and

what gendered patterns are produced through processes of reregulation are important questions to consider.

Because “saving nature to sell” (McAfee 1999) is a central tenet of neoliberal conservation, in 1994, the World Bank recommended that, in order for nature to have exchange value, it had to be *untouched*. Later, in the report *Agriculture for Development*, the World Bank (2008) noted that subsistence agriculture had no place in the conservation of forests and recommended that forest dwellers adopt other livelihood practices (1). In these reports, the interdependence between agriculture and forestry in contributing to the livelihoods of rural communities was deemed irrelevant and Indigenous peoples’ relations to their lands were translated into a set of management practices aimed at adding value to their forests. Thus, under the guise of helping, reregulation of landholdings created the conditions for the expropriation of Indigenous labour and dispossession of lands and resources deeply affecting women. Although in many cases Indigenous women did not hold land plots, they harvest and grow plants for family consumption in spaces located between plots held by men or along bush lines. Through reregulation, women’s informal access to land was eroded, putting the burden of feeding families exclusively on women. According to Li (2010), governing Indigenous peoples in this way is no less significant than colonial, coercive forms of domination (7).

Protected areas have been even more actively established since the United Nations adopted the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation in 2002. This document called for signatory countries to designate at least ten percent of their territory as protected for the purposes of climate change mitigation. Right after the adoption of this global strategy, Mexico modified its legal and institutional framework once again for the purpose of increasing its number of protected areas. A year later, the Mexican government established a national program, Payments for Hydrological Services (PHS), and, in 2004, it created a follow-up program in the form of carbon offset and trading. Since then, the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) program, involving both hydrological services and carbon offset, has expanded to be the largest program in the world (McAfee and Shapiro 2010). Thus, to understand neoliberal conservation, power asymmetries among countries, private corporations, powerful ENGOs, marginalized communities, and men and women must be taken into consideration.

Who bears the burden of conserving the environment and who benefits from it are not irrelevant questions.

### **Austerity Measures: Planting Trees Instead of Maize?**

What kinds of impacts and effects does neoliberal conservation have in places that have already been devastated by austerity measures? As noted earlier, in 1982, when Mexico virtually defaulted on its foreign debt, the IMF demanded that the government initiate a series of structural adjustment programs to get back on track. Although structural adjustments increased cash crop production, in the countryside, economic restructuring was marked by the elimination of tariffs and import permits for agricultural goods, the end of subsidies, the dismantling of state-run agricultural institutions, and the elimination of the Mexican Coffee Institute, which used to provide credit for and help coffee producers to commercialize their products. The consequent contraction of domestic market prices, along with cuts in state support for agriculture, made traditional rural livelihoods extremely challenging, fueling massive migration as families struggled to make ends meet. Migration intensified the unpaid work of rural women and children and created a number of households headed by women who were forced to find new survival strategies.

As the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the state party, began to lose its stranglehold in the 1980s, notions about survival strategies circulated, downplaying the impact of aggressive austerity measures. One of the main actors in the construction of notions of survival skills and the poor’s social capital was the World Bank (González de la Rocha 2007, 46). Ideas about the endless resources of the poor together with the increasing presence of NGOs working with rural communities fit well with understandings of bringing the poor into the market. In this framework, the household acted as the primary social unit responsible for social reproduction despite the fact that this was also a site of production deeply affected by austerity measures (González de la Rocha 2007). In the countryside, the idea was that the poor could overcome their circumstances simply by accessing technical expertise, which in this case was provided by external “experts.” Economic projects, such as collective corn mills, organic vanilla, shade coffee, and honey, were also actively promoted by the government who used sustainable conservation aid to

co-opt opposition in the countryside, thereby creating the perception that those concerned with sustainability were Indigenous while those concerned with land distribution were peasants (Altamirano-Jiménez 1998, 69).

In 1982, in the forested regions of the Tehuantepec Isthmus, with the support from a Jesuit mission team, coffee farmers from seventeen Indigenous communities formed the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Isthmus Region (*Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo* [UCIRI]). Articulating notions of Indigenous reciprocity and sustainability, this organization was constituted as a cooperative that sought to help shade coffee producers bring their produce directly to the market in the absence of the MCI (Cobo and Bartra 2007, 77). By adapting to the changing economic, political, economic, and ideological conditions created by the neoliberal reforms in the early 1990s, UCIRI was not only capable of inserting itself into the global economy but also of fostering some form of regional sustainable development. Based on an entrepreneurial logic, local participation, and collective decision-making, this cooperative was able to access international markets under the rubric of fair trade coffee. Although women have participated in all aspects of production and, in some cases, were the heads of households, their participation in the organization governance structures has been limited (Altamirano-Jiménez 1998; Chávez-Becker and Natal 2012). UCIRI's commitment to advance equal gender relations has translated into the creation of women led projects however peripheral to coffee. As a result, Indigenous women's working time has expanded without having the same kind of support to promote their products.

Like other rural organizations, such as the Barzón movement, UCIRI attempted to fill the gaps left by a receding state and find ways to deal with recurrent economic crises in the countryside. Visions of a modernized Mexico entering the global economy clashed sharply with the reality experienced by Indigenous farmers and coffee producers and also non-Indigenous farmers in the late 1990s. In 2003, when the national PES program was established, Indigenous and peasant organizations had already formed the national coalition *El Campo no Aguantará Más* (The Countryside Cannot Take It Anymore). This movement had quickly gained momentum and demanded the renegotiation of NAFTA's agricultural chapter and the rollback of fed-

eral agricultural subsidies. This social movement also advanced the idea that, for PES to become successful, it needed to be centered on a different understanding of conservation, specifically one that connected peasants and Indigenous peoples' activities to the protection of the environment. In doing so, the *El Campo no Aguantará Más* movement called upon the Mexican state to acknowledge the cultural role of Indigenous agriculture and its role in sustaining all Mesoamerican peoples. This coalition also demanded that the government reject a notion of imposed development that constructed the countryside as "empty of farmers" and the forest as "devoid of people" (UNORCA 2007). According to Kathleen McAfee and Elizabeth N. Shapiro (2010), this movement shaped the evolution of Mexico's PES program. Although initially conceptualized as a market mechanism, PES in practice ended up combining market-oriented restructuring and state supervision with antipoverty goals (8).

President Felipe Calderón fully embraced PES as a rural anti-poverty program. In his words, Mexico's "natural riches are and should be the solution to problems of marginalization and poverty experienced in many rural and Indigenous communities. For this reason we have launched programs focused on payment for ecosystem services such as ProÁrbol (ProTree). With this program we can offer a dignified income for those who dedicate themselves to protect and restore our forests and woodlands, of which Indigenous peoples are the first owners" (Calderón Hinojosa 2007). Later at the Cancun Climate Change Conference in 2010, Calderón said: "we will pay small land holders to plant trees instead of maize on the mountains" (Vigna 2012). In minimizing the role of agriculture to Indigenous peoples, Calderón noted that it was only a matter of choosing what to plant. Moreover, despite the key role Indigenous women play in caring for the ecosystems they live in, women seldom benefit from PES. Since communities are not homogeneous, women's absence from the management of natural resources is replicated in government policies, decision-making processes, and much of the technical assistance provided to communities.

In a context of recurrent economic crises, austerity measures, and the state's inability to offer meaningful support to the countryside, PES became a band-aid solution with pervasive effects. On the one hand, it continued to separate people from their

modes of production and their lands. On the other, by restructuring subsistence agriculture, PES became a means of dealing with *de facto* Indigenous dispossession. As members of *El Campo no Aguanta Más* observed, as a mechanism to alleviate poverty, PES is deeply misleading in that the no-touch forest policy can potentially accelerate the “abandonment of the forest and of the people who live in forested regions” (Merino Pérez et al. 2004, 6). To understand the impact of PES in specific communities, let us discuss the community of Lachiguiri’s experience.

### Dropping Conservation Out?

Oaxaca is located in southwestern Mexico, next to the states of Puebla, Chiapas, Guerrero, and Veracruz. Besides being the most culturally diverse state, Oaxaca has the largest Indigenous population in the country. According to the 2000 official data (Consejo Nacional de Población 2004), 48.8% of the population belongs to one of the 16 different Indigenous peoples inhabiting eight distinctive regions. Oaxaca is also one of the poorest states in the country. Indigenous peoples’ livelihood strategies combine subsistence agriculture, gathering, artisan production, and remittances from both national and international migration to sustain an increasingly transnationalized rural population. Oaxaca has 570 municipalities, more than any other state in the country. Historically, the creation of municipalities was one way through which Indigenous communities were able to maintain their territorial and political autonomy (Velásquez Cepeda 1998; Recondo 2001).

The municipality of Santiago Lachiguiri is located in the Tehuantepec Isthmus and inhabited mostly by Zapotecs who are ruled according to their own legal traditions and institutions. The main authority is the assembly of *comuneros* or communal landholders, mostly males. The municipality covers an area of approximately 26,000 hectares, which are communally owned by 30 villages and communities. In 1525, the Spanish Crown recognized the land title and the collective rights of the Zapotec communities to this territory (Schmidt 2010, 15). Most of the area is mountainous and covered with forests. The *Cerro de las Flores* (Mountain of Flowers) contains forests that many believe capture and filter large amounts of fresh water (Cobo and Bartra 2007). The numerous natural springs on the mountain are

used by people for water consumption and to provide water to the Benito Juárez dam. The economy of this municipality is based on maize but other crops, such as beans, squash, and chillies, are also cultivated for self-consumption.

Coffee provides a source of income for small farmers and has been particularly important to the recent political history of Santiago Lachiguiri as this community is part of the fair trade cooperative UCIRI. Until the late 1970s, small producers depended on the prices imposed by the MCI and were unable to bring their coffee directly to the market. When the PES program started, it primarily targeted shade coffee producers who already had an “eco-friendly market experience.” Santiago Lachiguiri became the first community to accept the scheme of Voluntarily Protected Areas in Mexico (Cobo and Bartra 2007, 121).

According to community members, when the representatives from the National Commission for Protected Areas (CONANP) and contracted surveyors first came to Santiago Lachiguiri in 2001, they painted a picture full of benefits for the community and encouraged people to voluntarily certify a portion of their lands, specifically the Mountain of Flowers (Schmidt 2010, 19). In August 2003, the communal assembly decided to declare part of the territory a protected area for only five years as an experiment. Without the communal assembly’s knowledge, CONANP certified a conservation area that included the flanks of the mountain where over 140 smallholders cultivate the land. Moreover, the certification was issued for a period of 30 years. CONANP, on the other hand, has insisted that the local inhabitants freely participated in the process and were properly informed (Vigna 2012). However, communal landholders maintained that the certification documents never clearly laid out the consequences of “preservation” and “conservation” schemes for communal landholders. The documents briefly stated that lands in the preservation area were “untouchable” (Vigna 2012; Schmidt, 2010; Barmeyer 2012). The immediate consequence of this certification was that all agricultural activities were banned in the untouchable zone. This community, like many others, practices slash-and-burn cultivation wherein land is cleared, burned, and then planted every seven years. Although this ancient technique has been crucial to the maintenance of healthy ecosystems, *comuneros*

have been targeted as “fire setters” who destroy the environment (Matthews 2005). According to *comuneros*, the model of conservation being imposed forces them to “change our production methods, even if it makes no sense in ecological terms” (Vigna 2012).

Moreover, because conservation is often presented to communities as a way to improve their lives, people hoped that the certification process would bring some needed economic benefit and prevent further migration. In my view, this situation reveals that Indigenous communities are neither naturally conservationists nor “fire setters” and that such constructions are embedded in complex power relations. For many Indigenous communities in Oaxaca, the search for economic alternatives cannot be separated from the depopulation of the countryside. However, PES has failed to improve peoples’ standard of living. For example, in this particular case incentives were offered only to some families, not the community. Out of 120 smallholders deprived from accessing their lands, only 15 were given assistance, creating mistrust among community members and the perception that some individuals were given preferential treatment (Barmeyer 2012, 55).

Feeling betrayed, community members voted to drop the area’s “preserved area” status in 2011. A representative of the communal assembly observed: “The government has deceived us. We are still the legitimate owners of the land, but we have lost control of it” (Vigna, 2012). To these Indigenous communities, a model of neoliberal conservation contributes to declining health and nutrition as a large subset of the services the forest provides to the communities (including agricultural produce, hunting sites, and gathering grounds) are abrogated or diminished in exchange for insufficient and selective payments. Although food is deeply gendered, Zapotec women who are responsible for feeding their families are, ironically, silenced in this debate. However, external experts act on the food and bodies of Indigenous peoples in the global South.

In the context of recurrent austerity measures and the impact of ongoing neoliberal restructuring, PES may have been seen as an incentive for Indigenous shade coffee farmers but not as a solution in itself. Although there may be some success stories, the government has largely failed to provide economic alternatives for Indigenous communities living in resource-rich environments. Moreover, the government has not been

able to fully convince Indigenous communities that planting trees instead of corn is a life alternative. To the communities living in this region, the main beneficiaries of conservation schemes are usually outsiders, the surveyors and evaluators who are being paid for their studies, the state, big businesses seeking to access and control biodiversity, and corrupt officials skimming off the funds intended for communities. As McAfee and Shapiro (2010) contend, despite PES being envisioned as a market form of biodiversity management, the state continues to be the most important buyer of ecosystem services. To small Indigenous coffee producers, conservation and its exclusive focus on biodiversity leaves the work they do taking care of perennial crops, such as coffee, cacao, and vanilla vines, grown in conjunction with shade trees, out of the equation. From this point of view, ecosystems are constituted by human non-human relationships and interactions. Neoliberal conservation simultaneously removes Indigenous peoples from their lands and appropriates the work they do to protect their forests. Indigenous women are the hardest hit by the ongoing restructuring of the countryside. Rigid gender roles within communities and lack of participation in decision-making structures simply mean that women bear the burden of being heads of the household without having a say on how communal lands are used.

### **The Flowers Mountain: Stewardship as Relationships**

When the communal assembly of Santiago Lachiguiri demanded the early cancellation of their forest certification, it also approved a new communal statute on the management of their forests. Several articles in the document state that the communal assembly is the authority, not the individual landholder. The communal statute states that collective participation and informed consent are required in all issues related to communal lands. The statute notes that the regulation, maintenance, and control of ancestrally conserved lands remains in the community and that PES will be received only on an unconditional basis (Schmidt 2010, 22; Barmeyer 2012, 55). As stated in different forums, Santiago Lachiguiri is not against conservation *per se* but against a neoliberal model that dispossesses Indigenous communities from their lands and resources.

In the recent communal statute of Santiago Lachiguiri, Zapotec *comuneros* center the traditional *milpa* (agriculture plots), which is an ancient, traditional

agricultural system that maintains the balance between food production and caring for the mountain and forests. Caring for the mountain not only involves resource management practices but also complex interactions, ceremonies and fiestas through which healthy ecosystems are co-produced by nature and Indigenous small-scale farmers. Accordingly, it is the relationship of care between nature and people that produces healthy ecosystems, not the separation of people from their lands. Moreover, the emphasis on the historical and cultural role of Indigenous agriculture rejects a stereotypical understanding of the “forest dweller” or noble savage representation. In connecting subsistence agriculture to an ancient collective Mesoamerican past, diverse organizations stand against the arborealization of Indigenous peoples and the artificial division between the categories “peasant” and “Indigenous.” Shade coffee producers not only harvest coffee but they also cultivate their food; they can be both peasants and Indigenous. In 2009, the *Red en Defensa del Maíz*, a network of environmentalists, Indigenous communities, and corn producers, issued a declaration in which it was noted: “The Indigenous peoples of Mexico created maize, they are the guardians and creators of the existing diversity of corn. Indigenous peoples’ rights are crucial to the preservation of such diversity and food sovereignty.” Similarly, in 2012, at the Indigenous Peoples International Conference on Corn, participants stressed: “Our struggles to protect corn as a source of our lives cannot be separated from our struggles to defend our forests, lands, water, traditional knowledge and self-determination” (Declaration of Santo Domingo Tomaltepec 2012). In challenging hegemonic narratives of Indigenous agriculture as environmentally destructive, corn has become central to the identity of Mesoamerican Indigenous peoples and a symbol of their environmental knowledge. Indigenous peoples’ efforts to preserve subsistence agriculture and the traditional practices it is associated with hinges on notions of neoliberal development and national narratives that emphasize nature as an ever growing entity, ready to be exploited.

## Conclusion

The case presented here illuminates the conflicts and contradictions produced in and through neoliberal conservation schemes, which are void of people. Although conservation has been represented as a win-win

situation, an intersectional analysis of different axes of domination and oppression reveals conservation as a gendered and racialized form of capital accumulation that rests on the dispossession of Indigenous communities. In these conservation schemes, Indigenous agriculture has become the problem that requires intervention while payment for ecosystem services has become the solution to improve people’s lives. In a context of restructuring and recurrent austerity measures, payments for conserving forests have become a program for supposedly alleviating rural poverty. However, while these handouts may bring some limited benefit, they still push Indigenous farmers away from their lands and conceal the ways in which patriarchy is embedded in market driven protection of the environment. What is at stake in debates on climate change mitigation is how neoliberal conservation reproduces power asymmetries, gendered dispossession, and a neo-colonial division of labour. Thus, in this context, the will to improve is a technique of power to manage those groups of people who have become an obstacle to capitalist accumulation.

