Engaging Feminisms: Challenging Exceptionalist Imaginaries

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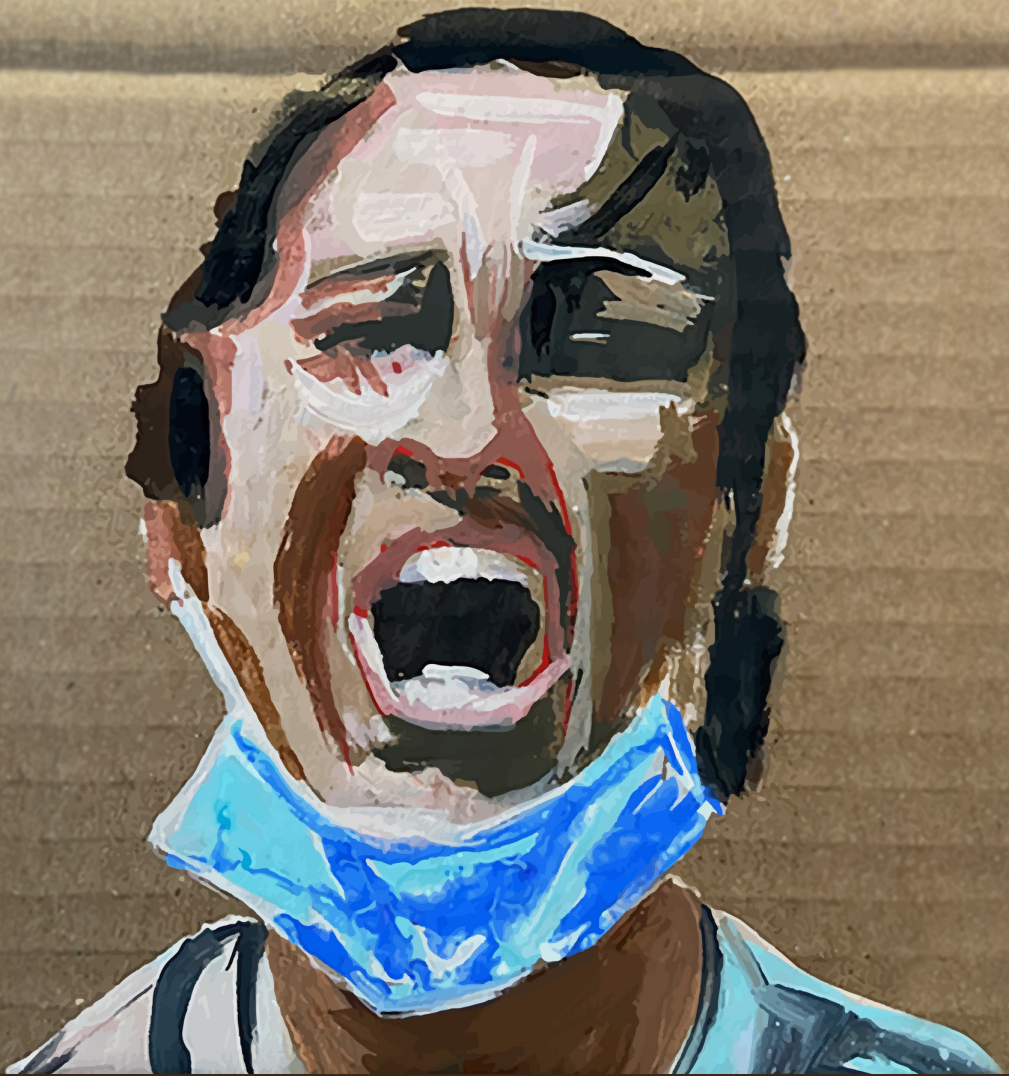
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Engaging Feminisms: Challenging Exceptionalist Imaginaries

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Marie Lovrod and Corinne L. Mason

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EXPOSING EXCEPTIONALISMS: B(E)ARING COMPLICITIES AND FRAMING RESISTANCES

Marie Lovrod and Corinne L. Mason

Exceptionalisms are reductive, short-sighted, and often convoluted rationalizations for refusing relational accountabilities. They systematically deliver narrowly conceived benefits to some at great expense to others, who are habitually held from public view and voice. In neoliberal times, excuses for ignoring damage and justifying harms are legion. Our planet is choking on the standard business practice of externalizing costs while permitting pollution, social ills, and health consequences to pile up in the lives of marginalized peoples, species, and places, with complicit nation states increasingly ill-equipped to address the fallout. Some exceptionalisms, like the "doctrine of discovery," are perpetrated for centuries with virtual impunity, masquerading as sacred edict until the mass graves of children surfacing from residential school grounds reveal assimilative evils that are more difficult to ignore for those who have benefitted most.

Marie Lovrod

When we launched the call for this special issue, there was no way we could have known that so many precarious global situations, pushed to the brink of crisis, would reach such a resounding sequence of cumulative tipping points. As we go to press, Russia claims exceptionalist fears of invasion upon its borders as an excuse to lay siege to Ukraine, while other leading nations bow to disaster capitalisms

Corinne L. Mason

by providing just enough support to extend the violence, sending streams of white refugees to countries that have been less-than welcoming toward racialized victims of globalizing imperialisms.

American sexual exceptionalisms, which overstate and underdeliver progressive approaches to civil, women's, and 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, now lay the groundwork for the mainstreaming of white supremacist theories of population "replacement." The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* potentially endangers concurring precedents including *Griswold, Lawrence,* and *Obergefell,* which protected contraception, ended sodomy laws, and advanced same-sex marriage rights. The current transnational white nationalist, anti-democratic, fundamentalist surge has

unleashed permission for wide ranging violence in every direction, from online trolling of a family-friendly drag show in Northern Ontario, to mass shootings becoming so commonplace in the United States that modest efforts to document some of the North American firearms trade have finally made some progress, if only by inches.

Similarly, Canadian exceptionalisms have permitted and enabled an occupation of downtown Ottawa by white nationalist anti-vaccine protesters, organized, in part, with ex-military personnel. Politicians who sought to capitalize on the situation made limited efforts to distance these shifts in Canadian culture from the attempted coup on January 6th in Washington D.C., under the veneer of a tattered Canadian claim to colonialist "civility." At a time when white supremacist violence dominates the extremist landscape, the province of Quebec has passed Bill 96 to "protect" the French language, most negatively affecting Indigenous and immigrant communities, not long after passing Bill 21, which "protects" a unique secularism, sustaining "cultural" Christianity, under the long shadow of the Islamophobic murders of six men at the Quebec City Mosque.

Under neoliberalism, public post-secondary institutions, with Canada's Laurentian University a now infamous example, have learned to generate rhetorics of financial exigency in ways that evacuate even the bland commitments to equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDID) that inform organizational branding exercises, of substance. Abandoning already meagre investments in actualizing those promises, and the futures they might enable if more rigorous and generative values of good governance were permitted to frame them, the opportunity to develop meaningful indicators of reciprocity with the planet and its peoples are too easily trampled in the rush to corporatize brazen refusals of public accountabilities.

We consider it vital to the mission of this issue to provide a critical commemoration of the short and long-term academic and community impacts of Laurentian's exceptionalist approaches to higher education, corporate law, and public service, more broadly. The cancellation of Indigenous Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, among many other dynamic programs, efforts to sell off donated assets and protected lands, the seizure of public research funds to settle ill-advised debts, and repudiations of transparency are all the structural (and very personally political) outcomes of signing equity and environmental charters, but creating inactionable policies, while undercutting, marginalizing, and de-professionalizing scholarship and teaching grounded in substantive engagements with social justice disparities. Expertise that commits to intersectional, collective, and reciprocal movements toward justice is dismissed by universities in which middle managers, routinely hired without critical training in the fields most affected by such willful ignorance, are encouraged to download messaging about interpersonal respect and individualized conflict resolution in conditions that require substantive systems transformations based on rigorous engagements with minoritized critiques from those enduring the worst effects of such extractive logics.