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# Intersectionality and the United Nations World Conference Against Racism

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**Abigail B. Bakan** is Professor and Chair in the Department of Social Justice Education (SJE) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and cross-appointed to the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto.  
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**Yasmeen Abu-Laban** is Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta.  
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## Abstract

This article analyzes the 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa. Utilizing original interviews with civil society delegates in the United States and Canada, government documents and media and academic accounts, we challenge prevailing interpretations of the WCAR to show that it was an important space for expressions of an explicit feminist intersectionality approach, especially the intersection of racism with gender. Our findings demonstrate how intersectionality was relevant to the discussions of both state and civil society delegates and served to highlight racialized, gendered, and other discriminatory patterns. Based on this evidence, we argue that the WCAR process played a significant role in advancing a global conversation about intersectionality and therefore carried potential for advancing an anti-racist agenda for the twenty-first century. That this is not widely understood or highlighted has to do with challenges to the WCAR, particularly the withdrawal of key states from the process and a negative discourse concerning discussions and scholarly analysis of the WCAR process. We suggest that acknowledging the presence of intersectionality in the WCAR process gestures towards a more accurate historical record. It also suggests both the opportunities and constraints afforded by intersectional analysis in moments of transition and mainstreaming. As such, the “Durban moment,” and the WCAR more broadly, are highly relevant for the study of women, politics, and human rights over

the first decade of the twenty-first century.  
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## Résumé

Cet article analyse la Conférence mondiale contre le racisme (CMCR) de 2001 qui s’est tenue à Durban, en Afrique du Sud. À l’aide d’entrevues originales avec des délégués de la société civile aux États-Unis et au Canada, ainsi que de documents gouvernementaux et de rapports médiatiques et universitaires, nous contestons les interprétations dominantes de la CMCR pour montrer qu’elle a été une plate-forme importante pour les expressions d’une approche féministe intersectionnelle explicite, en particulier l’intersection entre la race et le genre. Nos résultats démontrent comment l’intersectionnalité était pertinente aux discussions des délégués des gouvernements et de la société civile et a permis de mettre en évidence des schémas racialisés, axés sur le genre et autres schémas discriminatoires. Sur la base de ces preuves, nous soutenons que le processus de la CMCR a joué un rôle important pour faire progresser la conversation mondiale sur l’intersectionnalité et a donc eu un potentiel important pour faire progresser la cause antiraciste au 21<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le fait que cela ne soit pas largement compris ou mis en évidence est dû aux contestations de la CMCR, en particulier au retrait d’états clés du processus et à un discours négatif concernant les discussions et l’analyse scientifique du processus de la CMCR. Nous suggérons que le fait de reconnaître la présence de l’intersectionnalité dans le processus de la CMCR va en direction d’un compte-rendu historique plus correct. Cela évoque également à la fois les possibilités fournies et les contraintes imposées par l’analyse intersectionnelle dans les périodes de transition et d’intégration. En tant que tel, le « moment Durban », et la CMCR de manière plus générale, sont très pertinents aux études sur les femmes, les politiques et les droits de la personne au cours de la première décennie du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle.

## **Introduction: Anti-Racism, Gender and “Related Intolerance”<sup>1</sup>**

In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Declaration not only framed an international vision of global equality, but also “gave women a powerful tool to use in their campaign for equal political and economic rights, social status, and full citizenship” (Black 2012, 133). The UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) saw continued attention to women’s rights in the global arena. Arguably, however, it was the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women held in 1995 that marked a qualitative advance, producing a substantive Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration.

Sustained scholarly consideration of the role of the UN regarding women’s rights has followed, including attention to the relationship of UN policies to social movements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), global governance, violence, security, gender mainstreaming, the rights of the girl child, and human rights (Dutt 1996; Baden and Goetz 1997; Chappell 2008; Gaer 2009; Bunch 2012; Black 2012; Qureshi 2013). Much less scholarly attention, however, has traced the influence of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa. This conference, we maintain, could also be understood as a milestone in marking global attention to women’s rights, specifically in close connection to anti-racism. While there has been scant scholarly attention to this event, the WCAR explicitly referred to “intersectionality” and centred the intersection of gender and race in the multifarious events that surrounded what we refer to as the “Durban moment.”

The incursion of intersectionality reflects on the wider impact, including widespread global events and controversies that described the jagged parameters of a world conference against racism taking place in post-apartheid South Africa. This context included the timing of the event, within days of September 11, 2001, and the related opening of the “war on terror.” It marked the beginning of the new millennium with a broad range of rising issues. These issues included neoliberal austerity, environmental crisis, the rights of stateless peoples such as the Roma and the Palestinians, the politics of apartheid in South Africa, and global hu-

man rights associated with racialized and Indigenous peoples internationally.

The impact of the WCAR, specifically in relation to intersectional feminist theory and policy, are, of course, difficult to measure. Indeed, ongoing research is needed on the effect of UN conferences on state policy and practice and the challenge of assessing impact (Schechter 2005). What is clear, however, is that the conversation significantly changed in Durban in 2001 and, relatedly, that there has been a notable lack of attention to its significance. This lack of attention, we maintain, has come at some cost, including neglect of the specific and contested ways in which the WCAR adapted the feminist notion of intersectionality to the global scene. Addressing this lacuna provides the focus of this article.

The argument presented here is both simple and complex. In terms of the former, we emphasize that something important occurred in the context of this global arena in the continuing mainstreaming of feminist intersectionality. The WCAR signaled a transition from the local to the global, reflecting wider processes and in turn advancing the potential of transformation in varied national contexts. The moment bears significantly in the current and expanding scholarly attention on intersectionality and also in considering the impact of UN human rights discourse on state policy and social movements. We do not, however, suggest that this moment was unhindered by the limitations of liberal anti-discrimination politics, which is also relevant in terms of ongoing discourse surrounding intersectionality (for a critique, see, for example, Crenshaw 2011).

A more complex set of circumstances backgrounds the significance of this transitional moment. We maintain that the unusual level of controversy that surrounded the WCAR process, including the withdrawal of key state delegates amidst escalated charges and considerable “politics of emotion” (Ahmed 2004), has inhibited recognition of the role of the WCAR in advancing feminist intersectionality. We place the claims and actions of state withdrawal in a different light, suggesting that such action was in fact damaging and misplaced. Specifically, the claims of the US and Israel (states that withdrew from the WCAR in 2001) that the WCAR was not a conference opposing racism, but one advancing it in the form of anti-Semitism (or

anti-Jewish racism) is not substantiated by our findings. While the Canadian state delegates participated in the WCAR in 2001, under subsequent Conservative administrations led by then Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2005-2015), Canada led in a global movement to condemn the impact and ongoing efforts of the WCAR process. Noting the significance of gender in this UN sponsored event may serve to signal a repositioning of this negative discourse. Such a reframing may allow for a more nuanced contextualization of this important 2001 world conference taking place in an age of transition, notably situated in post-apartheid South Africa, and support further research on race, gender, and human rights.

This argument is part of a wider research agenda, which suggests that the WCAR in 2001 both reflected and contributed to an expanding conversation regarding racism and anti-racism on the global stage (Abu-Laban and Bakan forthcoming). In this article, we focus on the place of feminist intersectionality in this transitional moment. In fact, the conference could be seen to mark a turning point, when intersectionality moved from an approach in feminist theory to a more overtly political analytic, when we witness intersectionality “going global.” We demonstrate that gender and intersectionality had a substantial presence. We further argue that the full potential of the presence of gender and intersectionality has yet to be realized. Attending to this unrealized potential provides clues into the opportunities and constraints afforded by intersectional analysis in moments of crisis and transition.

In the following discussion, we address specifically the relationship of gender to anti-racism in the UN context, as it has emerged in the WCAR process in Durban in 2001, and the impact in subsequent WCAR events in Geneva (UN Durban Review Conference, 2009) to New York (UN Tenth Anniversary Commemoration high level meeting 2011) over the first decade of the twenty-first century. This article is based on document analysis and field interviews with civil society actors involved in the WCAR process. Interviews with twenty stakeholders (UN officials and leaders in NGOs participating in and supporting the WCAR process between 2001 and 2011) were conducted jointly by the authors in face-to-face interviews in Ottawa, Toronto, and New York, as well as by Skype or telephone in Europe and the Middle East, between March 2012 and

August 2013. Interview subjects were selected following a search of pivotal NGO representation at the conference, followed by a snowball method of generating no more than two interview leads for further interview recruitment. The authors adopted an arms-length approach to the interview subjects, noting that our interest was scholarly and that we were not ourselves present at the WCAR events. Data from these NGO interviews, combined with original UN documentary and archival analysis, indicates that the WCAR process was far more complex, and more positive, than simplistic narratives supporting the withdrawal of state delegates would suggest (see, for example, Bayefsky 2002).

The discussion proceeds in four parts. First, we revisit the concept of intersectionality and situate our understanding of the term in relation to its relevance to the Durban moment of the WCAR. Second, we demonstrate the significant presence of gender and intersectionality in the Durban WCAR process based on a close study of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action (DDPA) and the NGO Forum final declaration. Third, the experiences of civil society participants are considered, drawing largely on original interview material. And fourth, we consider the impact of state withdrawal from the 2001 WCAR and into the decade following, noting discernable frustrations among those who attended, specifically regarding the potential for intersectional analysis. We conclude with a brief revisiting of the conflicted context in which the WCAR occurred and suggest that a more positive perspective on these events could inspire constructive research and policy conversations about race, gender, and human rights.

### **1. The Presence of Gender and Intersectionality: The Durban Moment**

The WCAR events at Durban were surrounded by enthusiasm with a sense of great potential. The conference was actually a twofold event, running parallel to another UN conference dedicated to advancing participation of non-governmental organizations internationally. The state delegates attended the WCAR, which took place over the period August 31 to September 8, 2001. The UN Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Forum, also taking place in Durban, South Africa, but in a different venue, was held from August 28 to September 1, 2001.

The UN WCAR conference was responsible for the production of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action (DDPA), a document produced by a consensus process of the participant states (UN WCAR 2001a). The DDPA is a sustaining statement of the events at the WCAR and includes considerable recognition of the intersection between gender-based and race-based forms of discrimination and oppression. Though the United States and Israel withdrew from the 2001 Durban conference, the remaining states (including Canada) concluded unanimous agreement on the wording of the DDPA (UN WCAR 2001a). The NGO Forum also produced a declaration, which similarly recognized the role of gender and an intersectional analysis (UN WCAR 2001c). The NGO Forum was comprised of diverse civil society delegates, representing a broad array of interests internationally. While more representative of activists from countries around the world who were deeply engaged in social movements advancing anti-racist politics, the event and its declaration were viewed quite differently by state officials than the officially delegated WCAR. The Durban moment, *inter alia*, reflected these simultaneous discussions at the formal UN conference as well as the NGO Forum, both of which featured heightened awareness of the intersections of racial discrimination with other forms of oppression, specifically gender-based oppression.

The concept of “intersectionality” deserves brief review in this context. It has generated extensive discussions and carries multiple meanings (McCall 2005; Farris 2015; Siltanen and Doucet 2008). In this discussion, we understand the term as one which insists upon the inherent interdependence of difference based on race and gender and on the integral role of such interdependence in the social relations of global political economy. The term itself is traceable to the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), drawing on the concept of the “intersection” to describe particularly the experiences of black women in the US legal system and grounding the approach in the scholarly contexts of critical race legal theory and feminist perspectives on social justice. Crenshaw is widely seen to have originated and popularized the term in her 1989 article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (Yuval-Davis 2006). There are, of course, many contexts that have both pre-dated and

followed Crenshaw’s identification and naming of intersectionality. The insistence on the interdependence of race, gender, and political economy is not uniquely or distinctly traceable to the term. These relations have been variously identified experientially, historically, theoretically, and methodologically (Combahee River Collective 1977; Bannerji 1995, 2014; Davis [1981] 1983; Hill Collins 1986), sometimes termed as “interlocking” (Razack 1998), “linked” (Guillaumin [1995] 2003), or in “connection” (Stasiulis 1990).

Arguably, however, intersectionality has struck a resounding chord, dominant in contemporary feminist theory (Puar 2012), addressing “the most pressing problem facing contemporary feminism—the long and painful legacy of its exclusions” (Davis 2011, 45). The specific inspiration and newly energized debates in feminist theory and discourse continue to be traced to “the specific socio-economic situation of Black women...[and] the simultaneity and mutual co-constitution of different categories of social differentiation” that foreground Crenshaw’s original framing (Lutz, Vivar, and Supik 2011, 2). The substantive presence of “intersectionality,” as a notion emphasizing gender as an elemental feature of racism and anti-racism globally and specifically as an identified concept, is, therefore, significant. The presence of intersectionality in the WCAR is explicit, even forwarded as part of the understanding of “related intolerance” that was addressed in the full title of the 2001 conference. This specific linking of racism to gender-based discrimination in United Nations (UN) human rights discourse was the product of years of organizing among civil society delegations and its inclusion merits scholarly attention.

During the Durban moment, “22 parallel events” that comprised the UN WCAR activities in Durban were organized (UN WCAR 2001b, 178, para. 5). Among these was a UN workshop on “The Intersectionality of Gender and Race Discrimination” sponsored by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); also notable was a panel “Gender, Race and Ethnicity: Women at the Intersection of Peace, Justice and Human Rights” organized by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Significantly, Columbia Law Professor and anti-racist feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw served as rapporteur for the Expert Group on Race and Gender at the WCAR held in Durban (Columbia Law School 2011) and was

a high profile participant at both the UN WCAR main conference and the NGO Forum. Also notable is the fact that Crenshaw (2000) authored the background paper on “Gender-Related Aspects of Race Discrimination” for the UN world conference. Sherene Razack, then Professor at the University of Toronto and now at the University of California, Los Angeles, attended the 2001 Durban conference as a result of her work as a board member for Across Boundaries (a mental health center for people of colour) as well as her work with the Riverdale Immigrant Women’s Center in Toronto. She specifically stressed the importance of the presence of “Kim Crenshaw who did a workshop on intersectionality” at the 2001 meeting in South Africa (Authors’ Interview, July 3, 2012).

Crenshaw herself has noted the significance of the WCAR process in advancing recognition of an intersectional analysis of race and gender oppression. As she aptly emphasized, the preparatory conferences that addressed the centrality of gendered relationships in explaining the experience of racism laid a strong basis not only for impacting the Durban moment, but also for enduring the challenges that followed. Without minimizing the impact of returning to the United States (US) and facing a negative context where NGO “discursive communities were potentially fractured,” Crenshaw noted:

The fact that the potential was even there is remarkable, in and of itself. That is something that might not have been predicted in the years leading up to this particular conference. In various disaggregated places [intersectional analysis] was taken up...At least getting a toehold as an articulable set of observations has allowed us, in the aftermath, to maintain this aggregated effort for a broader understanding of the dialogue. (Authors’ interview, August 16, 2013)

The inclusion of intersectionality in the WCAR process offers, we suggest, promise, but at the same time indicates cautionary attention, characteristic of gender mainstreaming in other contexts. Discussions of intersectionality have importantly advanced the conversations regarding race and gender from the margins to the centre, with all the potential opportunities in terms of power and policy, as well as the risks and obstacles, this involves (Dhamoon 2011). As feminist anti-rac-

ist scholars have noted for some time, an analysis that attends to the realities of race and gender in the experiences of women of colour is not simply a matter of advancing a “list” of various forms of discrimination, but demands reframing our understanding of state processes and social relations (Bakan and Kobayashi 2000; Stasiulis and Bakan 2005; Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Abu-Laban 2008).

These challenges are notable in the WCAR process. As we note in the following section, the DDPA final language insisted on defining gender narrowly, according to a male/female binary. In so doing, the document resisted association with same-sex, transgender, or queer gendered connotations. The NGO Forum supported a wider understanding of “gender,” which is important in signifying the array of conversations present as the work of the conference was conducted. The DDPA could be seen to be operating within a broadly “anti-discrimination” frame, pivoting around the principle axis of race and racism. While the NGO Forum Declaration was far more comprehensive, the event was also a distinct, civil society site, a locus of less legitimacy in terms of state commitments. In this sense, the Durban moment was an important entry point into intersectional analysis, but only an entry point. The theoretical work of advancing a consistent “multi-dimensional” analysis, rather than one resting on “single-axis” notions of discrimination based on either race or gender (Crenshaw 2011, 25), could arguably not be accomplished through a single UN event, even one including two parallel global conferences, multiple panels and workshops, and a wide array of international representatives.

## **2. The Durban Declaration and Program of Action and the Non-Governmental Organization Forum Declaration**

A close look at the DDPA and the NGO Forum declaration reveal substantive presence of gender and intersectionality. Intersectionality was clearly integrated in the 2001 Durban Declaration and Program of Action (DDPA), the principal and sustaining product of the Durban WCAR. The DDPA remains as a significant document, with the potential to impact states and civil society actors in important ways. For example, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which monitors the implementation of



the 1969 UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by requiring states to submit regular reports, specifically calls on countries to attend to the DDPA in its responses to these reports (Authors' Interview, UN Official, April 18, 2013). While implementation continues to be voluntary and challenging to measure in terms of impact, the DDPA can be seen to be a central part of UN communications with governments.

In the DDPA, gender is specifically highlighted as an elemental feature of anti-racism. The DDPA preamble reaffirms that states:

...have the duty to protect and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all victims, and that they should apply a gender perspective, recognizing the multiple forms of discrimination which women can face, and that the enjoyment of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights is essential for the development of societies throughout the world... (UN WCAR, 2001b, 8)

The DDPA defines "gender," however, very specifically, stating in a footnote at the outset of the document that:

For the purpose of this Declaration and Programme of Action, it was understood that the term 'gender' refers to the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society. The term 'gender' does not indicate any meaning different from the above. (UN WCAR 2001b, 75, n.1)

We learned in our field interviews that, in the views of several state delegates, this footnote was considered an important proviso, specifically included to avoid references to matters relevant to the broad panoply of LGBTQ rights issues. "Gender" was not to be read outside "the two sexes" described as either male or female.

With recognition of what appears to be a deliberate avoidance of the human rights dimensions of LGBTQ issues, the attention to gender issues in the DDPA applies to women and girls and it is in the context of racialized women's rights that "intersectionality" is employed. For example, in addressing sexual violence, the term "intersection" is explicitly adopted. The DDPA urges states:

To recognize that sexual violence which has been systematically used as a weapon of war, sometimes with the ac-

quiescence or at the instigation of the State, is a serious violation of international humanitarian law that, in defined circumstances, constitutes a crime against humanity and/or a war crime, and that the intersection of discrimination on grounds of race and gender makes women and girls particularly vulnerable to this type of violence, which is often related to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. (UN WCAR 2001b, 37, para. 54a)

Further, the DDPA addresses the sexual exploitation and racial discrimination that arises from certain forms of migration and affirms:

The urgent need to prevent, combat and eliminate all forms of trafficking in persons, in particular women and children, and recognize that victims of trafficking are particularly exposed to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. (UN WCAR 2001b, 14, para. 30)

Additionally, the DDPA acknowledges a broad range of inequalities that may arise from the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The DDPA holds that state delegates:

...are convinced that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance reveal themselves in a differentiated manner for women and girls, and can be among the factors leading to a deterioration in their living conditions, poverty, violence, multiple forms of discrimination, and the limitation or denial of their human rights. We recognize the need to integrate a gender perspective into relevant policies, strategies and programmes of action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in order to address multiple forms of discrimination. (UN WCAR 2001b, 18-19, para. 69)

Turning to the NGO Forum declaration, the notion of intersectionality is similarly widely recognized. Here, however, "gender" was addressed in a much more comprehensive manner than in the DDPA, attending not only to discrimination against women and girls, but also to those who face discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The NGO Forum declaration reflects a broad approach to racism and gender oppression both in the context of many forms of discrimination (including issues related to LGBTQ

oppression) and as a distinct experiential category. The preamble reaffirms that:

...all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inalienable, and that all human beings are entitled to all these rights irrespective of distinction of any kind such as race, class, colour, sex, citizenship, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, caste, descent, occupation, social/economic status or origin, health, including HIV/AIDS status, or any other status. (UN WCAR 2001c, 2, para. 6)

The preamble further notes that:

...racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance create serious obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights and result in aggravated discrimination against communities who already face discrimination on the basis of class, colour, sex, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion or caste, descent, work, socio-economic status or origin, health, including HIV/AIDS status, or any other status. (UN WCAR 2001c, 6, para. 37)

In the body of the NGO Forum declaration, a section titled “Gender” explicitly highlights intersectionality. To quote:

An intersectional approach to discrimination acknowledges that every person be it man or woman exists in a framework of multiple identities, with [sic.] factors such as race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, citizenship, national identity, geo-political context, health, including HIV/AIDS status and any other status are all determinants in one’s experiences of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances. An intersectional approach highlights the way in which there is a simultaneous interaction of discrimination as a result of multiple identities. (UN WCAR 2001c, 21, para 119)

The concept of intersectionality also arises in the context of “refugees, asylum seekers, stateless and internally displaced persons,” where it is stressed that “[w]omen constitute 80% of the world’s refugees...[and] are victimized due to the intersectionality of gender and dis-

ability and other forms of discrimination” (UN WCAR 2001c, 32, para. 169). It is also referred to with respect to trafficking, where it is noted that “[w]omen and children are especially vulnerable,” resulting from the “intersectionality of gender, disability, race and other forms of discrimination” (UN WCAR 2001c, 36, para. 193).

The NGO Forum declaration includes its own “Programme of Action” that calls for member states to adopt and implement comprehensive legislation that “should integrate a full gender dimension, taking into consideration intersectional discrimination faced by marginalized communities and vulnerable groups” (UN WCAR 2001c, 43, para. 220). The action plan also calls for the establishment of “programs of affirmative action” that attend particularly to those impacted by the effects of intersectional forms of discrimination (UN WCAR 2001c, 43, para. 226) and makes similar calls regarding the judicial system (para. 258), disability (para. 282), religious intolerance (para. 428), and in regard to discrimination against young people and the girl child (para. 469).

### **3. Gendering the Durban Moment: Civil Society in North America and Beyond**

As suggested by both the DDPa and the NGO Forum declaration, the UN WCAR process at Durban, South Africa in 2001 marked a significant moment in advancing a global agenda against racism that was attentive to the specific ways in which racialized and gendered forms of discrimination affect and amplify each other in intersecting ways in the global political economy. What is equally significant is that this attention to intersectionality was seen to be integral to the WCAR experience for many civil society representatives who often participated as delegates for both of these conferences. For example, David Gesspass, Past President of the US-based National Lawyers’ Guild, attended the 2001 Durban conference as part of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. He highlighted the relevance of gender to NGO discussions in 2001. As he recalled, “That was always emphasized...Everybody is an amalgam...you face different forms of oppression, or you come from different positions of power as a consequence of how that’s made up” (Authors’ Interview, April 13, 2013).

A number of prominent NGOs, particularly in the US and Canada, attended to the voices of an emer-

gent alliance of Africans and African descendants in forwarding global attention to the legacy of Atlantic slavery and the need to address reparations and redress. Importantly, African and African-American women were pivotal in this movement. Another participant, Sarah White of the Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights, singled out the relevance of gender in the African-American delegation's contribution in Durban. White, a union activist and leader in the largest strike of African-American women in Mississippi history, spoke to officials at both of the 2001 WCAR events in Durban (Authors' Interview, July 16, 2013). As she recalled:

When we went to Africa women talked about different violations as women. A lot of those issues were brought up in different functions I went to...Here [in Mississippi], on the jobs we had mostly women...but the men dominated us, the bosses dominated us, and tried to have us feeling that we were less fitting, less capable as women, that our voices didn't matter as women. And these are issues crossing countries—paid less on jobs, not given positions because men feel we are not capable to carry these positions out...So a lot of this did arise during the conference and women voiced their opinion, and talked about the domination and not being violated, and this is even in the [DDPA] guidelines. (Authors' Interview, July 16 2013)

In fact, further corroborating what White noted, it is significant to consider that the majority of the delegates that gathered at the NGO Forum in Durban were women (Blackwell and Naber 2002, 238). This demographic representation of women may be seen to be related to the fact that the Durban conference marked a moment when the United Nations, for the first time, offered an avenue to potentially consider the intersection of racism with gender, class, sexuality, and other forms of social divisions (240).

Further suggesting the complexity of issues on the agenda of the WCAR, Margaret Parsons, Executive Director of the African-Canadian Legal Clinic, which was organizationally involved in the 2001 conferences and supportive of reparations for slavery, noted the relevance of the Durban moment for both Indigenous and African-origin groups:

At the first prepcom [WCAR Preparatory Committee meeting] the two groups that really emerged and co-

alesced, in terms of their voices being heard, were the Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples, and Africans and African descended. This was the first time there was a gathering of people of African descent from around the world, that we got to meet each other as a family. After centuries, we touched African soil, many of us being the first in our families to have that privilege...This was a historical moment for me and a lot of African descendants. So we created the two largest and probably most powerful coalitions, or caucuses as we call them, the Indigenous peoples and the African and African descended. And yes, our voice was loud and yes our voice was strong. And African and African descendants came together strongly asking for reparations, and the Indigenous peoples for their land rights, and we were not going to compromise on that. (Authors' Interview, July 27, 2012)

Among the events that comprised the Durban moment was a Special Forum at the official venue of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism entitled "Voices," convened jointly by Gay McDougall and Nozipho January-Bardill, members of the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and Ambassador N. Barney Pitso, Chair of the South African Human Rights Commission. The Voices Forum at Durban featured twenty-one speakers from different countries and world regions who offered personal testimonies about their experiences with racism and racial discrimination. As explained by Mary Robinson (2001), then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Durban moment created a space "to hear the personal stories of a wide variety of individuals," noting "the voices of victims are calls to action" (n.p.).

#### **4. Challenges and Frustrations in the World Conference Against Racism Process: 2001-2011**

Such a space, however, was also highly contentious. While the WCAR allowed for the participation of NGOs and civil society delegates, as well as state officials from every nation in the world, it is relevant to recall that the Durban moment was also a locus where considerable trauma associated with racism was front and centre. The focus on racism invited by the 2001 Durban conference, significantly held in post-apartheid South Africa, was a vivid reminder that racism brings with it what Sara Ahmed (2004) has called the "politics of emotion." This is because trauma is not simply borne

by individuals, but collectivities. In opening the space for greater NGO participation in the WCAR process, as well as in the personal accounts of victims, it was almost inevitable that the politics of emotion would be unleashed. Indeed, in the varied foci and discussions that have been held in the name of the WCAR, it has become evident that racism is deep and widespread—not only as an historical episode, but in the continuing contemporary experiences of and impacts on people and politics in every country in the world. Margaret Parsons observed that it was only a “wise group from the US” that “actually held counselling sessions and healing sessions, every morning at 6:00 a.m., packed to the rafters. Because people are coming with centuries-long, inter-generational oppression and hurt, and just came to unload” (Authors’ Interview, July 27, 2012). Of the United Nations, Parsons stated:

They just weren’t prepared for that; they weren’t ready for how politically charged it became. And everyone was fighting for space and fighting for their issues, you know. And so, I don’t think that they really understood that fully. I don’t think the High Commissioner’s office really understood that. I think they thought it was going to just be a nice Kumbaya, and they were likely completely taken aback, and they compared it to other world conferences... like Beijing, like Vienna Human Rights...No, you’re talking about oppression, you’re talking about racism, you’re talking about centuries of this, and people came there with their hurt on their sleeve, and it was put on the table. Really, it was put there in a raw open way. (Authors’ Interview, July 27, 2012)

In the WCAR process, issues that had festered for decades in terms of race and racism were, importantly, given space for expression, dialogue, and debate. Among the contentious issues were reparations for slavery, the rights of silenced minorities such as the Dalit, and the claims of stateless peoples such as the Roma and the Palestinians. In the case of the latter, the long unresolved “question of Palestine” (Said 1992), which remains highly contested despite recurrent efforts on the part of the United Nations in the Middle East, proved to be a site of notably heightened emotion. It also alone became a focal point for the withdrawal of the delegates of key countries, notably the United States and Israel.

The states that withdrew from the WCAR in Durban were later joined by other countries (such as Canada), boycotting the 2009 Durban review conference in Geneva and the 2011 DDPA tenth anniversary high level meeting in New York. The withdrawal from the WCAR process accompanied a highly negative narrative, which viewed the WCAR as a process that, while promising to address anti-racism, instead became one for asserting racism in the form of anti-Semitism or anti-Jewish racism. State actors representing the Canadian government, headed by Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015), became notably public on the global stage, taking the lead among states refusing to participate in the 2009 WCAR Durban review in Geneva. Jason Kenney, Canada’s then Conservative Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, boycotted the September 22, 2011 one-day New York commemoration of the Durban Declaration on grounds that “the original Durban conference and its declaration, as well as the non-governmental activities associated with it, proved to be a dangerous platform for racism, including anti-Semitism” (cited in *The Toronto Star* 2010). Moreover, he participated in and spoke at a “Durban counter-conference” organized by Anne Bayefsky through the Hudson Institute on the same day in New York. In this regard, Bayefsky (2002), a self-named human rights analyst, has articulated what became a hegemonic view of the 2001 Durban conference, seeing it as an example of a longstanding pattern where human rights rhetoric belies a “grossly distorted” focus on Israel’s particular violations.

An alternative analysis has been forwarded by Canadian journalist Naomi Klein (2009). According to Klein, while anti-Semitic comments arose during the course of the Durban NGO conference, these were challenged and resoundingly renounced. The clear consensus which emerged was, in her view, consistent anti-racism, not racism. In Klein’s analysis, the key issue was the call for reparations for the impact of slavery on Africans and those of African descent. Regarding the official delegated WCAR, the DDPA was developed by the vast majority of representative states that did not withdraw, including Canada. There is explicit opposition to anti-Semitism in this document (DDPA, 12, s. 61; 48, s. 150 at UN WCAR 2001b). In fact, the Durban moment indicated optimism and a sense of hopeful progress. This was summarized in a statement made by

presiding officer Mary Robinson, then UN High Commissioner and Secretary-General, which placed gender securely at the centre of a global agenda against racism. In Robinson's estimation, in 2001, "Durban has put the gender dimension of racism on the map. The linkages between gender, racism and poverty were clearly shown and the urgent need to tackle this dimension emphasized" (UN WCAR 2001b, 175). Reflecting years later on the WCAR in Durban, Robinson (2016) acknowledged that this was a "very difficult conference," recalling not least the US withdrawal and the charges of anti-Semitism. She details the negotiations associated with the specific language in a draft version of the DDPA, which was seen to be anti-Semitic, but was bracketed and then removed and notes that the US withdrew before the deliberations were finalized (Robinson 2016; Robinson 2012, 233-248).

Our findings, consistent with Klein's and Robinson's, suggest that the WCAR process was not dominated by any form of racism, including anti-Semitism, but instead served as an important step in advancing a global response to racism. Our findings further indicate that the WCAR process was a complex moment in advancing a global conversation against racism in multivariate forms. The experiences of civil society delegates indicate that the withdrawal of major states from the Durban conference in 2001, particularly the US, was damaging to the progress of this anti-racist project. There were multiple consequences of such state withdrawal. One such consequence, our research suggests, is that the important work on the intersections of gender and race was considerably sidelined. As Sherene Razack observed, because the US official delegation eventually withdrew in 2001, American civil society activists (including those such as Kimberlé Crenshaw) "were in a kind of stateless position...kind of like refugees" (Authors' Interview, July 3, 2012). Experiencing Durban as a "moment when our histories come together," Razack further articulated a deeply emotional response to the rationale for the US withdrawal in 2001:

I just thought, 'We're in this room together and we're looking at each other and we are all thinking, what brought us here?' Slavery was a really big thing about what brought us here, as well as the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. And, I think I felt that in my body, in Durban, in a way that led me to be shocked and angry that this could

be about anti-Semitism now. (Authors' Interview, July 3, 2012)

Sarah White reflected on her own feelings of disappointment at the US withdrawal in 2001:

By pulling out they sent a message to me...that it wasn't important, that they didn't care, that what was going on in your particular country didn't matter. Because we were there speaking about race, and jobs, and people, and education, and children, and so many struggles that were oppressing us. For the country to say 'Not at this moment, we are not going to do it at this time'-it felt like a betrayal to me...It felt like a shutdown, that we're little people and we didn't matter. (Authors' Interview, July 16, 2013)

The withdrawal/boycott of major states from the process was also viewed to have impacted negatively on the tenor of discussions in the aftermath of the Durban moment. Diana Ralph of Independent Jewish Voices was part of a broad coalition of Canadian groups that criticized the Canadian government for withdrawing from the 2009 review conference in Geneva. Ralph was in attendance at the Geneva event and noted that the atmosphere around pro-Israel lobbying made it unattractive both for delegates and, significantly, for heads of state to speak. As a consequence, in 2009, it was only Iran's then President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had previously and so dangerously denied the reality and experience of the Holocaust, who attended and spoke as a head of state. Describing her experience in Geneva, Ralph noted:

There were 1400 or so Israel lobby observers who came in, with their way paid by the World Jewish Congress and by a variety of others, such as the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, and other organizations; those were two of the main ones. They came in equipped with information about which UN delegates they were to lobby and harass, and what they were going to do when Ahmadinejad came to speak. Any head of state is allowed to speak to address any UN conference like that. So, as it turned out, there had been this smear campaign against the WCAR, so that no other head of state had asked to speak. The only head of state who asked to speak was Ahmadinejad. (Authors' Interview, March 4, 2012)

The US response was particularly disappointing in terms of the issue of reparations for slavery and the representation of African and African descended delegates. The decision to boycott was made by the first African-American United States President Barack Obama in the first year of his administration. According to Sarah White, “surely he should understand what we need as people of colour” (Authors’ Interview, July 16, 2013). As White continued:

I was very disappointed [when the US did not participate in the review conference]...When you don’t want to listen and you turn your back, you are still allowing racism and issues to continue. When you hear the struggle of the people and organizations trying to make a difference you drop everything, and you listen. (Authors’ Interview, July 16, 2013)

Overt discussions of intersectionality were among the casualties of these changes in the WCAR events. American journalist and activist Kali Akuno, who attended the Durban 2001 NGO Forum and the main WCAR Conference as well as the Geneva review conference, was active in the Durban+10 Coalition through the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, which supported the New York commemoration. Akuno similarly noted that a number of issues were sidelined as the WCAR process became more controversial. Significantly, these included the manner in which intersectionality was approached as an issue following Durban. As he stated:

It largely dropped off the radar screen, to be honest with you—largely dropped off the radar screen. I think there was a certain level in the civil society space, there was a certain level of not just pushback, I’m trying to think of the word—there was a certain level of avoidance of the issue. [Gender intersectionality] was the framing in a lot of the early documentation, and I think what many of us were expecting. But how it played out in the conversations—after a while it really just didn’t come up. You know it hardly had any life at all in 2009 and 2011. (Authors’ Interview, May 29, 2013)

The potential of the DDPA was seen to have suffered from the withdrawal/boycott of states. New York based Dowoti Désir, founder of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action Watch Group, noted the failed

potential of the DDPA, and the DDPA’s intersectional perspective, to serve as a reference point in ongoing discussions in the United States:

Sometimes it’s a quadruple set of problems, other times it’s a triple set of problems: you’re black and Latina, and you’re an immigrant and you’re poor; other times, it’s that you’re Indian, and you’re a woman and you’re poor. If you’re an immigrant in the country, you have to deal with all of that. In this country [US], the issue of immigration reform is really important, but again do you ever hear the DDPA referenced in this dialogue? No, it’s not. (Authors’ Interview, April 17, 2013)

### **Context, Potential and Concluding Observations**

As this article has suggested, the WCAR process was formative in shaping a significant, but little recognized, expansion of the influence of gender intersectionality in the study of race and racism, and in the politics and human rights, over the first decade of the twenty-first century. Intersectional feminist analysis has been forwarded when addressing and redressing claims regarding oppression where multiple types of grievances are identified. The state actors that agreed to the Durban Declaration and Program of Action, and the civil society groups that signed on to the NGO Forum declaration, were aware of, and, to varying degrees, open to addressing, the ways in which gender, racism, and racial discrimination were interactive and co-constitutive. This was also the case with civil society groups in the United States and Canada committed to the WCAR process. However, as we have noted, the WCAR process was complex and contradictory. While the DDPA held more legitimacy among states than the NGO Forum declaration, the former suggested a narrower view of gender and was reliant on a male/female binary. The more fulsome attention to gender expressed in the NGO Forum deliberations, including support for lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender rights, was avoided in the UN WCAR conference at Durban.