Ron Srigley[1]* describes Laurentian's disreputable process as the "manhandling" of a preventable situation. By invoking the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA), which denied unions and even governments ready access to the information necessary to assess and respond to such an egregious breach of trust, institutional "leaders" dismantled more democratic measures that could have helped to protect public investments, sooner. While several members of the board of governors have stepped down and two complicit administrators have tabled plans to leave the institution, hope for healing, according to a recent CBC report, is now sought from the Indigenous communities so summarily disregarded in the Laurentian take-down, leaving those most affected, once again, to clean up the messes of those privileged enough by corrupt systems to practice violence under the guise of a manufactured crisis with relative public and personal impunity.

An homage to Brigette DePape

Efforts to manipulate the rule of law for economic reasons bring to mind the SNC Lavalin scandal, in which the press adopted an obscuring, sensationalist "he said, she said" construction of events, which very nearly permitted the popular political claim of "jobs, jobs, jobs" to drown out the criminal behavior of Canadian mining companies abroad. Known the world over for extractive policies that harm peoples and places, too many companies replicate residential school outsourcing policies, enabling direct attacks on Indigenous communities through arms-length security forces hired for that purpose. Adjudication of these crimes in states depleted by disparity diplomacies, renders judicial systems subject to bribes and ensures that retirement investors at home learn little or nothing of such nefarious activities abroad. The fallacious logic that sees democracy and capitalism as aligned and mutually constituting ignores how seamlessly capital weaves together with dictatorships, fascisms, and extremisms, all fueled by inequities that most democratic states claim to ameliorate, but simultaneously tolerate and promote under neoliberal politics.

Contemporary exceptionalisms are so commonplace that many slip by unremarked in the busyness of overheated neoliberal efforts to avoid asking: what is the just, meaningful, and critical work that matters most for supporting mutual flourishing across peoples, species, places, and spaces? Exceptionalisms are fundamental to prevailing structures of violence, bias, and the micro- and macro-aggressions they animate within and across borders and bodies. Practices for facilitating aggression and ignorance as privileged measures of power map rather neatly onto the current global pandemic to which they have given rise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a study in exceptionalisms; mobilizing the variable velocities of neoliberal oppressions as a primary vector of its concomitant spread of polarizing

1 ˙ Srigley, R. (2021, December 10). Inside Laurentian University's Demise. Canadian Dimension. https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/the-fix-inside-laurentian-universitys-demise

xenophobic discourses, related police brutalities, predictable mortalities, and other measurable institutionalized biases. In Canada, pervasive disregard for the elderly and infirm were both exposed and accelerated in the early days of the pandemic. This cavalier indifference to vulnerable groups continues to pervade the institutional and cultural landscape, via disinformed but politically expedient moves to "post-pandemic life" and "learning to live with the virus."

Rampant labour abuses continue, based on minimal (or non-existent) investments in public health and other institutions, too often left to dress the windows of purported commitments to good governance, while the one percent ponder privatization and laugh all the way to their offshore tax havens. In a blink, unsung essential workers were striving to hold space for battered healthcare workers, struggling to secure the vulnerable behind frontlines made worse by unrepentant demands for freedoms to harm others with impunity, whether by ignoring public health mandates or radicalizing the disgruntled against mutual care.

Claims that "we are all in this together" obscure the power differentials between those privileged enough to socially distance and the often intergenerational and overcrowded public and "slumlord" housing that made such public health orders futile. As people move back into "normal life," those who are shut in, elderly, and disabled in Canada are targeted for expedient neglect and demise amidst a global mass death and disabling event. The threat of coronavirus variants (and other viruses, such as what is currently known as "monkeypox") to healthcare systems, the employment sector, and what is left of any meaningful social safety net, is ignored for political convenience. Expertise that positions wearing a mask—an ordinary and simple act of care (already necessary to surviving in the world's most polluted cities)—as the most effective tool to endure this (and perhaps the next) plague, is politically positioned as a threat to individual bodily autonomy while "freedom" is expressed as the mass spread of contagions. Cultures of exceptionalism distort, absolutely, because they cling desperately to models of power that sustain prevailing monocultures, eliminating smarter and more effective strategies for growing diversely accountable reciprocities.