Such a nuanced view has not found pride of place in the dominant narrative, which has been marked by claims made by the states that have withdrawn or boycotted that the WCAR process is anti-Semitic. The fact that the WCAR conference and the NGO Forum in South Africa took place days before the 9/11 attacks further affected the narrative that followed the

Durban moment. However, an approach that presents the WCAR process as fundamentally and overwhelmingly anti-Semitic is, we maintain, both inaccurate and misleading. Notably, even organizations specifically concerned with issues relating to Israel/Palestine, and the rights of Palestinians, were not solely focused on the WCAR events with only this issue in mind. For example, Sid Shniad, who attended the 2009 WCAR review conference in Geneva representing Independent Jewish Voices (Canada), highlighted the tremendous potential of a global conference on racism:

I am of the view that ordinary people who are not invested in racism, sexism, homophobia, national privilege, ethnocide, and stuff like that, when they are confronted with the real historical record of crimes that have been committed against the people, (very reparably, or, however reparably one could discuss), ten-to-one they will want to right the wrong. (Authors' Interview, July 5, 2012)

Similarly, Mohammed Boudjenane, who attended the 2009 Geneva review conference representing the Canadian Arab Federation, noted that what he hoped would come out of the WCAR process, in addition to "the Palestinians having another light shine on their plight and for people to realize occupation is unjust," were issues of "Indigenous rights, that we recognize across the planet...And that slavery would finally be dealt with...and the European countries, or the perpetrators of slavery, would say 'yes we did it'" (Authors' Interview, July 6, 2012). An interpretation that reduces the 2001 WCAR to a focus simply on the issue of the Israel/Palestine conflict is therefore misleading. For example, in the Durban NGO Forum, Palestinian refugee women who gave testimonies did so alongside migrant women workers from the Philippines and lesbian feminists from South Africa (Blackwell and Naber 2002, 240).

It is also important to recognize that the WCAR process served as a pivotal, and little recognized, global site for advancing an intersectional perspective that foregrounds the mutually reinforcing effects among gender and race. In this way, the withdrawal/boycott of countries, such as Canada and the United States, from the WCAR process has left a negative legacy—one that weighs on the movement to advance human rights, not least in times of crisis and the politics of austerity. Overcoming this legacy suggests the significance

of highlighting the positive, if limited, gains that the WCAR process accomplished, including in the advance of women's rights and human rights policy and advocacy. We suggest that global discussions of anti-racism at the level of the United Nations have developed in wider historical and international contexts, where there is a paradox of simultaneous processes of both inclusion and exclusion (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2013). Women's rights and challenges to gender-based discrimination have gained increasing recognition internationally, as have issues associated with the rights of racialized and Indigenous peoples and challenges to colonialism and racial discrimination. While to date there are few specific examples which indicate this potential,<sup>2</sup> given the expanding influence of intersectionality in feminist theory, there remains room for optimism on this front.

Given the complexity and challenges of this context, a note on our positionality as co-authors is perhaps relevant here. We are cognizant that discussions associated with the WCAR process, particularly in light of attention to the Israel/Palestine conflict, have not been normalized within the academy or academic scholarship. Although we reject essentialism as a basis for analysis, because we are dealing with issues of racism and racialization, in our joint writing together, we have consistently positioned ourselves as scholars who reflect on both the Palestinian (Abu-Laban) and Jewish (Bakan) diasporic and cultural experiences. Elsewhere, we have written extensively on racism and racialization in relation to the United Nations and Palestinian human rights as well as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Our focus here, however, is specifically on issues relating to intersectionality in the WCAR process and on research findings, which highlight a glaring need for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of what happened at Durban. The WCAR process has much to tell us about the study of women and politics, and human rights, in the opening decades of the twenty-first century.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> An important exception is demonstrated in the website of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, significant because this is Canada's most populous province. This arms' length government-supported Commission features a document titled, "An Intersectional Approach to Discrimination: Addressing Multiple Grounds in Human Rights Claims," which explicitly highlights the WCAR process as grounds for being able to make claims in relation to the combined impact of race with gender and other forms of discrimination (OHRC n.d.).

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# A Beyoncé Feminist

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**Dr. Naila Keleta-Mae** is an artist-scholar and Assistant Professor in the Department of Drama and Speech Communication at the University of Waterloo where she researches critical race, gender, and performance studies. Her scholarship has been published in journals and magazines, including *Theatre Research in Canada*, *Canadian Theatre Review*, *alt.theatre*, and *CanPlay*. Dr. Keleta-Mae gave the TEDx Talk “Imagine & Do” and was awarded the New Scholars Prize by the International Federation for Theatre Research, the Abella Scholarship for Studies in Equity from York University, the Susan Mann Dissertation Scholarship from York University, and a Canada Graduate Scholarship from SSHRC for her doctoral studies on black performance in Canada. She is also a poet, recording artist, playwright, and director who has performed in Canada, France, South Africa, and the United States of America. She has released two full-length albums, been produced by bcurrent, Black Theatre Workshop, and University of Waterloo Drama, and published by the *Toronto Star*, Playwrights Canada Press, Fernwood Publishing, and Frontenac House Publishing.

influence sur la culture populaire est indéniable et il serait négligent pour ceux d'entre nous qui sont investis dans des études sur le genre et les femmes de ne pas prendre l'album ou sa principale artiste

.....  
**Abstract**

Beyoncé's album *Beyoncé* is a vexing articulation of twenty-first century mainstream feminism that captivated audiences worldwide. Whether or not feminist scholars, activists, or artists agree with Beyoncé's discourse, her influence on popular culture is undeniable and it would be negligent for those of us invested in women's and gender studies to dismiss the album or its principal artist.

.....  
**Résumé**

L'album *Beyoncé* de Beyoncé est une articulation fâcheuse du courant féministe dominant du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle qui a captivé le public dans le monde entier. Que les universitaires, les militantes ou les artistes féministes soient ou non d'accord avec le discours de Beyoncé, son

I know when you were little girls  
You dreamt of being in my world  
Don't forget it, don't forget it  
Respect that, bow down bitches.  
(Beyoncé, \*\*\*Flawless 2013)

To some extent, it is the mutability of her voice, the impenetrability of her image, the careful choreography of her public persona, and the astute manipulation of audio, visual, and audio-video mediums that position Beyoncé Giselle Knowles Carter as one of the most influential performers of the twenty-first century. Her record-breaking self-titled fifth album, released on December 13, 2013, was a vexing performance of twenty-first century mainstream feminism that captivated audiences worldwide.

The details of the contracts Beyoncé has with corporate stakeholders are private and so there is no way to ascertain the extent to which she controls her public image and messages. What is public knowledge, however, is that she manages herself through her company Parkwood Entertainment, was a writer on each of the seventeen songs on the album *Beyoncé*, and co-produced all but two of them. As Jake Nava, a director of one of the album's videos, said "[Beyoncé]'s been through this process of taking increasing control over her own career and identity" (Goldberg 2014, n.p.). In light of the depth of her participation in multiple aspects of the making of this album, it is unlikely that, at this point in her career, she is merely a corporate puppet who does and says what she is told. Therefore, when Beyoncé explicitly and problematically takes up feminism in the album *Beyoncé*, it is at the very least in part because she wants to. Four months after she did, Beyoncé achieved one of her career goals when she was featured in *Time Magazine's* (2014) annual "100 Most Influential People" issue (see also Sandberg 2014). The accompanying article references the album *Beyoncé* and cites the song "\*\*\*Flawless" in which Beyoncé calls herself a feminist. Ironically, it was the image of Beyoncé on the cover of that same *Time Magazine* issue that led bell hooks, a foundational Black feminist scholar, to call Beyoncé an "anti-feminist" (The New School 2014). Now, whether or not feminist scholars, activists or artists think that Beyoncé is a feminist or agree with the feminist discourse on her album, her tremendous influence on popular culture is undeniable and hooks' critique is revealing. That said, it would be negligent for

those of us invested in women's and gender studies to dismiss the album *Beyoncé*, its principal artist, or hooks' statement.

Beyoncé describes herself as a "modern day feminist" (Cubarrubia 2013) and the feminism she calls for and portrays in *Beyoncé* is hyper sexual, über rich, and politically ambiguous. Beyoncé, the commercial brand, is a compelling mythical display of capitalist female perfection—one that is categorically unattainable for those unable to mobilize entire industries at their behest. Beyoncé, the celebrity, is a capitalist feminist, one who often attributes her phenomenal success to the trope of the American Dream – the seductive narrative that the right blend of hard work and determination will lead to anyone's success (Celebrity Universe 2014). Her command of popular culture is exerted not only through her songs, concerts, and interviews but perhaps, most notably, through her production company's astute use of modes of distribution that are ubiquitous in twenty-first century popular culture (i.e., Instagram, YouTube, Vevo, Facebook, and Tumblr). When Beyoncé releases audio, visuals, or audio-video products, they are able to seep into the back and foreground of girls, young women, and women's lives as well as the minds of those who make up her male fan base. In fact, the very title of this article comes from a man who was baffled by my friend's decision not to change her last name to her husband's and was only able to reconcile this fact with his experience of her as an amicable woman when he surmised: "Oh...she's a Beyoncé Feminist." In other words, as I understand his comment, she is empowered *and* non-threatening.

The sheer scope of Beyoncé's influence is made more notable and worthy of careful contemplation given that she is an African-American woman at time in history when the predominantly white U.S. governments' capacity to protect and uphold the basic civil rights of African-Americans is questionable. This is, perhaps, no more clearly evident than in the death of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old African-American young man who was unarmed when he was shot in broad daylight in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 by a white police officer named Darren Wilson. Coming three years after the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his murderer, Brown's murder became a touchstone—one that saw Black people and their allies vocalize their disgust with anti-black racism. In the days

that followed Brown's death, protestors, journalists and elected officials were arrested, detained, tear-gassed, and shot at with rubber pullets and wooden pellets by the police. What incensed protestors and observers, inside and outside of the U.S., was that Brown's murder was but one in a long list of extrajudicial murders of Black people by white people and/or U.S. law enforcement officials: Sean Bell (23 years old), Rekia Boyd (22 years old), John Crawford (22 years old), Malcolm Ferguson (23 years old), Jonathon Ferrell (24 years old), Ezell Ford (25 years old), Eric Garner (43 years old), Oscar Grant III (22 years old), Aiyana Jones (7 years old), Kathryn Johnston (92 years old), Trayvon Martin (17 years old), Renisha McBride (22 years old), Yvette Smith (45 years old), and Timothy Stansbury (23 years old)—to name some. When these deaths are combined with the disproportionately high rates of incarceration, poverty, and unemployment among African Americans, as compared to white Americans, a grim picture of systemic racial inequality in the U.S. is exposed.

It is within the context of a racially fraught country that Beyoncé, a 35 year old, light-skinned, African American, cis-gendered woman, wife, and mother has managed to use her music, image, and business acumen to catapult herself from pop diva to cultural phenomenon. As *New York Times* critic-at-large Jody Rosen (2014) wrote: "Beyoncé is, as a cultural studies professor might put it, popular culture's most richly multivalent 'text.' The question these days is not, What does the new Beyoncé record sound like? It's, What does Beyoncé mean?" (n.p.). The evolution of the question Rosen asked is most evident to me in the trajectory of the lyrics quoted in the epigraph—from their controversial debut in the single "Bow Down / I Been On" to their reappearance on her most recent album in the song "\*\*\*Flawless." This article begins with a historiography of Beyoncé and then, drawing on feminist, critical race, and performance studies, continues with a close reading of the song "Bow Down / I Been On" and an analysis of Beyoncé's fusion of misogyny and feminist rhetoric in the song "\*\*\*Flawless." It concludes with a reflection on what hooks' description of Beyoncé as an "anti-feminist" suggests about the evolution of Black feminist thought.

### **Beyoncé's Background and Reach**

Beyoncé was born on September 4, 1981 in Houston, Texas. Her father, Mathew Knowles, had a well paying job at Xerox and her mother, Tina Knowles, owned and operated a hair salon. Beyoncé describes herself as a "really shy" child who "did not speak much" (Subscribe for the Best of Bey! 2011) but, when her parents saw her perform in a dance class she was enrolled in, she says they realized that she was "in heaven...it was where I could step out of my shell and I just felt the most like myself" (Subscribe for the Best of Bey! 2011). As a young child, Beyoncé competed in and won beauty pageants. Beauty pageants require contestants to perform static notions of femininity—ones that affirm white, Euro-centric, upper-middle-class, heterosexual, and patriarchal fantasies of female perfection. Beauty pageants are a performative iteration of the "created image" that Susan Bordo (1993) describes as one "that has the hold on our most vibrant, immediate sense of what *is*, of what matters, of what we must pursue for ourselves" (104). In other words, at a young age, Beyoncé learned how to assess, meet, and exceed the expectations of the "created image" through onstage performances. And, to some extent, it is the performance of that same image that Beyoncé has made the central narrative in her public performances (in audio, visual, and audio/visual mediums) as an entertainer with one central deviation informed by her race. As Aisha Durham (2012) asserts: "Through performance, Beyoncé calls attention to intersecting discourses of racialized sexuality and gender, and she highlights the particular constraints that exist for Black girls and women who also want to express their sexuality in a society where Black bodies are always marked as deviant" (37). That marking is, of course, an off-shoot of the transatlantic slave trade and its practice of using auction blocks as stages where "racial-sexual codes" about female blackness were produced, distributed, and redistributed with impacts that persist in the present day (McKittrick 2006, 80). Beyoncé's long-lasting success, I suggest, is in part due to her constant reference to and exploitation of those same "racial-sexual codes" historically produced on auction blocks that emphasized physiological differences that were "not white and not masculine" (81).

As a child she was also part of a rapping and dancing all female group called Girl's Tyme that

rehearsed in the backyard of her family home and at her mother's hair salon. Soon thereafter, Girls Tyme was shopping for a record deal with a major music label and that pursuit led to the group's performance on Ed McMahon's then popular TV show, *Star Search*—a nationally televised singing competition where winners returned weekly to defend their title. Girls Tyme competed and lost in what Beyoncé describes as a “really defining moment” in her life:

In my mind, we would perform on *Star Search*, we would win, we would get a record deal, and that was my dream at the time. Is [sic] no way in the world, I would have ever imagined losing as a possibility.

You know, I was only nine years old so, at that time, you don't realize that you could actually work super hard and give everything you have and lose. It was the best message for me. (The Official Beyoncé YouTube Channel 2013b)

Eventually, Girls Tyme evolved into a girl group called Destiny's Child that was signed to Columbia Records in 1996. Destiny's Child subsequently went through numerous personnel changes (with Beyoncé as the only constant member) but what finally emerged was the highly successful trio of Beyoncé, Kelly Rowland, and Michelle Williams.

By the time Destiny's Child disbanded in 2005, they had released five albums, sold more than 40 million records worldwide (Kaufman 2005), and won three Grammys (Grammys 2014). Beyoncé launched her solo career in 2003 and, by 2013, her five solo albums were estimated to have sold more than 75 million copies worldwide (Evans 2013). By 2014, she had won seventeen Grammys (Grammys 2014) – along with numerous Emmy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, NAACP Image Awards, Billboard Music Awards, BET Awards, and countless other honours. Beyoncé has acted in films and commercials and has appeared in television shows and documentaries. In 2014, her YouTube channel (housing everything from music videos, to commercials, to interviews) had a total of 140,785,823 views (The Official Beyoncé YouTube Channel 2014). She has had endorsement deals with H & M and Pepsi and owns a line of fragrances. Beyoncé was estimated to have earned \$115 million from June 2013 to June 2014 (Pomerantz 2014) and was named

“the highest-paid black artist of all time” by *Billboard Magazine* (MTV.com 2014).

To some extent, Beyoncé exemplifies what Black feminist have long fought for—the right to a full professional career, her own body, and the space to define the parameters of her existence. She has shown consistency as a consummate performer. A performer's ability to sustain high levels of achievement over decades hinges on a heightened acuity for discipline, skill, and control—rare capabilities that have undoubtedly contributed substantially to Beyoncé's longstanding success and influence. Ironically, these capabilities are downplayed in her public persona in favour of a racialized “created image” of a woman who is beautiful, sexual, and very nice (Bordo 1993). Her choices can be read, as hooks does, as the anti-thesis of what feminist work has historically strived to do (The New School 2014)—a point that is perhaps no better exemplified than in the song “Bow Down / I Been On.”

### “Bow down bitches”

Beyoncé has consistently articulated her awareness of her impact on girls and young woman and she has described the ways in which she has found it stifling to fully express herself within the confines of her perceived responsibility to her fans and popular culture (The Official Beyoncé YouTube Channel 2013b). On March 16, 2013, an image was uploaded to Beyoncé's Tumblr account with a link to a 3 minute and 35 second digital audio recording that opens with the following lyrics: “I know when you were little girls / You dreamt of being in my world / Don't forget it, don't forget it / Respect that, bow down bitches. / I took some time to live my life / But don't think I'm just his little wife / Don't get it twisted, get it twisted / This my shit, bow down bitches” (Beyoncé 2014). The lyric “I took some time to live my life” refers to the time away from recording and performing that she took after the birth of her daughter Blue Ivy in 2012 and “don't think I'm just his little wife” refers to her marriage in 2008 to hip hop mogul Sean “Jay-Z” Carter. The recording “Bow Down / I Been On” is comprised of two distinct songs: the first 1:30 seconds is “Bow Down” produced by Hit Boy and the final 2:00 minutes is “I Been On” produced by Timbaland, Polow Da Don, Sonny Digital, Planet IV and Keyz.

The image posted to Beyoncé's Tumblr to announce her song was of Beyoncé as a child, wearing

an elaborate floor-length pink dress replete with lace, overlay, and what appears to be crinoline. A small gold crown with red details sits atop her head of coiffed loose brown ringlets. A red pageantry sash is draped over her right shoulder; the words are illegible. Beyoncé is framed dead centre; she stands on gleaming hardwood floors in front of a fireplace with an ornate gold screen and a wide white mantel. On the floor behind her sit two large trophies—on either side of her stand at least two larger trophies that tower well above her head and from which other red pageantry sashes are draped or hung. Atop the white mantel are no less than nine golden trophies and one large shimmering tiara. In the midst of all of these displays of competition and success, Beyoncé stands poised, hands placed neatly on either side, lips glossy, smiling comfortably. Superimposed on the image in white full cap typeface are the words “BOW DOWN.” The picture contained a link to Beyoncé’s SoundCloud account where a song entitled “Bow Down / I Been On” was available to listen to and share for free. By 2014, the song had been played on SoundCloud alone a total of 9,426, 226 and reposted from SoundCloud to other social media sites 40,868 times (Beyoncé 2014). These numbers, of course, fail to capture the numerous other ways in which music files are shared across digital media which renders the tracking of the song shares virtually impossible.

The lyrics of this song left the internet divided. The explicit use of the word “bitch” was a departure from Beyoncé’s catalogue that includes the song “Run The World (Girls),” a pop culture manifesto of female empowerment that infantilizes women and constrains female agency to heterosexual displays of sexuality. “Run The World (Girls)” features a protagonist, Beyoncé, who tells the “boys” that they fail to possess the veracity of character necessary to hold court with her and she bolsters her “girls” with lyrics like “My persuasion can build a nation.” When stripped of the captivating production qualities of the music and video, the song’s lyrics tell the familiar tale of female agency residing in women’s capacity to control men through sexuality. Speaking to her “girls” and then to the “boys,” she sings, “Endless power, with our love we can devour / You’ll do anything for me.”

Beyoncé has long described one of the objectives of her art as the empowerment of young women: “[M]y music is bigger than just performing and dancing and

videos. I have a voice and and [sic] I try to teach women how badly we need each other, how much we need to support each other and how anything that you really want you have to work for.” (Celebrity Universe 2014). The juxtaposition of Beyoncé’s talk of female solidarity with her request in “Bow Down / I Been On” for women to supplicate before her is jarring. Some argued that her use of the word “bitch” in the song was an extension of the braggadocio culture of hip hop. It is important to note that the connotative meaning of the word “bitch” has undergone a shift in popular culture that I would argue is being led by Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans culture in the U.S. YouTube sensation Kid Fury and his friend Crissle host a widely popular podcast called “The Read” that provides explicit, comedic coverage of popular culture. Kid Fury and Crissle are hardcore Beyoncé fans who have spoken about her regularly. In a gushing review of one of Beyoncé’s concerts in 2014, they described how, in their euphoria of seeing “Queen Bey” perform, Kid Fury called her “all manner of bitches” and Crissle said that, as she stood on her seat screaming “bitch,” others looked on upset (Kid Fury and Crissle 2014). This led Crissle to clarify in the podcast: “Don’t worry about me calling Beyoncé a bitch, it’s all out of love. Clearly, I am not calling her like a stank ass, ho ass, trollop ass bitch” (Kid Fury and Crissle 2014).

The re-appropriation of language is nothing new but I agree with bell hooks’ succinct analysis that it is a “fantasy that we can recoup the violating image and use it...I used to get so tired of people quoting Audre [Lorde]’s ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ but that was exactly what she meant—that you are not going to destroy this imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy by creating your own version of it even if it serves you to make lots and lots of money” (The New School 2014). In a sense, this is precisely what Beyoncé did with the transformation of “Bow Down / I Been On” into “\*\*\*Flawless.” She said that she recorded over seventy songs for the album *Beyoncé* and selected fourteen because they were the ones that she “kept coming back to” (The Official Beyoncé YouTube Channel 2013a). She chose to tell women to “bow down bitches” with the release of “Bow Down / I Been On” in March 2013. She also chose to continue her misogynist message in “\*\*\*Flawless” but this time she made an attempt to “recoup” (The New



School 2014) and monetize it by affixing it to an excerpt from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TEDx Talk "We Should All Be Feminist" (TEDx Talks 2013).

### Misogyny Meets Feminist Rhetoric

On the evening of December 13, 2013, Beyoncé's Instagram account posted, to its 30 million followers, a video that appeared as a thumbnail image of a black square with all caps block font in a light pink with hints of gray that spelled out the word "Beyoncé." The caption that accompanied the thumbnail/video was "Surprise!" The video was 30 seconds long and was comprised of short clips of music videos, excerpts from songs, and the words "Beyoncé Visual Album 14 songs 17 videos available now" (Beyoncé 2013). Her followers ascertained that the album was available on iTunes and could only be purchased as a complete album – all fourteen songs and seventeen videos. Within twelve hours, Beyoncé's "Surprise!" caused 1.2 million tweets and, within the first three days, it was number 1 on iTunes in 104 countries (Apple Press Info 2013). Beyoncé's "Surprise!" took the internet by storm. What made the release of *Beyoncé* innovative was that an artist of Beyoncé's stature had never before released a full length album without any promotional materials whatsoever—not to mention the staggering, unprecedented feat that was the secret production of seventeen music videos that each boasted full production values. Keeping the album a secret was its own remarkable feat given the number of people who would have been involved in the recording of each song and creation of each video. Beyoncé described the impetus behind the surprise album as a combination of her desire to communicate directly with her fans and have her fans experience her album as an entire art project as opposed to giving them the ability to buy singles (The Official Beyoncé YouTube Channel 2013a). I also suspect that it is more profitable to sell entire albums than it is to sell singles.

Beyoncé is an undeniably astute and highly successful capitalist in an entertainment industry in which commercial success is notoriously fickle and fleeting. She has said that she only competes with herself and that, prior to starting a new album, she reviews the chart positions and content of her most recent album with the intent of surpassing those numbers (Subscribe for the Best of Bey! 2011). So when Beyoncé chose to explicitly address feminism, as she

did in the song "Flawless," we can presume at least two things: 1) the song would be heard by millions of people worldwide, especially the girls, young women, and women who are her principal demographic; and 2) she deduced that the kind of feminism she chose to articulate and endorse would be financially lucrative. It is this carefully constructed and executed rubric that permits Beyoncé, in the song "Flawless," to call women bitches who need to supplicate to her greatness mere moments before she features the following lengthy 50 second compilation of excerpts from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "We Should All Be Feminists" TED talk:

We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, 'You can have ambition but not too much. You should aim to be successful but not too successful otherwise you will threaten the man.' Because I am female I am expected to aspire to marriage, I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important.

Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same? We raise girls to see each other as competitors, not for jobs or for accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing, but for the attention of men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are. 'Feminist: the person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.' (TEDx Talks 2013)

Beyoncé said that she happened upon Adichie's lecture one evening when she was watching videos about feminism on YouTube (The Official Beyoncé YouTube Channel 2013b). When listened to in its entirety, Adichie's TED talk is a thoughtful and engaging lecture about the relevance and place of feminism in contemporary Nigeria. Beyoncé's decision to ignore the rich body of Black feminist work from African-American women is an intriguing one—instead she made a foray into transnational feminism, one which simultaneously brought Adichie's voice, name, and literary body of work into popular culture in North America.

The video for "Flawless" opens with a nod to Beyoncé's childhood as an entertainer: the footage of Ed McMahon on Star Search introducing the performance

of “the hip hop rapping Girls Tyme” (\*\*\*)Flawless 2013) followed by a brief shot of the six girls as they perform the first dance move of their routine—a high kick. The archival footage transitions into black and white footage of the legs of someone in torn fishnet stockings, a plaid skirt, and weathered black boots. Other lower limbs are visible in this shot too: one pair in distressed faded blue jeans with black leather boots and a pair of feet in well scuffed black leather lace up boots. And then there is a shot of Beyoncé, head bowed, one knee slightly bent, wearing a very short pair of frayed, torn, acid washed, cut off jean shorts, a black leather belt with large metal detailing, fish net stockings, high heeled black leather boots with elaborate chain detailing, a long sleeve plaid shirt tucked in at the waist, rolled up to just below the elbows and buttoned all the way up to the top. Her hair is a wavy, asymmetric blonde bob with dark roots, lowlights, and highlights. The video is populated by men and women dressed and coiffed like skin heads, punks, and rude boys who dance, kiss, lounge, push, and mosh on a filthy cement floor and abandoned leather furniture. The atmosphere is hard, aggressive, sexual; the surfaces are cement, leather, graffiti and the people are white, brown, black, and tattooed and they move in a cinematography that suggests that violence and sex lurks just below the surface. The set, camera work, performances, and production values culminate to create an artistic and compelling video.

For the opening verse, Beyoncé faces the camera and mouths the infamous lines: ‘I know when you were little girls / You dreamt of being in my world / Don’t forget don’t forget it / Respect that bow down’ (\*\*\*)Flawless 2013) but her lips cease to move and her eyes harden into a cocky glare when the word “bitches” plays. Beyoncé’s performance of not mouthing the word ‘bitches’ reads as both a nod to and disavowal of all of the critiques about her use of the word in “Bow Down / I Been On.” Her refusal to mouth the word in her audio-visual performance permits her to conveniently sit on the fence in a controversy that she caused when she first called women “bitches” on “Bow Down / I Been On.” But Beyoncé’s fence sitting is lucrative and her assessment of the need to be politically ambiguous is clear. She and her husband marched in New York after the murder of Trayvon Martin but she remained conspicuously silent on the murder of Michael Brown. Ellis Cashmore’s (2010) analysis of

Beyoncé’s business practices have also made clear the synchronicity of her business and creative choices as evidenced by the invention and monetization of her alter ego Sasha Fierce. That said, I wonder if her team did a cost benefit analysis after the foray into moderate activism that her participation in the Martin rally signaled and chose silence on the Brown story. In that vein, the explicit introduction of “feminism” into Beyoncé’s repertoire and public persona suggests to me that, at the very least, an informal cost benefit analysis was performed with regards to the use of the word ‘feminism’ and the inclusion of excerpts of Adichie’s lecture in “\*\*\*)Flawless.” When taken out of its original context and affixed to the tail end of Beyoncé’s call for supplication, Adichie’s feminist discourse becomes an endorsement of sorts, a container that almost justifies Beyoncé’s misogynist rhetoric because Adichie calls for competition between women (TEDx Talks 2013).

Beyoncé has a history of responding to criticism in this kind of measured, strategic, and indirect way. She sang the U.S. national anthem at Barack Obama’s second inauguration and a mild controversy erupted in the media when it was revealed that she had lip-synched the words. Several days later, at a press conference to discuss her upcoming performance at the NFL Superbowl, she entered the room, asked the press gallery to stand, and gave an excellent acapella performance of the national anthem—an indirect response to the criticism she had received. Similarly, when an audio less surveillance video of her sister, Solange Knowles, physically attacking Beyoncé’s husband in an elevator, was released in 2015, it trended on social media and in the tabloids. Days later, Beyoncé’s team issued an innocuous press release that was followed, several weeks later, by a surprise release on Beyoncé’s website of a remix of “\*\*\*)Flawless” done with rapper Nicki Minaj. In the remix Beyoncé’s said: “Of course some times shit go down when it’s a billion dollars on a elevator” (Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj 2014), referencing rumours of her and her husband’s net worth of one billion dollars.

All this to say that Beyoncé does not just drop or ignore the moments when her name is in the news for reasons she deems unfavourable or unflattering. Instead, she often crafts some kind of indirect response which is, I would argue, precisely why feminism, and a text book definition of it, were dragged into Beyoncé’s pop music coup. She subsequently doubled down on attaching

feminism to her brand as I witnessed when I attended Beyoncé and Jay-Z's live concert tour "On The Run" that included a performance of "Flawless" in which excerpts from Adichie's TED Talk appeared in massive font behind Beyoncé and one of the words selected was "FEMINIST." Her performance of "Flawless" at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards featured the same set design. Ironically the word "bitches" never made it onto the big screen in either performance. Unlike the video, however, she sang the word in performance but opted against its projection on the screen. To be clear, my critique of Beyoncé is not a veiled attempt to police the borders of feminism. Instead, this is an attempt to carefully contemplate how the cultural phenomenon that is Beyoncé has managed to fuse misogyny and feminist rhetoric in popular and financially lucrative ways—much to the ire of some feminists.

### Beyoncé and bell hooks

In 2014, Beyoncé landed the cover of *Time Magazine's* "100 Most Influential People" issue, an accomplishment that she described as "definitely one of the goals in my life. It's something important for me as an artist because it's not about fashion or beauty or music; it's about the influence I've had on culture" (*Time Magazine* 2014). The magazine cover was not one of the plethora of glamour shots of Beyoncé that populate the internet nor did the black and white image conjure the familiar tropes of success, sexuality, and power that one might expect from a mainstream publication. The cover image in question was of Beyoncé clad in white high-waisted underwear, a white halter bra top, and a sheer white crew neck top with elbow length sleeves. The sleeve of the left arm is rolled up to her shoulder and the other is down. The hem of the shirt is partly tucked into the upper right hand side of the underwear. The roots of her hair are dark and lighten into wispy straight, almost invisible strands that end in a slight curl near her waist. It is an image that drew the ire of bell hooks' who in a live-streamed panel discussion said about the image:

[O]ne could deconstruct for days that first she's looking like a deer in headlights and she's wearing the little panty and bra set, you know that some of us wore like when we were 10 or 12. And I'm thinking 'Isn't this interesting that she's being supposedly held up as one of the most

important people in our nation, in the world, and yet why did they image her, I mean she's not glam on the cover of *Time Magazine*; what is that cover meant to say about the Black female body? (The New School 2014)

In my estimation, hooks' reading of the image reflects an attentiveness to the presence of the live audience at the panel and, as such, a desire to entertain and captivate them—hence, the bit about the panty set. Nonetheless, hooks raises a fair question about the implications of pairing an infantilized image of Beyoncé with text about her influence in the world. However, though hooks assumes that Beyoncé was styled for the *Time Magazine* cover by the corporation's employees, I would suggest that it is more reasonable to assume that Beyoncé had significant influence on how she was styled, given her public stature. Were the latter true, it would require that her image be read not as explicit coercion by proxies of corporate stakeholders but as Beyoncé's choice. Erin Hatton and Mary Nell Trautner's (2013) research on the sexualization of women on *Rolling Stone* magazine covers offers productive insights into what 'choice' means for female entertainers in positions of power. They conclude that "Whether or not women 'choose' to be sexualized, the sheer repetition of their sexualization *in combination with* the intensity of their sexualization (but not that of men) suggests that there is very little that is 'individual' about such choices. Instead, we argue, it is necessary to identify the social forces that shape and constrain individual choice" (74).

In Beyoncé's case, there are at least three social forces that warrant consideration: historical legacy, celebrity culture, and corporate expectations. Her historical context is informed by the legacy of female black bodies staged as working-sexual objects on auction blocks across the United States during the transatlantic slave trade (McKittrick 2006). Another social force that influences the range of choices Beyoncé has available with regard to her visual representation is her celebrity status as hip hop culture's southern belle with a voluptuous body and lyrics rife with sexual agency (Durham 2012). Lastly, from a corporate standpoint, Beyoncé has been described as "an industry" (Cashmore 2010, 142) and it is one she vehemently protects as evidenced by her statement: "I've worked too hard and sacrificed too much to do something silly that would mess up the brand I've created all of these years" (qtd. in Cashmore 2010, 142).

It is facile for some feminists to read Beyoncé's choices around her visual representation as those of a simple pop star performing a vexingly familiar narrative of female blackness as young, sexual, and non-threatening. But the reading I am suggesting here is that of a business woman and performer who successfully performs what is expected by social forces that delineate the boundaries of her choices while also subverting them. In the *Time Magazine* cover, that subversion is visible in Beyoncé's gaze that has a hint of an edge to it that reminds me of the ways in which Sarah Baartman disrupted the imaging she was subjected to (Strother 1999). In a sense, Beyoncé disrupts her own brand with a performance within her own performance and, as Stuart Hall (1990) argues, cultural identities are "[n]ot an essence but a positioning" (226). In that regard, Beyoncé uses performances of her self (in visual and audio-visual mediums) to position and re-position herself for the consumption of her audience's boundless fantasies of her gender, sexuality, race, class, and age.

## Conclusion

At worst, Beyoncé's feminism is vacuous rhetoric wielded to monetize feminism and affix it to the Beyoncé brand. At best, her feminism is an extension of her astutely managed and highly successful career that was built, in part, by her ability to perch perfectly on the fence when it comes to her political views. In the case of the song "\*\*\*Flawless," while fence sitting, she spins a captivating tale about a woman who is hyper sexual, über rich, supremely confident and politically ambiguous—a Beyoncé feminist—a woman who rehearses and subverts capitalist patriarchy while she performs messages of female empowerment.

When Beyoncé pinned her call for women to "bow down bitches" to Adichie's call for gender equality, she attached the following refrain: "I woke up like this / I woke up like this / Said I look so good to tonight / Said I look so good tonight / God damn God damn God damn" (\*\*\**Flawless* 2013). This most definitely is at the core of Beyoncé's feminism in "\*\*\*Flawless"—it most certainly emphasizes the "look." Beyoncé and her team were experts in the careful choreography of image production and distribution at precisely the same moment in time when hooks identified visual mediums as "the major assault on feminism in our society" (The New School 2014). Like the meticulously choreographed

images presented by her team, the feminism that Beyoncé argued for is mythological and manufactured. Beyoncé's brand of feminism is a twenty-first century story told by a brilliant performer. It has the vexing capacity to lure spectators into actually believing that misogyny, capitalism, and feminism can not only "look so good" (\*\*\**Flawless* 2013) on Beyoncé but it might just look good on you and me too.

For these very reasons, it is, of course, tempting for feminists to imagine the radical and impactful work that Beyoncé could do were she to make different career choices with regards to her image, music, and corporate affiliations. It is also easy to deride Beyoncé and to move from analytical to inflammatory as hooks did when she said "I see a part of Beyoncé that is in fact anti-feminist" (The New School 2014). When bell hooks decides that a woman who identifies as a feminist is not one, she provides a prime example of a staid Black feminist politic that risks alienating its younger generation or, even worse, becoming a relic with reduced contemporary relevance (Foster 2014). hooks' critique is particularly painful when I think of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) assertion that the "distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as the cutting edge dividing them, has been key to Black women's survival" (208). hooks' reading of Beyoncé leaves little to no room for Beyoncé's personal "experience" to determine what is necessary for her own "survival" as a Black woman.

My twenty-first century Black feminist thoughts are messy. My criticisms of Beyoncé are as intellectually complex as my admiration of her success as an artist and businesswoman navigating the institutionalized racism and patriarchy. The messiness of contemporary Black feminist thought means that I, and others like me, can abhor Beyoncé's feminist politics and root unabashedly for her continued domination of the music industry (Foster 2014). It also means that we can understand her feminist politics and the mere presence of her sexualized body in public view as a contestation of the "whiteness of mainstream feminism" (Weidhase 2015, 130). This is precisely because many of us long to see reflections of our own potential in Beyoncé's images of success. hooks' comments suggest that she is painfully out of touch with this evolution in Black feminist thought and is seemingly unwilling to relinquish "feminist authority" and make way for "popular feminism" (Hollows 2000, 203). When feminists deploy messy twenty-first century

Black feminist thought to root for Beyoncé, it is not a demonstration of uncritical cheerleading. It is instead a profound expression of sisterhood that longs for critical space to be Black, feminist, and fly while thoroughly enjoying the spoils of capitalism. I would not call that anti-feminist but I would certainly call it messy.