Resisting exceptionalisms then, is close, difficult work that takes place in both the micro-spaces of interpersonal relations and in wider resistances to the self-justifying macro-hostilities of privilege that root racist, phobic, ableist, and misogynist abandonment of even modestly accurate long view assessments, stealing back hard-won inches accumulated toward more equitable opportunities and futures. Resisting exceptionalisms is tricky— barriers to dismantling structural and institutional injustices are myriad and shifting, as are our complicities in systems that, ultimately, disempower us. In the academy, our positions—however precarious—place us squarely within histories and contemporary forms of colonialism and imperialism, even as we seek to rebuke their continued functioning. The university is both a corporate entity and a liberatory space, and therefore, not exceptional. Instead, the academy is both a microcosm and a producer of societal stratifications and solidarities, including through our intellectual collaborations and even friendships. Importantly, there remain generative prospects for critically engaged feminist praxis that refuse the dichotomy of town and gown.

In this special issue, scholars critically analyze the productive tensions that characterize academic-activist community engagements. Challenging the inequities that characterize

hegemonic power, privilege, and status-quo logics, the papers, projects, and podcasts presented here expose scholar-activist complicities with and challenges to exceptionalisms. Authors address both the difficulties and possibilities of community-university engagements in teaching, research, collaborations, and publishing from a wide-range of theoretical and empirical entry points.

Our special issue begins with Shaista Aziz Patel and Dia Da Costa's critical reflection on collaborative writing across caste in the context of academic solidarities and friendship. In their article "'We cannot write about complicity together': Limits of Cross-Caste Collaborations in Western Academy," Patel and Da Costa consider the place of collaboration in the academy contextualized by calls for solidarities among Indigenous, Black, and other racialized scholars. Making visible the violence of caste in the university and beyond, Patel and Da Costa's interwoven—and, at times, very separate—life writing engagements with caste power and personal positionalities invite readers to (re)consider the role of anti-caste feminist praxis within the broader conditions of the neoliberal colonialist university, as it follows privileging practices that obscure and ensure the power of dominant caste South Asians over Dalit and caste-oppressed Muslim scholars.

In "Avoiding Risk, Protecting the 'Vulnerable': A Story of Performative Ethics and Community Research Relationships," Rachel Loewen Walker and Andrew Hartman illustrate how complications in community-led research can arise through exceptionalist applications of ethics processes. Their article focuses on a $1.1 million project on gender-based violence perpetuated against and within the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, led by the local pride organization, OUTSaskatoon. As community-based researchers seeking ethics approval though the University of Saskatchewan, they illuminate the barriers to community-university partnerships involving organizations working directly with "vulnerable" communities. Demanding much more nuanced understandings of and relationships with community organizations, Loewen Walker and Hartman interrogate what is behind the "risk aversion" central to university ethical reviews. Thinking through the harm of purportedly protective methods, they challenge exclusive formulations of expertise and knowledge creation; like Patel and Da Costa, they offer insight into the complexity and promise of relationality as a more rigorous rubric, which, in this case, highlights substandard academic applications of institutional commitments to community engagement.

"Rethinking Gendered Violence through Critical Feminist Community-Engaged Research" by Emily Colpitts and Alison Crosby offers two case studies of community-engaged research on sexualized violence—one focused on Canadian universities and the other on wartime violence in Guatemala—to demonstrate the reductive logics of presumed universalisms found in feminist and human rights framings. Taking issue with a common "violence against women paradigm," Colpitts and Crosby refuse both the concretization of the supposed ideal survivor of violence and voyeuristic spectatorship over victimhood. Skeptical of institutional investments in community-university engagements, Colpitts and Crosby resist the notion that universities and researchers working in communities are neutral, harkening back to Loewen Walker and Hartman's revelations about how community-based knowledge and community-led research are treated within academic routines.