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# Clearing Space for Multiple Voices: HIV Vulnerability Among South Asian Immigrant Women in Toronto

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**Roula Hawa** is a post-doctoral fellow at Women's College Research Institute, Women's College Hospital, in Toronto, Canada. Her recent research projects include examining the role of storytelling as a culturally relevant intervention to promote sexual health and assessment of resiliency and health amongst young women living with HIV. She has a PhD in Education from OISE, University of Toronto.  
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**Vijaya Chikermame** has been an avid collaborator and worker in the fields of HIV/AIDS, sexual health, and gender equity in Toronto and internationally for over ten years. She is the former Executive Director at the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP) in Toronto, Canada. She has an MSc in Social Policy from the London School of Economics.  
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## Abstract

This paper shares findings from a community-based research study conducted with South Asian women living with HIV in Toronto. Using qualitative methods, specifically in-depth interviews, participants' experiences contribute to the creation of a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of HIV risk and support. Their narratives highlighted specific vulnerabilities growing out of structural inequities and gender-based power imbalances in their families and with their sexual and/or marital partners. The participants' insights have important social justice and health program development implications.  
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## Résumé

Cet article partage les conclusions d'une étude de recherche communautaire menée auprès de femmes d'Asie du sud vivant avec le VIH à Toronto. À l'aide de méthodes qualitatives, en particulier d'entrevues approfondies, les expériences des participantes contribuent à l'émergence d'une compréhension plus nuancée et intersectionnelle du risque de VIH et du

soutien aux personnes atteintes du VIH. Leurs récits ont mis en évidence des vulnérabilités spécifiques découlant d'inégalités structurelles et de déséquilibres de pouvoir fondés sur le sexe dans leur famille et avec leurs partenaires sexuels ou conjugaux. Les révélations des participantes ont d'importantes répercussions en matière de justice sociale et de développement des programmes de santé.

## Introduction

Several studies have focused on HIV and women of different ethnic groups in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA); however, South Asian immigrant women have not received much attention. There is a significant gap in HIV literature as it relates to the South Asian Diaspora in North America (i.e., the dispersion of a people or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place). As a result, there is a scarcity of HIV/AIDS-related published research on South Asian HIV-infected women in the GTA. The few North American studies agree that there is a considerable amount of stigma attached to HIV/AIDS in the South Asian community. This stigma (disgrace and dishonor) results in an overall denial of and/or disassociation with HIV/AIDS as it affects community members (Abraham, Chakkappan, and Park 2005; Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention [ASAAP] 1999; Gagnon et al. 2010; Leonard et al. 2007; Raj and Tuller 2003; Singer et al. 1996; Vlassoff and Ali 2011).

Moreover, while many of these aforementioned studies have identified structural factors, such as male power, immigration, poverty, and discrimination, as affecting South Asian women's risk for HIV, none of them have analyzed how these structural factors affect women's behaviour. The effects of these structural factors need to be studied by exploring the unique individual experiences of HIV-infected South Asian immigrant women in Canada. To that end, this study focuses on HIV-positive or POZ South Asian<sup>1</sup> immigrant women<sup>2</sup> in the GTA. The intent is to improve our understandings of the structural factors that increase women's vulnerability to HIV infection.

In particular, our main research objective is to explore how male power in South Asian communities, legitimized by hegemonic masculinity, contributes to South Asian women's risk of contracting HIV. By way of explanation, through gendered practices, resulting from shared gendered beliefs fashioned to benefit the dominant group, hegemonic masculinity works to legitimize the dominance of men over women, increasing the latter's HIV vulnerability. In light of this, our study draws attention to oppressions through the experiences of a community of women who are rarely given a voice in HIV/AIDS research. This study further aims to provide a platform where women living with HIV can connect their lived realities with structural

inequities in their own voice. Knowledge gathered through this study is new and can be used to encourage women to (a) recognize how structural factors may affect their individual risk; and (b) participate in community initiatives. The knowledge can also be used to strengthen the services provided to women living with HIV.

R. W. Connell's (1987) social theory of gender (see also Connell and Pearse 2014) informs our examination of the role of hegemonic masculinity in legitimizing male power as a contributing factor to HIV risk among South Asian immigrant women in the GTA. Through the use of one-on-one interviews, we have been able to unpack how the women "make sense" of their experiences and life situations as immigrants in relation to HIV. Using this theory, we explore the three major structures that characterize the gendered relationships between men and women: (a) the sexual division of labour; (b) the sexual division of power; and (c) cathexis (the process of intellectually investing in a person, object, or idea). Cultural and normative influences in the lives of these South Asian women and the forms of resistance they employed are also examined using an anti-racist lens.

Rather than making generalizations about HIV-infected South Asian women, one should consciously speak from the standpoint of women's voices. The stories told by the women are unique, specific, and connected to their settlement history. They are not necessarily representative of broader narratives of South Asian immigrant women. Their accounts of "culture," such as collectivism, upholding an ideal of female purity, and tolerance towards male promiscuity, are specific to these particular women and may not represent other South Asian women's understandings of "culture." The fact that the women are living with HIV may also have influenced how they see and interpret these "cultural" traits. As such, as per the tenets of narrative research, the findings of this qualitative study are not intended to be generalized to South Asian men, South Asian women, or the South Asian culture.

## Context and Gendered Power Relations

Context is an important factor in clarifying the interdependencies between individual beliefs, social structures, and social norms (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). It refers to the circumstances or events that form



the environment within which something exists or takes place. Context varies from one individual to the next and even within individuals themselves. Regarding the latter, context depends on personal attributes and the way individuals interpret their daily life experiences. These specific contexts are also shaped by social relations between individuals and diverse, shared, and cultural behavioural expectations. Because of the link between social relations and behavioural expectations, context requires further exploration relative to the study's research objectives.

R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (2005) are aware of the need to understand context so as to assist in determining what upholds gendered power relations, how they may be challenged, and how the system as a whole works. Local context allows for agency in everyday discourses and practices, the complexities of which affect the formation of gendered selves. Individual gender performance can be more easily identified in a local context as opposed to regional or global surroundings, even though local settings are also affected by the regional and global settings (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The local setting in this study is South Asian immigrant woman living in the GTA.

### **Specific Contexts of this Research**

It is important to discuss the context within which the women's narratives in this study are embedded. This study reflects the perspective of a particular group of South Asian HIV-infected immigrant women in the Greater Toronto Area. In-depth interviews helped us to examine the women's personal resistance to and reinforcement of gender relations and their constructions of HIV risk in the context of their own families, work, and their immediate communities. In some cases, their HIV status is a result of heterosexual relationships, which may have changed their views on men, patriarchy, and community. Most of the women reported psychological and emotional abuse at some point in their lives as well as severe stigma resulting from their HIV status. Their life experiences may have been colored by their feelings and attitudes towards their partners and their own communities.

### **Methodology**

This was a community-based research study, which focused on bringing to the forefront the voices

of South Asian women living in Canada (greater GTA) with HIV. It was decided that a qualitative methodology using in-depth interviews was the most appropriate research design. Through this medium of data collection, participants were able to share rich and meaningful responses that provided data on structural inequities, gender roles, and HIV risk.

Given the specificity of the study, a non-probability, purposive sampling strategy was adopted to reach self-identified HIV-infected South Asian women residing in the GTA who could communicate well in English. Participants were recruited through local AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) working with South Asian POZ women and through snowball sampling. The ASAAP in Toronto was a key partner; however, because stigma was recognized as a key barrier to accessing some of the South Asian POZ women, we had to rely heavily on word-of-mouth and referrals to reach participants. The recruitment process was affected by the challenges associated with stigma and other health and structural factors that affected participation (such as long working hours or shift work and HIV-related illness). In the end, twelve women of diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds were recruited for the study.

Once recruited, the intersecting issues affecting the lives of participants created very real challenges in scheduling and the data collection process. However, concentrated efforts led to successful data collection and analysis. All interview transcripts were subjected to preliminary thematic analysis (Strauss 1987). Using a general inductive approach, the intent was to formulate summary themes and categories from the raw data. The primary purpose of this iterative data analysis process was to allow research findings to materialize from the frequent, prevailing, or central themes emergent from the raw data (Thomas 2006).

### **Findings**

This section is organized into two parts. The first provides a demographic, socio-economic, and socio-cultural profile of the twelve participants. This is followed by the presentation of the findings from the thematic analysis.

### **Sample Profile**

As demonstrated in Table 1, the women differed considerably by language, country of origin, levels of

education, marital status, and age. The participants spoke many languages, including Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Punjabi, and Marathi along with other local African or Caribbean dialects. Each participant spoke at least two languages, including English. They also represented a wide variety of religions: Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity. The participants ranged in age between twenty eight and fifty with an average age of forty two at the time of the interview. Six women had some community college or university education and six had only attained a high school diploma. All participants were married by age twenty four with the exception of one who was married in her early thirties. Four were married in their teen years.

Languages Spoken Aside from English (most participants spoke more than one language aside from English)	Gujarati – 7 Hindi - 6 Marathi - 2 Punjabi - 2 Swahili - 2 Tamil - 1 Malay - 1 Shona - 1 Njamda - 1 Kachi - 1 Baluchi – 1
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**Table 1**  
**Diversity in Study Sample**

Category	Frequency
Religion	Hindu - 6 Muslim - 3 Sikh - 1 Mixed Christian/Hindu - 1 Mixed Muslim/Christian - 1
Country of Birth	India – 4 Tanzania - 3 Canada (Indian background) - 1 Kenya - 1 Zimbabwe - 1 Trinidad - 1 Malaysia - 1
Length of Stay in Canada	0-5 years - 1 6-10 years - 4 11-15 years - 1 16-20 years - 3 More than 20 years - 2
Age	20s - 2 30s - 4 40s - 5 50s – 1

**Table 2**  
**Diversity in Study Sample**

Category	Frequency
Highest Level of Education	High School – 6 Community College - 4 University - 2
Number of Children	None – 3 1 Child - 4 2 Children - 3 3 Children - 2
Perceived Mode of Infection	Husband/Partner – 8 Blood Transfusion - 2 Unknown - 2
Number of Years since Diagnosis	0-5 years - 4 6-10 years - 4 11-15 years - 2 16-20 years - 2
Marital Status at Time of Infection	Married: 10 Divorced: 2

Marital Status at Time of Interview	Divorced – 5 Married - 4 Remarried - 2 Widowed - 1
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The length of time the women had been in Canada ranged from three years to over thirty years. Given that foreign education and training are commonly unrecognized in Canada when immigrants apply for employment, it is not surprising that most participants worked in low-paying, unskilled jobs upon arrival, such as the restaurant work, factory work, retail, textile, house cleaning, or self-employment in their own family business.

The length of time since their HIV diagnosis varied among participants. Four women were diagnosed less than five years prior to the time of the study and two were diagnosed over fifteen years prior to the time of the study. There was a strong desire among the women to have children. In fact, despite suspicions of infidelity in their marital relationship, some women engaged in unprotected sexual relationships in order to conceive and to strengthen trust in their marital relationships. Nine of the women had children and one participant discussed her struggle with raising a child who was also living with HIV.

According to the participants, eight contracted HIV through their husbands or sexual partners, two by unknown sources, and two by blood transfusions. After their diagnosis, only five of the women remained with their original marriage partners, including one who lost her husband to an AIDS-related illness. The husbands of the remaining seven women left them after the women were diagnosed. The divorce of these women can be attributed to HIV-related stigma and discrimination and is also reflective of a power imbalance in their relationships. Although, in most cases, they believed they had contracted HIV through unprotected sex with their husbands, if the woman was the first to be diagnosed, the husband was likely to leave. Two of the women remarried. Also, following their diagnosis, most women suffered economically as a result of losing employment due to illness. Seven women were living on social assistance benefits or their savings.

**Thematic Findings**

Analysis of the data led to four overarching

and overlapping themes: power relations, emotional relations, gendered division of labour, and social norms. In the presentation of the main themes, the social norm theme is interwoven throughout their discussions. All four themes spoke to the vulnerability that heightened the women’s risk of HIV. As per the research objectives, our analysis revealed that clear connections could be inferred about how the women’s experiences of gender were constructed in ways that legitimized male power. Also, these constructions played critical roles in their risk for and vulnerability to HIV and, more broadly, their sexual health. The women not only discussed risk in relation to male power, but also in relation to resistance. Through varying experiences shared with us through in-depth interviews, women demonstrated the rewards and consequences of such resistance.

**Theme 1A: Power Relations and Resistance in Early Years of their Lives**

Gendered roles and male authority in the families of origin had profound impacts on the women in this study, which manifested primarily in the intimate relationships established later on in their lives. In households where their brothers, fathers, and uncles were superior, women reported growing up with weighty messages about their limited power in the world. In addition, unlike their brothers, they were not permitted to explore their sexuality or to date potential partners. These social norms were reinforced during the most developmentally significant time in their lives – while they were determining who they would be and what their lives would be like in the future. All women reported strict gendered roles in the household. These rules required that (a) women performed household duties, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare; and (b) men worked outside the home to provide food and a home for their families.

These roles were clearly what the participants expected for themselves. Fathers were often described as being authoritative and distant from their daughters. As a result, the women were afraid of their fathers and the repercussions of defying their dictates. In addition, fathers were key in the determination and implementation of rules regarding girls dating and their future marriage partners. In most of the women’s lives, males, husbands, and partners continued to dominate. Despite being based in gender inequality, these women

still expressed a desire to transfer these same rules to their children, particularly to their daughters.

Connell's (1987) theory holds that the legitimization and contestation of hegemonic masculinity can occur simultaneously. Despite the fact that most of the participants described conforming to the strict rules about females having associations with males outside marriage (either by dating, having sex, or choosing their marriage partners), some women reported acts of resistance in this area. Resistance to hegemonic masculinity can take many forms. It can be seen in women's expressions of strong feelings about a norm. Others may try to beat the system and contest through subterfuge. But fundamentally, the power relations of hegemonic masculinity are only found to be illegitimate where the inherent values are rejected by all or most women (Connell and Pearse 2014).

To illustrate, both Anjali and Haifa felt strongly about the value of sexual experimentation before marriage. Consequently, both contested male power, but chose to do so in a rather secretive way when they were younger by having clandestine sexual relationships with boys. Others, such as Juhi, Anandi, and Minu, contested male power more directly. Juhi rebelled against her parents and left home to go to India in pursuit of a new life away from her family. As she described it:

Canadian-born Indian children grow up with Indian families, obviously the ideals don't match anymore and I was having trouble getting along with my family. So I left home and I went to India and I stayed there for a few years.

Minu married for love when she was twenty-one years old. The union was controversial because she and her husband were of different Hindu sects and Minu's family was "orthodox." As a result, they eloped, but their families eventually becoming comfortable with the arrangement afterwards. Actually, Minu lived happily with her husband and they had two children. Anandi grew up in a "very strict environment" and was never allowed to go out of the house for any social activities. But she achieved freedom by going to college where she met her future husband with whom she had a romantic relationship. However, he was not of her ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Her parents, particularly her father, were adamantly opposed to the marriage because

of the economic and ethnic differences, but eventually agreed to it. Although it meant going against her parent's wishes, it was important for Anandi to marry the person she loved:

I met my husband and we dated. My parents were against it because he was a Sri Lankan. And so they said no, sorry, and all that. So I went against them. I am an Indian, a South Indian Tamil. So my parents were against it. And because, it's not only the caste or anything like that, it's the, you know, Sri Lankans, how they are... And it's not like oh my parents were in the caste. My father was very staunch Indian... We should only get married to our people.

Power relations in marriages are determined both by social beliefs and behaviours that dictate the inequality between men and women. These imbalances of power are, at times, replications or extensions of the family dynamics experienced while growing up. The women who contested male power and socially accepted norms by engaging in premarital sex did so in secrecy. The women who contested publicly by marrying men of their choice still ended up conforming to the norms of male power later on in their lives. The effect of socially accepted male dominance on the women's individual attitudes and behaviours can be seen in the women's acceptance of and adherence to socially entrenched norms established in childhood and extended or replicated in their adult years.

### ***Theme 1B: Power and Resistance in Current Families***

In addition to discussing power relations in the earlier years of their lives, the women also described gendered power relations in their current families as manifested in their marital relationship, domestic abuse, normalized male infidelity, and strict gendered roles. Closely examining these familial dynamics, as shaped by religious dictates and communities, reveals a psychosocial context of tremendous HIV vulnerability among the immigrant women interviewed. The fact that most of them said they contracted HIV through unprotected sex with their husbands (n=8) is powerful evidence of this vulnerability. From the stories that the women shared about their lives with their husbands and partners, we were able to see how power-generated identities and practices conform to an ideal of masculine hegemony and how that power was contested.

The women reported enduring various types of abuse in their marriages. Only one woman spoke about physical abuse with others mentioning ongoing emotional and psychological abuse, which they described as worse when they were newly married. Despite the risk, the women in the study contested male power whenever possible. For example, the isolation and lack of family support that Chandra experienced as an immigrant made it very difficult for her to live in Canada. In spite of being pregnant at the time, she packed her belongings and went back home to India to stay with her parents. As she stated, “*I was already five months pregnant when I came [to Canada] with my daughter, and you know we were newly married, a new country with the ups and downs and I decided to go back home.*” Chandra believed that, with her husband going out, partying and staying out late, she was the only one striving to make the marriage work. Further, when she confronted her husband about his behaviour, their arguments became abusive:

“We had arguments, we were both young and it’s like I was trying to fight for a nice marriage...and he was being a little bit abusive. That’s when I packed and left.” Chandra explained her reasoning: “I really didn’t argue about it. I said this is my fate; this is what I have to do. So I couldn’t put up and eventually I couldn’t eat. Because it’s difficult to go against the man, with the South Asian.”