Ina Seethaler's "Women and Allies in Action: College Students as 'Diversity Workers' in the Activism Classroom" focuses on the ways university classrooms too often position community activism, specifically within women's and gender studies programs, without attending to the ways that faculty and students are themselves impacted by the disparities they study. Grounded in Sara Ahmed's critiques of the academic "diversity worker," Seethaler offers student insights, gathered from a community-invested course, to illustrate how racist, misogynistic, and phobic conditions prevailing in the neoliberal academy fail to recognize the constraints and limitations imposed on students struggling with institutional pressures to realize their imaginative and material potentials to mobilize meaningful educational justice projects.

The theme of "learning social change" continues in the article by Amie Thurber, Helen Buckingham, Jordenn Martens, Rebecca Lusk, Darrylann Becker, and Stacy Spenser. Critically concerned with the professional neoliberalization of the field of social work, Thurber et al. consider how instructors can connect students with social movement organizing in community-engaged teaching. Centering solidarity, reciprocity, and justice as social work goals, the authors offer an in-depth case study of a graduate-level seminar project that requires students to participate in several local justice-oriented campaigns over nine months. In the article, students reflect on their projects, positionalities, and expertise (or lack thereof) in climate justice, foster care, immigration justice, and mass incarceration, attending to COVID-19-induced disruptions to community organizing and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement over the summer of 2020.

Critical reflections on the complexities and contradictions of enacting feminist praxis within the neoliberal university continue with the article "Decolonizing or Doing the Best with What We have? Feminist University-Community Engagement outside WGSS Programs" by Nafisa Tanjeem and Michael J. Illuzzi. For Tanjeem and Illuzzi, feminist curricular praxis extends beyond women's and gender studies programs, where feminist apprehensions about university-community engagements must remain central to rendering service-learning initiatives more effective. Like Thurber et al., the authors reflect on disruptions to teaching and learning during COVID-19, and on the responses of universities to anti-Black racism and police violence by way of EDID initiatives. Ultimately, Tanjeem and Illuzzi argue that neoliberal expectations for faculty to "do more with less" create increasingly confining conditions under which to dismantle hierarchal relationships between universities and communities, which were never entirely separate entities in any case. Still, as the authors show, collaborative pedagogical approaches that center decolonial and feminist praxis, and subversive moves to extract resources from the university for more effective community engagements, endure.

Calla Evans and May Friedman provide a conversational exchange on teaching and service in "On Being the 'Fat Person': Possibilities and Pitfalls for Fat Activist Engagement in Academic Institutions." As two differently situated scholars, teachers, and activists, Evans and Friedman consider the role of "the fat expert" in the academy. Taking up this issue's ingoing concerns about the role of community knowledge in the university and offering a critical analysis of the politics of collaboration, these authors explore what it means to be "the fat person" in colonial and fatphobic institutions, as administrators commit to EDID initiatives and frameworks.

Their reflections on how to be fat scholars in the fatphobic academy invite readers to wrestle with the complicities of working within and against institutional confines.

Continuing efforts to think about community-led expertise through the immediacies of diverse embodiments, Claire Carter's "Collaborative Movement: What Queering Dance Makes Possible" anchors this issue. Carter illustrates the "uneasiness" of feminist praxis, as outlined by Evans and Friedman, in another context. Carter presents personal and theoretical reflections that arise from stepping outside the comfort zones generated by daily movements within a public institutional space, into dance research based in community-grounded practices. Exploring challenges to queer and trans-affirming movement praxis in Regina, Saskatchewan, Carter's collaborative project *Queering Dance* foregrounds concerns with researchers' accountabilities to challenge the coloniality of space and place, while unsettling heteronormative and gender-binarized community-based dance programming. Offering fresh possibilities of being together amidst structural and institutional challenges, Carter holds space for feminists to "keep moving."

The exceptionalist logics laid bare in this special issue showcase the rich and fierce feminist, queer, decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-caste critiques offered by scholars committed to community-engaged praxis beyond the limits of the institutionalized imaginary. Still, the incessant erasures of transitional and transnational forms of violence leave much to think through in relation to university commitments to community. Rather than offer a conclusion, we extend an invitation to continue this conversation beyond the topics, case studies, and theoretical approaches offered here. There is much more to say about how we bear the lived realities of enduring manufactured crises—poverty, overdose, houselessness, migration, climate change, and war—and there are more prevailing complicities and effective resistances to lay bare. We welcome ongoing dialogue on these and other fronts.

Heartfelt thanks to the artists, authors, reviewers, podcasters, as well as the conversational exchange and field report contributors to this issue for trusting us with your perspectives and expertise, and for labouring alongside us as we bumped along the rocky path of publishing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your answers to our call for papers have placed us all in a set of conversations that have enriched our thinking, challenged our expectations, and led us to new ways of conceptualizing exceptionalisms. Thank you to Dawna Rose for the arresting cover art. Many thanks also to the peer reviewers for this issue. Your keen insight, careful critiques, and recommendations have guided authors, and this special issue, in new and exciting directions. Finally, thank you to the *Engaged Scholar Journal* editorial team for keeping us on track, offering us grace during more than a few hiccups, and for ensuring that this issue (finally) went to print.

About the Editors

Marie Lovrod (She/They) is Associate Professor and Program Chair of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Born and now working on Treaty 6 Territory, a traditional gathering place for the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway, Saulteaus/Anisnaabe, and Inuit peoples whose histories, languages and cultures continue to inform the futures of all Treaty people, she remains committed to decolonization. Her research engages the intergenerational, cultural, social and interspecies effects of economic and structural violence in local, national and transnational contexts. She has served as president of two national scholarly associations, Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, as well as the editorial board of *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture and Social Justice*. Invested in creative approaches to complex issues, nurtured in processes of respectful, co-constructive meaning-making, she values humility in collaborative co-learning projects. She works from the principle that everyone and everything matters. Email: marie.lovrod@usask.ca

Corinne L. Mason is a queer non-binary femme (They/She) and Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Mount Royal University. Their research program investigates how social justice concerns become 'crises' to be managed by institutions. They specialize in the areas of sexualized and gendered violence, 2SLGBTQIA+ in/exclusion, EDI, and reproductive justice. She is the author of *Reproduction in Crisis: White Feminism and the Queer Politics of End Times* (WLU Press, under contract), *Manufacturing Urgency: Violence Against Women and the Development Industry* (University of Regina Press, 2017), the editor of *Routledge Handbook of Queer Development Studies* (Routledge, 2018), the co-editor of *Unmasking Academia: Institutional Inequities Laid Bare During COVID-19* (University of Alberta Press, expressed interest), and sits on the editorial board for *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*. Corinne lives as an uninvited guest on Treaty 7 territory, the hereditary homelands of the Niitsitapi (the Blackfoot Confederacy: Siksika, Piikani, Kainai), the Îyârhe Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina Nations, and of the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. Email: cmason@mtroyal.ca

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Christina E. Gringeri	Heather Sykes
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Diana Gustafson	Darci Thoune

Issue Statistics

A. Authors and Submissions

Authors and Co-Authors	
University-based	21
Community partners	5
Total	**26**

Article Submissions	
Original proposals for peer and editor review	17
Articles submitted for editor review	2
Articles submitted for peer review	16
Peer-reviewed articles accepted for publication	9
Editor-reviewed articles accepted for publication	2
Book reviews submitted for editor review	2
Book reviews accepted for publication	2

Geographic Distribution (Corresponding Authors Only)	
Eastern Canada	
McMaster University	1
Ryerson University	1
York University	1
Western Canada	
University of Regina	1
University of Saskatchewan	2
International	
Adelphi University	1
Coastal Carolina University, USA	1
Lesley University, USA	1
Portland State University, USA	1
University of California, San Diego, USA	1
Total	**10**

B. Peer-Reviewers and Peer-Reviewing

Peer Reviewers	
Total invitations to peer review	61
Number of peer reviewers who accepted invitations	18

Geographic Distribution (Peer Reviewers)	
Atlantic Canada	
Memorial University, NL	1
Eastern Canada	
McMaster University, ON	1
Ryerson University, ON	1
Trent University, ON	1