Three of the participants who reported abuse in their marriages left their relationships. Given the belief among these women that divorce under any circumstances is forbidden, their actions took a lot of courage. To illustrate, both Juhi and Anjali were married abroad and lived in their husband’s country of origin without their own families or support systems. Juhi said of her first marriage: “It was not an arranged marriage...But, I can’t say, I can’t say even if it was a love relationship, because it was an abusive relationship and I was just trapped and stuck.” Anjali did not report physical abuse, but spoke about emotional abuse in her marriage when she was living with her husband and his family in Kenya:

You know this is almost twenty years ago and I’ve done lots of therapy to get him out of my system. So his family was very kind, but he was not kind. We had a lovely affair and

romance, but after marriage he was, he was just a terrible, terrible, terrible person. I felt like I was married just for a showpiece wife. And yeah, it was not a good relationship... It was emotional abuse...Yeah, he would come home, he would have hickeys on his neck, I’m just freshly a new bride and you’re doing that...No he was insecure, he was jealous, he was possessive, he was abusive, and I was just left with his mother all the time.

The third woman, Anandi, came to Canada with her husband. She was compelled to leave the marriage in order to protect her children from the ongoing stress and the fear they experienced when she and her husband fought. She was aware that her husband’s verbal abuse was harming her children. Anandi left her marriage and returned home to Malaysia. Unfortunately, she was so disturbed by the negative effect their fighting was having on her children that she left without telling him that, in fact, their marriage was over. She described the situation as follows:

He started drinking. Yeah and was verbally abusive and started, you know arguing and fights among us. So I thought maybe you know, eventually when we have children, things will change...But my son was three and my daughter was two and I never got my immigrant status yet. I decided it’s too much for me to put up with him, the children are growing up. My son was watching me daily fight and he is scared...and I needed comfort and you know it was too much for me. I thought he would change but he eventually didn’t even change.

Due to the stigma of divorce, she also reported that women will not put their children at risk of community scorn. However, Anandi left her husband and returned to Canada despite being acutely aware of the social stigma attached to divorce. She acknowledged just how unusual it is for women to leave their partners because they are unfaithful.

### ***Theme 2: Resisting Emotional Dependence (Social Norm of Husband Reverence)***

The issue of husband reverence was central in these women’s lives. Husband reverence is based on an extreme emotional dependence and attachment to male partners. This reverence seemed to dictate gender-based sexual behaviours that shaped the

participants' contact with HIV. Listening to the women's stories, a clear interdependence was evident between the women's individual attitudes and the social norms that sanction women's emotional reliance on men. Moreover, there was evidence that the women's emotional dependence is interdependent with male power. To illustrate, women's emotional dependence and admiration for their male partners exacerbated their openness to male power and exploitation, which increased their HIV risk, particularly through risky sexual practices.

Some women reported holding their husbands in high regard and even tolerating practices they did not approve of such as infidelity and a sexual double standard. The women's willingness to ignore personal feelings of dislike for certain behaviours, in order to adhere to prescribed submissive roles for women in families of origin and marriage relationships, may indicate the women's emotional dependence on husbands. As the women aged, emotional dependencies within their families of origin extended to marital ones. This assertion was clearly illustrated in Juhi's first marital experience. Although raised in Canada, Juhi reported that she lived in a traditional and conservative Indian family:

Pretty typical, you know, South Asian family. My father was the patriarch, very strict. Mom was very submissive, very in the background, you know. Wasn't into a lot of disciplining. My grandparents lived with us, so it was an extended family. Very typical.

As a teenager, Juhi rebelled against her family's traditions and ran away from home. She went to her parents' hometown in India where she became involved in an abusive relationship with a man. In spite of this abuse, she married him, hoping that marriage would improve his behaviour: "The only way I felt I could survive is if I married him. And so that's the kind of relationship it was." Juhi's tendency toward emotional dependence on a man was demonstrated by her decision to marry an abusive boyfriend rather than leave him and be on her own. Although Juhi rebelled against the strictness of her father, she soon found herself under the control of another man. From a different perspective, after difficulties in her marriage became overwhelming, Chandra decided to return home to Africa with her

child. During the separation, she realized that her husband was a good father and she wanted father and daughter to know each other. So, after about two and a half years, she returned to him in Canada. She remarked: "See I loved him so much... Like, once you get married, you know that this is the only man for you and all. I felt that he's my life, you know?"

Despite the normalized infidelity of the men in the lives of this particular group of women, all of the women had an underlying desire for trust and fidelity in their relationships. This underlying desire for trust, combined with a fear of possible severe repercussions for confronting their husbands, led several women to remain silent in the face of their husband's infidelity. Given the stigma associated with divorce, the effect of social norms on the women's individual beliefs and their sexual practices became clear. The women's unconditional trust in what they perceived to be a monogamous relationship and their strong desire for trust and fidelity in this social context made it easier for them to ignore infidelity. Although most of the women believed they contracted HIV from their male partners, only a few women were aware of their husband's infidelity prior to their diagnosis.

Despite the fact that their male partner's sexual activities with additional partners placed many of the women at risk, these women still viewed marriage as protection from HIV and their husbands as worthy of their trust. In effect, they exhibited harmful cathexis; that is, they intellectually and personally invested in a person and patriarchy-related ideas. Those who knew that their husbands were unfaithful to them were unable to request condom use by their husband, which put them at amplified risk for HIV infection. That said, regardless of having a strong emotional attachment to their husbands, some of the women concurrently felt strong hostility towards their husbands, mainly as a result of the husbands' involvement in extramarital affairs and their resultant HIV status. Shortly before her marriage in India, Juhi's husband became ill, but did not disclose to her the nature of the illness. Later, she discovered that he had known that he was HIV positive prior to their marriage, but chose not to disclose. Juhi said:

I was 19 when I got in my first marriage, right, so that's when I got infected. And then I didn't find out that I was HIV positive until [sighs] 25. Yeah, yeah, so it was quite a

while and it was a complete shock because you know this man...I mean, mind you I shouldn't have taken his word for it just because of the kind of man that he was, but it was a shock. Like, oh wow, he lied to me about it.

### **Theme 3: Gendered Division of Labour**

The findings clearly indicated that the women's households were constituted by a division of labour that defines women's work as domestic and unpaid and men's work as public and paid. This gendered division of labour reflects ideas about a "woman's place." But who defines this division? The division of labour in the families in this study is partly a consequence of husbands' power to define their wives' situation. All women reported strict gendered roles in the household. These rules required (a) women to perform household duties, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare; and (b) men to work outside the home to provide food and a home for their families. Once they left their husbands, the women were forced to find their own employment (or gain social assistance), in effect challenging the gendered division of labour rule. Their role now extended beyond the home in order to take care of themselves and their children.

Regarding employment, three of the participants reported working in AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) since becoming HIV positive. In spite of the oppressive circumstances of their lives, these three women managed to thrive in Canada. Most of the other women held factory work and jobs in the service industry even though all had finished high school and six had completed college or other post-secondary training. With the exception of two of the women, who were able to obtain further training in Canada, the participants remained in low-paying work until they were too ill to be employed at which time they needed government assistance to survive. Four of the women were able to improve their employment situations; however, for the rest, the changes were minimal.

Most of the women spoke about having some control over money, especially while working and living in Canada, and a few reported some equality in their marriages. Some of them perceived nominal changes in the gendered division of labour in their home. And, the role of agency was evident for those women who worked at changing their partners' behaviour in the domestic sphere. But for most of them, the reality seemed to be

otherwise. Even in households where husbands shared their incomes and helped with household chores and childcare, they still did not compromise their economic control over their wives. Power relations supported by the strongly-adhered-to social norm of "woman in the home" remained the structure most resistant to change and the most influential in sustaining the legitimacy of male power. Both factors increased the women's vulnerability to HIV.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The intent of this study was to improve our understandings of the structural factors that increase South Asian women's vulnerability to HIV infection. For the participants in this study, their risk was exacerbated by such factors as isolation, economic dependence on their husbands, investment in psychologically and emotionally unhealthy relationships (cathexis), combined with the absence of support from their family of origin. Four themes emerged from the women's narratives pursuant to these structural factors: (a) power relations (before and after marriage); (b) emotional relations during and after marriage; (c) gendered division of labour during marriage; and (d) social norms related to women's roles relative to men. Women are supposed to revere men and abstain from sexual relations or any discussions thereof. They exhibited harmful cathexis; that is, they intellectually and personally invested in a person and in patriarchy-related ideas (social norms).

Patriarchy is not universal in or inherent to South Asian cultures (Bannerji 2005; George and Rashidi 2014; Jiwani 2005). That being said, the most significant finding of this study was the reinforcement of the relationship between South Asian culture and patriarchy/male dominance. Any initiatives related to promoting the inclusion and integration of HIV-infected South Asian women into Canadian society need to be aware that patriarchy dominates in these communities and in these women's lives. This is evident in the women's acceptance of and adherence to socially entrenched norms established in childhood and extended or replicated in their adult years. This seemingly self-defeating adherence to patriarchal ideology persisted even in the face of their HIV status.

The findings further reflected the interpretations of culture that are imbued with personal biases based

on social locations, context, and histories. In an ideal world, the local context allows for agency in everyday discourses and practices (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This was apparent to some degree in this study. The women's narratives showed that resistance was a part of some women's lives. In most instance, the conscious, and sometimes not so conscious, push-back choices they made were transformative if not always successful. Indeed, Meenakshi Thapan (2009) found that the choices women make can transform their "experiential living out of an embodied identity. This undeniable reality gives them a strength and dignity that is of their making, driven by their awareness and understanding, and therefore lies outside the domain of what is socially approved or normative behaviour" (xv).

By exploring the more overarching theme of patriarchy across landscapes, our research has cleared space for multiple voices previously silenced by dominant ideologies. It draws attention to gender-based and other intertwined oppressions including race, class, and ethnicity (Bannerji 2005) through the experiences of a community of women who are rarely given a voice in the context of research on HIV/AIDS. Most important, this work has given a voice to South Asian immigrant women in Canada by providing an opportunity to tell their stories, which would otherwise remain untold. Because male power in South Asian communities, legitimized by hegemonic masculinity, contributes to South Asian women's risk of contracting HIV, it is imperative that women's voices be heard.

One of the anticipated benefits of this study was to use the new knowledge to strengthen the services provided to South Asian women living in Canada with HIV. From a pragmatic perspective, the findings confirmed there are many entry points to begin to develop culturally relevant and appropriate HIV-education and prevention programs in South Asian communities that address the unique needs of the entire family, including women, men, and children. All HIV-related program efforts should be supported by influential social institutions such as places of employment, worship, community and health centres, public schools, and even the media. Key messages should attend to the power of patriarchy and aggression against women while identifying and addressing interrelated problems of housing, poverty, racism, and gendered labour division. HIV prevention initiatives

need to concern themselves with how to approach the complexity of this disease in communities of colour. Front line workers need to be actively cognizant about social dynamics when working with South Asian women and HIV prevention. Finally, HIV program designers must consider how women living with HIV and their lived experiences can beneficially inform prevention messages and HIV-related programming.

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## Acknowledgement

We offer our gratitude to the incredible South Asian immigrant women who gave so much of their time and shared their inspirational stories with us and to the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention, a community-based AIDS Service Organization that offers services to South Asian women living with HIV in the Greater Toronto Area, for helping with the project every step of the way.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term "South Asian" refers to an extremely diverse group of people whose origins can be traced to the region of South Asia, which includes the principal countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Statistics Canada 2006). It also refers to people who self-identify as South Asian although their country of last permanent residence is not in South Asia. This includes South Asians from places such as Africa (especially East and South Africa), Caribbean (Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica), South America, Pacific (Fiji), and European countries who trace their origin to the Indian subcontinent and continue to describe themselves as South Asians (CASSA, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> All the participants in the study were first generation South Asian with the exception of one who was a second generation South Asian. The reason this participant was included in this sample is because she self-identified as a South Asian immigrant. She moved from Canada to India on her own as an adolescent and resided there for several years.

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# Review Essay: *Mothers, Mothering and Sex Work*

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**Laura Winters** is a committed community worker in St. John's NL, currently working in housing. Her past experience includes work with SHOP, a sex workers' community outreach organization. She is in the final stages of her dissertation which examines both agency and cultural understandings of stigma from the unique stance of Newfoundland sex workers', for completion of PhD requirements in Sociology at UNB Fredericton.  
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## Book Under Review

DeJong, Monique Marie and Rebecca Jaremko Bromwich. *Mothers, Mothering and Sex Work*. Bradford: Demeter Press. 2015. 200 pp.

Sex work and mothering are identities that, in the spaces where they intersect, challenge stereotypical notions of what it means to be either. Patriarchal understandings of sex work and motherhood force the experiences of women into tight spaces, within limited discourses; this book challenges those stereotypes, opening up the process of meaning making to prioritize the voices of lived experience.

This book is a multimedia collection of both academic and non-academic pieces on sex work and mothering that examines and challenges mechanisms of social control around both. What it means to be a sex worker, a mother, and more importantly, what it means to embody both identities at once, is defined by women within the context of their own lives; that in and of itself is an inherently political endeavour.

The greatest strength of this book is the inclusion of pieces by women with sex working experience, and the presentation of their stories and multimedia work within a highly politicized context. Too often researchers and academics speak over and for people who do sex work; when their voices are heard, the stories are often taken out of context, depoliticized as a result, and presented in support of some ultimate truth about sex work. That process, at worst, results in furthering a highly stigmatized discourse around sex work, and at best presents accounts of sex work for no other purpose than the explicit voyeurism of the reader. In contrast, this collection highlights the politicality inherent in women's tellings of their own experiences, and situates these personal accounts as critical analysis of the socio-political context in which sex work happens, including sex work laws, "social policy, child protection, regulatory frameworks, structures of power in a variety of social regimes, and discursive structures" (p. 12).

The editors of this book understand that there is no one truth or shared experience in sex work (or mothering), and have chosen pieces from women with a wide variety of lived experiences to demonstrate that. The diversity of contributors means that space is opened

to explore the intersections of not only mothering and sex work, but also of race, class, age, migratory status, sexuality, and drug use, among other themes.

These chapters are presented within the context of an introduction in which the editors aim to outline the current legislative context of sex work in Canada. My only criticism of this book is of the introduction, where a confusion of terms leads me to believe that the editors are not entrenched in, or even familiar with, the world of sex work activism or academic work in Canada. On page 8, the authors state: "In recent decades considerable debate has raged between "abolitionists"... and other scholars and activists who would like to see sex work legalized," and on page 13, they then go on to use the words decriminalization and legalization interchangeably. In sex work activism, legalization and decriminalization are not interchangeable terms, and denote two very different legal circumstances around sex work. A full discussion of the differences is beyond the scope of this review, but It is decriminalization, not legalization, that is fought for by sex workers and allied groups who wish to increase the human rights and safety of sex workers. The introduction would have been strengthened by a better unpacking of the terms criminalization, decriminalization and legalization, as well as a discussion of the important differences between them.

As a woman who runs a human rights based sex worker outreach program in Newfoundland, as well as a member of the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform and academic who has researched with people who do sex work in NL, I believe that this book is an excellent addition to the field. This collection as a whole broadens understandings by presenting a myriad of lived experiences and meanings related to sex work. It is well suited for both graduate and undergraduate courses on relevant topics, and is also an excellent read for anyone looking to gain insight into what it means to inhabit two seemingly conflicting, and highly stigmatized identities.

# Review Essay: *Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education: Critical Theory and Practice*.

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**Maggie FitzGerald Murphy** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario.  
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## **Book Under Review**

Tracy Penny Light, Jane Nicholas, and Renée Bondy, eds. *Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education: Critical Theory and Practice*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015. 331 pp.

In the edited collection *Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education*, Tracy Penny Light, Jane Nicholas, and Renée Bondy bring together fifteen essays that discuss some of the challenges and triumphs involved in implementing innovative feminist pedagogy in the university classroom. While each chapter is a stand-alone piece, the volume as a whole is a wonderful contribution to the feminist literature, showcasing “the celebrations and successes, as well as the struggles and pitfalls, of feminist pedagogies” (5).

This collection covers a range of topics, from restorative justice in the classroom, to the use of book clubs as a teaching strategy, to a pedagogical practice of sex, and more. Before reading this book, I was intrigued by the editors’ choice to present the chapters individually, as opposed to collecting certain chapters together under sub-sections, as is so often done in edited collections. I was weary that without such sub-sections, the wide array of topics covered in this book would be challenging to engage with as a whole. I was pleasantly surprised to find that this was not the case. In fact, the authors of each chapter manage to engage successfully with each other in their respective pieces. The dialogue created between the chapters encouraged me to revisit chapters, to weave back and forth between contributions, and to consider each piece in light of the contributions and arguments of the other chapters. To further strengthen this dialogue, the way in which the editors have organized these chapters allows one to read the entire collection chronologically – as aspects of each chapter easily flow into aspects of the next. This flow, combined with the focus on feminist pedagogies more generally, allows all of these pieces to shine both individually and collectively.

As the editors note, while the pieces included in this collection are thought provoking, there is a distinct absence of reflections from scholars in the STEM disciplines and the collection is very Western-centric; this is certainly a limitation of this book. Nonetheless, I found this collection to be well worth reading (and

indeed, reading again!). As a student, these pieces inspired me to reflect on my own experiences in the feminist classroom and to appreciate the dedicated feminist professors who have shaped my own (un) learning. As an aspiring feminist educator, I also recommend this book to others who are interested in exploring and expanding the use of feminist pedagogies in their own teaching.

This collection feels like a fruitful conversation between feminist allies who, despite very different experiences, share the common goal of reflecting on and enhancing feminist pedagogy. In reading this book, I am delighted to have been a part of this conversation.

# Review Essay: *On Their Own: Women, Urbanization, and the Right to the City in South Africa*

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**Yen Nee Wong** is an MPhil candidate in the Gender Institute at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research focuses on poverty, gender, and socio-economic exclusion in relation to social protection strategies and labour markets. Her main research area is South Africa.  
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## **Book Under Review**

Allison Goebal. *On Their Own: Women, Urbanization, and the Right to the City in South Africa*. Montréal, QC and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. 242 pp.