University of Toronto, ON	2
University of Wilfrid Laurier University, ON	1
Western Canada	
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University of British Columbia, BC	1
University of Regina, SK	1
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University of Utah, USA	1
University of Wisconsin–La Crosse, USA	1

Essays

"We cannot write about complicity together": Limits of Cross-Caste Collaborations in Western Academy

Shaista Aziz Patel, Dia Da Costa

ABSTRACT   Grounded in a friendship that began in the academy, we write together to problematize collaborative writing across our distinct caste positionalities. Writing as caste-oppressed Pakistani Muslim settler (Patel) and dominant caste Indian settler (Da Costa), we write primarily across caste power lines to focus on the failure in our own efforts at collaborative writing. This article, initially meant to focus on our complicities in white settler colonialism in its present form, reflects on the detours we undertook to arrive at this place of certainty that "we cannot write about our complicity together." Specifically, we reconsider some assumptions underlining prominent methodological commitments of transnational collaborative writing across uneven locations in, for, and beyond the academy. Collaborative writing has been championed for its capacity to generate dialogue across disagreements, praxis grounded in social change, a challenge to the academy's notions of individual knowledge-production and merit, and as a means of holding people across hierarchies accountable to structures of violence that remain at work within social movements and collective struggles. Considering the contours of what Sara Ahmed (2019) calls structural "usefulness" of collaborative writing to the colonial and neoliberal academy, we use historical and life-writing approaches to make caste violence legible in order to refuse the cover that collaborative writing provides to dominant caste South Asians engaged in research with Indigenous, Black, Muslim, caste-oppressed and multiply and differentially colonized communities. Our purpose is to foreground the historical and ordinary violence of caste as it shapes North American academic relationships, intimacies, and scholarship, in order to challenge the assumption that caste-privileged South Asian scholars of postcolonial and transnational studies in western academia are best poised to collaborate with Indigenous, Black, other racialized, and Dalit scholars and actors toward a decolonial, abolitionist, and anti-casteist feminist praxis. While focusing on writing across caste lines, our analysis can also be read as offering a space to engage ethically with complexities informing collaborative projects across differential horizontal and vertical power relations informed by race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, north/south and other differences. In the process of writing this article, we have also paid particular attention to our citational practices.

KEYWORDS   caste, Brahminical supremacy, transnational feminism, collaborative writing, South Asian studies, complicity, people of colour, diversity, friendship

Reading the following lines in the Canadian Caribbean poet and novelist, Dionne Brand's thought-provoking and humorous book, *Theory*, brought us to a halt. She writes: "One has no friends in academia. One has colleagues. One has assassins" (Brand, 2018, p. 66). *Theory*, a work of fiction, traces the struggles of a Black non-binary Ph.D. student who has been working on their dissertation for 15 years in a university which encourages innovation (in theory) but also imperils critical and revolutionary world-building practices. Brand's narrative presents a picture of academia that many people situated on the margins of academia recognize. That is, the academy is both a terrible place of apathy and cruelty, of belittling, and of buzzwords with no action in suit, and yet, can also be a site of invention, possibilities, giving voice to one's histories, and perhaps, also of finding collaborators among accomplices-parading-as-colleagues-and-friends.

Despite this reminder by Brand, in the context of a friendship that began in Canadian academy, we, Shaista and Dia, decided to write together to question the ethics of collaborative writing. We hold onto the limits and contradictions of an 'academic friendship' upfront and work through its contours through our argument. As a caste-oppressed Shi'a Pakistani Muslim settler (Patel) and dominant caste Bengali Brahmin settler (Da Costa), we write across multiple power lines to focus on the rough edges, limits, and what felt like outright failure in our own efforts at collaborative writing for this article, which was initially focused on thinking through our complicities in white settler colonialism. While we had many conversations in the process of coming together, we will discuss some of the detours we undertook to arrive at this place of certainty that "we cannot write about our complicity together." Specifically, we reconsider some assumptions underlying prominent methodological commitments of collaborative writing across uneven locations in, for, and beyond the academy. While we will discuss some particular texts to make our arguments, we also want to share that, even though we reviewed many recent publications on academic friendship by South Asian scholars, we decided not to cite from them in order to i) avoid the *predatory citational practices* of citing texts from racialized scholars on the margins only to criticize and make our analysis stand out as sanctimonious; and ii) allow these more recent texts to circulate and build a life of their own in the lives of scholars. We engage with these cited and uncited texts by South Asian scholars in our article with a lot of respect for the struggles they are engaged in, and with a genuine desire to have a conversation with them and to be their ethical interlocutors.