In *On Their Own: Women, Urbanization and the Right to the City in South Africa*, Allison Goebal (2015) insightfully draws on the lived narratives of low-income, urban African women in post-apartheid South Africa to argue that women's experiences of urbanization and their capabilities and agencies to exploit the opportunities which urban life has to offer are intricately bound to the intersectionality of race, class and gender. Her analysis of Black African women's livelihoods "from the largest action of the global economy, to the state and its actors, to the intimate lives of men and women" (147) provides a crucial and comprehensive examination of a little-studied group. However, the limited discussion of the impact of care work on women's experience of justice in the city leads Goebal to neglect a crucial dimension of gendered differences in the urban livelihoods of African women.

Injecting Iris Marion Young's (1990) "politics of difference" and a gendered lens into the "right to the city" literature, Goebal's work critically challenges a Lefebvrian notion of the concept which lacks consideration of the patriarchal, cultural, national, and ethnic dimensions of power relations. Rather than assuming a "homogeneous public" in her discussion of justice for the poor, Goebal, in the first two chapters of her work, illuminates the interaction of women's lived histories, socio-economic status, generation, race, class, and gender with their social, economic, political, and environmental circumstances to redefine their inclusivity and mark new boundaries of marginalization for African women in the city.

Goebal's work is well supported, weaving together rich ethnographic data from a case study of the city of Pietermaritzburg over the period of ten years with detailed evidence of national level survey research and the broader literature on South African history, policies, politics, urban theories, and gender studies. Her work is all-encompassing, synthesizing a broad range of concepts in the "right to the city" literature. For example, she discusses Susan S. Fainstein's (2010)

concepts of diversity, equity, and democracy in the state's response to South Africa's housing policies in Chapter Three and David Harvey's (1996) redistributive paradigm in South Africa's comprehensive social protection program in Chapter Four.

Albeit recognizing the contribution of policies to women's constitutional rights to the city, Goebal aligns with Ruth Fincher and Kurt Iveson's (2012) perspective that the translation of philosophical conceptualizations of justice in policies into empirical outcomes "on the ground" is often far from ideal (234). In Chapters Four and Five, Goebal provides a multi-dimensional understanding of women's rights which expands beyond the institutional and public domains, drawing attention to the differential socio-cultural status of women which hinders their enactment of a right to the city through their everyday participation in both the private and public spheres of production and reproduction.

Through a clever adaption of Henri Lefebvre's (1991) radical thinking about citizenship into her work, Goebal engages with the concepts of right to appropriate and right to participate in the production of urban space (Harvey 2003; Marcuse 2009; Purcell 2003) to provide an inspiring illustration of a multi-layered citizenship which incorporates the local. In Chapter Six, Goebal gives credit to collectives seeking to practice their "right to the city" through political action on the localized scale, narrating the practice of public protests and strikes as attempts of the marginalized poor to struggle for what Edward W. Soja's (2010) refers to as spatial justice within the geographically uneven development of South Africa, enacted through a long history of apartheid and further perpetuated by pressures of globalization and neoliberalism.

Goebal's feminist standpoint adds an interesting perspective to the social movement literature. Reviewing the secondary literature on social mobilizations in post-apartheid South Africa, she brings to light the gender-biased internal processes of mobilization within social movements which inhibits women from participation in leadership and decision-making. Regrettably, though, a similar strand of analysis was not translated into her own case study of Nthutukoville where women participated in eviction protests and self-help housing through the support of a housing advocacy NGO. Goebal's rich empirics attest to the socio-economic impacts of

housing improvements on women's livelihoods, albeit falling short of demonstrating women's role in the often messy, unfinished, and unending process of enacting a right to housing through insurgent urban citizenship. In particular, she could have further revealed the power dynamics at play in African women's practice of squatting as well as negotiations and challenges made against the political rights to housing through their participation in a NGO-driven self-help housing scheme in Nthutukoville. Perhaps due to her dedicated focus on the "right to the city," Goebal's analysis of housing conditions falls short of responding to Friedrich Engels' (1873) one hundred and fifty year-old housing question. Goebal's preoccupation with the urban spatial aspect of "right to the city" and with questioning the degree to which South African cities reflect the values of redistribution, fairness, and democracy may perhaps explain the limited attention given to care work. The author depicts the lived realities of a majority of her interviewees as female heads of households with multiple generations of dependents under their care. In her conclusion, Goebal singled out care burdens as one of the key factors compromising women's experience of livelihood improvements in terms of gender equitable access to (1) opportunities for personal development, (2) opportunities for economic advancements, (3) housing, and (4) urban services.

African women's experience of urban poverty and marginalization, coupled with the socio-economic impacts of HIV/AIDS on their livelihoods, imply that women often conduct care within the context of their homes and communities. Such non-institutionalized forms of care bring to the fore the possibility that women's care work may be practiced as a situated response to injustice and neglect perpetuated by urban life. Yet, the impact of African women's everyday practices of care on their experience of the 'right to the city' is little explored by Goebal. She could have taken the opportunity to fill in a significant gap in urban theory which explores how an ethic of care may contribute to the practice of ideals of care and justice within urban life (Till 2012). Goebal's work has, however, opened up future opportunities to examine the mundane, unspectacular everyday activities of "doing" care as women's means of contributing to a just city and to question how the inclusion of care into justice in urban theory might impact the fulfilment of women's "right to the city."

Above all, a major contribution of *On Their Own* to the “right to the city” scholarship lies in Goebal’s strong gendered and feminist perspective and how she weaves an intricate connection between (1) individual women’s everyday experiences in both the public and private spheres, (2) local governance activities, (3) city planning and national state governance, and (4) legal and jurisdictional notions of citizenship. Throughout the text, women’s narratives are not only interesting vignettes of experience, but also function as thought-provoking mechanisms used to question, authorize, and resist jurisdictional, state, and institutional processes. To this end, the text lays the groundwork for discussions on the tenacity of African women in transgressing social, economic, political, and environmental challenges presented by urbanization to pursue their “right to the city.” Rather than explicitly elaborating on the impact of women’s care responsibilities on their “right to the city,” the well-documented narratives in the book serves as a quiet call for widening imaginations of care ethics in the search for a just city.

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# Review Essay: *Masculinity, Militarism and the Hegemonic Norm in Canadian Social Institutions*

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**Maria Relucio** is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Justice Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Maria also earned postgraduate degrees in Philosophy and Theory and Policy Studies in Education. Her primary research interest is *identities-at-intersections*, and how social categories that form identities interconnect and are conflated within adverse the stereotypical constructions of these identities. In her doctoral work, Maria's main focus is to investigate the narratives female and racialized migrant teachers in Canada and how their ascribed intersectional identities work for or against them. Maria also engages in another area of research about human rights issues and challenges of exceptional students within the Canadian school systems.

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## **Book Under Review:**

Taber, N. (2015) (Editor). *Gendered Militarism in Canada: Learning Conformity and Resistance*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press.

Each chapter highlights how gendered militarism proliferated within social structures, institutions and practices in Canada. The volume discourses on the interspersed of the concepts of the gender, militarism and learning (xi, xxi) and further chapters discuss how the social categories of race and ethnicity, culture, class and ability/disability are conceptualized within intersections stimulated by militarism.

In the beginning of the book, Taber defines "gender as a societal construct; militarism as a belief system that positions violence or conflict, connected to but not limitedly confined with war and the militaries; and learning... (as that) includes compulsory education and a variety of contexts addressed in adult education" (xi-xii). By intertwining these three concepts, Taber finds it imperative to discuss the relations among them that shape everyday aspects of the Canadian life.

Taber begins with her own narrative and reflection, having been raised in a military family and later on, serving the institution as a military officer. While she mentions that she initially enjoyed her work in serving the Canadian Forces, as she has immersed herself to the male dominated military culture and way of life, she began to reflect and question her positionality and her experiences as a woman in a male dominated institution (p. xvi). Conceivably, this is the initial intersection in which Taber finds it significant to perceive the impact of gendered practices in the military and beyond and its enactment in the social norms. Gendered militarism may have positive effects to one gender, i.e. the male or masculine and adverse effects to other, i.e. female and feminine within the heteronormative framework, and gender identities beyond this framework. The edited volume initially argues that the gendering processes preserve the hegemonic norms.

## **Gendering Processes and the Hegemonic Norms**

Most of the chapters in this edited work utilize the framework of Enloe (2000) in interrogating

gendered militarism and in finding the ways in which it can be appropriated to social structures and practices. Enloe espouses on the concepts of militarism and militarization that is beyond the aspects of military life. She claims:

Thinking about militarization allows us to chart silences. It enables us to see what is not challenged for...what is not made problematic: elevating a good soldier to the status of a good citizen...The silence surrounding militarization is broken when military assumptions, and military dependence on gender are pushed up to the surface (of) public discussion (32).

In this framework, Enloe challenges the militarized masculinity that has been deeply ingrained in our social practices. As a backbone unto which the veneration of male subjects, soldiers and military men are often exalted as prototype, “good” citizens, opposed to other kinds of citizen-subjects. In connection, in the Chapter Four of this volume, Taber argues that the framing of Canadian citizenship has promoted the privileging of men, militaries, militarism and masculinity through the materials she has surveyed. This practice defies the fact that Canadian ideals are plural and multicultural—it stands beyond the privileging of a particular gender, race and social category of identity. Similarly, Hanson (2015) and Fournier (2015), in their respective discussions in this volume, raise how gender training and gendering processes have ensured the dominance of the male and the masculine subjects. Hanson notes that while peace-building processes have well tried to ensure that structural inequities are resolved by placing some well-balanced gender training programs, the lack of structure to promote education and opportunities for girls and women challenge such aim (129). Most often, the male identity and masculinity are still implanted in many gender training pursuits (Hanson, 142). The lack of problematizing and interrogation of these concepts not only promotes the hegemonic norm, but further instigates violence against women.

To particularly highlight the gendering process, Fournier (2015) exemplifies the case of cyber-technology users as acting in highly militarized spaces (177). In this space, interlocutors engage in some forms of stereotypical constructions of girls and women, and utilize these as significant platforms and springboard to bully girls and women in the cyberspace. In the online

virtual ethno drama presented by Fournier, she manifests how girls are identified to be initially feeble (182-197), however, the course of the dialogue presents that these actors can actually exhibit agency and resistance by challenging norms. This means that while the gendering processes in the militarized spaces embrace the hegemonic norm, girls’ and women’s identities are achieved through some forms of opposition.

Through these various forms of gendering process, the public is challenged to take pedagogical and reflective steps, to the point of learning and advocating counter-movements. This is to break the silence that causes militarism to proliferate in our everyday social practices. This process has implications to challenging gendered, and to a large extent, violent and oppressive practices, within Canadian social institutions. It is at this juncture that Taber invokes that, citizens and educators have this social responsibility to challenge forms of militaristic thinking (xxii). Some other chapters in this compendium centre on these aims and advocacies, in order to promote pedagogical moments that make us reflect about militarism and its impact in our society.

The other chapters in the edited work can be further reviewed based on the two other significant themes: (1) cyber world, technology and entertainment; and (2) education. These themes are significant aspects of everyday life, and in the authors’ respective discussions, militarism has stimulated these social structures and institutions, to the point of disadvantage of some vulnerable groups.

### **Cyber world, technology and entertainment**

In the first chapter of the text, Magnusson and Mojab (2015) discuss the visibility of militarism as connected with racialized and genderized patriarchal capitalism (1). These authors widened the conception of militarism in the form of rigidity and hierarchy, and how violence and oppression are manifested by supporting these. The initial chapter focuses on the discussion of the virtual game, *Urgent Evoke*, an online alternative gaming reality platform developed by the World Bank Institute (WBI). Magnusson and Mojab claim that this gamified learning environment has important implications for learning gendered militarism in Canada (2, 4) and the rest of the world. Originally developed to empower gamers and young people as they take part in resolving the deeply entrenched world problems (4), the solutions

posed by this learning environment, as Magnusson and Mojab claim, are embracing the monolithic dominance of the western political economy of capitalism. While the project virtually allows gamers to exercise many forms of virtual agency and power, the authors argue that *Urgent Evoke* is a vehicle to learn gendered and market-based militarism (7). In the game, WBI simplistically conceptualizes equality based on economic terms and the road to freedom is limited to the financial realm. The game situates African youth, people of colour and Muslim women as marginalized identities because of their economic condition, race, gender and religion. *Urgent Evoke* follows the western political economy of capitalism, to claim that these subjects can resolve their challenges by embracing the heteronormative, usurping colonialist practices and participating in the patriarchal capitalist world. However, this mechanism resounds a very simplistic understanding of the plights of these marginalized subjects. The game and the rationale behind it, limitedly portray the issues at hand, as one that can only be resolved merely through economic means. It devalues the consideration for unjust socio-historical conditions that must be made perceptible to understand that social positions of these subjects. In utilizing a simplistic lens, it sets the stakeholders to be vulnerable to limitedly be susceptible to a binary and duality, a hierarchy and a clinch towards the restrictions of militarism.

In connection with the first chapter, in the second chapter, Lane (2015) argues that the modern tools and devices such as Social Networking Sites (SNS) or particularly Facebook, give this opportunity for liberatory knowledge production; however, through a similar simplistic lens, SNS also leave stakeholders the possibility of reproducing social norms (25). Lane exemplifies how online social media platforms such as Facebook are streamlined with conceptions of militarism and gender. This streamlining manifests how deeply ingrained yet invisible regulations are, despite the possibility of resistance (28). Specifically, Lane presents how the Canadian Army Facebook conveys, “reproduce(s) and reinforce(s) dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity through predominant representations of men as strong protectors and women as caregivers and homemakers” (32). To counter such online movement of promoting militarized masculinity, Lane demonstrates how soft anti-militarism is

manifested in the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom Facebook, where many of the insights shown are “women’s experiences as central to war and peace” (32) and the possibility of a dialogue between men and women to promote peace. The presence of resistance despite the strong militarization amid SNS proves that, as Lane argues, there is a transgressive and transformative potential (35) to break the imposed binary and duality, the hierarchy and a clinch towards militarism.

Apart from the heteronormative hierarchy, in the third chapter of the volume, Haddow (2015) presents the phenomenon of a cultural hierarchy as supported by militarism and militaristic culture in entertainment. Haddow argues that in terms of these aspects, there is a very strong influence of the American culture in the Canadian imaginary (44). Canadian media consumption is so much saturated with American media. As Haddow claims, this phenomenon has effects on nationhood, culture and the Canadian identity (45-46). And with American popular culture being so much permeated by militaristic thinking and militarism (49), Canadian viewers and patrons, deliberately or insentiently, are being influenced by such American patriarchal militarism.

In the three chapters mentioned above, it is no doubt the hierarchal militarism is in place in theory and practice and it has affects not only to gender, but also to popular culture and social life.

### **Militarism, Learning and Education**

The second theme that can be highlighted from this compendium is how militarism has affected the educational and formal learning systems in Canada. Castrodale, Saul, Mizzi and Ratkovic, respectively illustrate diverse social conditions where educational practices and systems embrace gendered militarism and standardized militarism, in general. In Chapter Five, Castrodale (2015) demonstrates that the framing of exceptionality as disability that has become a hegemonic norm to support ableist and militaristic discourses and practices in education. The notion of prototypes, standardized and ideal bodies thrive in the practice of education, and they become the favoured subjects, seen and considered to be the worthy persons to learn. However, bodies that are “labelled disabled” are at a disadvantage. They are often not given the opportunity

to access education and methods of learning that are suitable for them to thrive. With such disparity in practice, students and persons with disability are further marginalized, while others, who are seemingly able because they fit the militarized standard, are given more opportunities.

While Castrodale speaks about ableism in macro-contexts, Saul (2015) presents militarism in education and sports, and challenges the militarization in school sports. Boys and male students are often encouraged if not forced to participate in sports that promote full-bodied masculinity (215) and the gender order (210), where the masculine is on the top of the hierarchy. Male students manifest their deep ability and maintain their superiority if they engage in and consequently win in competitive and combative sports. This sporting culture promotes militarism that may limitedly frame the conceptualization of maleness and masculine. It also apparently places some boys and males who do not engage in such sporting culture because of various reasons, to be fragile and therefore has failed the test of masculinity.

Apart from ableism and masculinity in school sports culture, another author, Mizzi (2015) explores the situation of other kinds of genders – those beyond the heteronormative and how negative social constructions against these gender identities place them in the absent centre. Mizzi raises his own experience when he was discriminated against when he applied to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). Because his mannerisms were considered too effeminate (108), he was automatically disqualified from the position. Mizzi asserts that hegemonic masculinity and the clinch towards the heteronormative sexes and genders (male and female, masculine and feminine) bars opportunities from identities within the LGBTQ umbrella. The exclusion of these identities in the CAF is a noticeable way of supporting gendered militarism. To challenge these unfair practices, Mizzi calls for a “rainbow audit” in order to reflect and examine the current practices in the CAF that has visible and invisible relegations against LGBTQ identities.

Interconnected with ableism and gender, Ratkovic (2015) also raises how women of economic, social and political class, such as refugee and migrant women teachers are also challenged by militarism. The imposition of preference and hierarchy in the

workplace, particularly in the teaching professions, positions the women migrant and refugee teachers into a social positioning, where the social constructions against their identities adversely affect their capacity to contribute in a highly militarized society. Citing the stories of refugee women from war-torn Eastern Europe, i.e. Yugoslavia, Ratkovic presents the narratives of women refugee teachers who constantly experience discrimination and “othering” because of the social ascriptions against their identities. These are formed by militarism against women in general and cultural militarism against women from war-torn countries, in particular. These women refugee teachers experience many forms of discrimination and challenges as they navigate to access employment spaces in Canada, and as they resist the social constructions of their identities.

## Conclusion

The collection raises various themes to reflect on how standardized forms of militarism proliferate in the everyday lives of Canadians. From the particular examples and experiences cited by the authors in this volume, it can be reflected how militarism creases in, in the intersections of the social categories of identities, i.e. sex and gender, race and ethnicity, political status and economic class, ability/disability and culture. These are the intersections that are significant to create a pedagogy of learning and understanding on how the Canadian society and nation is visibly or invisibly supported by militarism in so many ways. The most significant value that this volume brings to us is the possibility of resistance, an epistemology and strategy that is consciously or unconsciously used as a platform for agency amid learning conformity.

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