Instead of intending a prescriptive article on how to do collaborative work, we hope that our transparency in this piece can encourage the reader to pause, question, and maybe even resist the imperiling seduction of doing collaborative research without writing in one's complicity, or clear goals working across power lines in academia. While writing this article, we have found ourselves asking about the most productive ways to challenge the circulation of collaborations across difference as a radical praxis of interdisciplinarity in academia. Collaborative work is, of course, already exemplified in a long history of Indigenous, Black, and Latinx writings that did not live along the binaries of academia and taking to the streets. The more recent phenomenon of making collaborative scholarship commonplace is also a welcome sign of a hard-won struggle on the part of those feminists whose interdisciplinary work brought texts and contexts into a continuum with the streets and academia. These women and non-binary

thinkers amplified the testimonials of Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and other women and non-binary people transnationally, and helped make polyvocal knowledge-production matter in the academy for challenging prevailing canons and encouraging critical thinking and social change. These feminist scholars taught us how to pay attention not just to what we know, but, more importantly, *how* we know. It is this practice which has guided our collaborative writing on why we cannot write together about our complicity in holding up white settler colonialism.

In the current environment of universities and granting agencies obsessed with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), writing collaboratively across unequal locations has gone from being a challenge to the neoliberal western academy's conception of individual merit and knowledge-production to what Sara Ahmed (2019) calls being structurally "useful" to a colonial and neoliberal academy. For example, in the social sciences and humanities, academia's increasing familiarity with collaborative projects is apparent in the number of competitive granting programs oriented toward collaborative research, the sprouting of "collaboratories" at various universities, and the prevalence of collaborative research approaches on syllabi for research methodologies. Despite the growing familiarity of this practice of collaboration, there are still disputes over whether such forms of writing count as scholarly enough to constitute meritorious academic knowledge. In pre-tenure and tenure review files in Shaista's university for example, faculty are required to state exactly what percentage of the planning, ideological, and written work on a collaborated article was done by each listed author. This predominantly hard sciences model of acknowledgement of division of labour deters scholars in fields such as Ethnic Studies who constantly struggle to hold onto the ethics of intersectional, feminist, and queer analyses. Such moves encourage academics to become transactional and less creative in how we approach collaborations with thinkers from our programs, departments, divisions, universities, and beyond. Having noted the limits on making collaborative work 'count' in tenure-granting processes, we, as feminists attuned to decolonizing scholarship, can also imagine that our political innovations for collaborative writing in solidarity for social change are subject to the always-voracious appetite for new *frontiers* of value (data, community relationships, funding) within a heteropatriarchal colonial and capitalist academy. If collaborative writing increasingly occupies that space, it should not be surprising.

It is in this context that we use historical and life-writing approaches to make caste violence both visible and legible, in order to refuse the exceptionalist cover that collaborative writing provides to caste-privileged brown South Asians engaged in research with Indigenous, Black, Muslim, caste-oppressed and multiply- and differentially-colonized communities.

Our purpose in this paper is to foreground the historical and ordinary violence of caste as it shapes North American academic relationships and scholarship, in order to challenge the assumption that racialized, postcolonial studies scholars are best poised to collaborate with Indigenous and/or Black scholars and actors toward abolitionist and decolonial feminist futurities. While focusing on writing across caste lines, our analysis can be read as offering a space to engage ethically with complexities informing collaborative projects across differential horizontal and vertical power relations, as informed by race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, north/south and other differences.

In the next few sections, we discuss in more detail what caste is and how it is intricately tied to knowledge production, labour, and also the category of labourers, as a site of consolidating the human and its others. For us to make caste legible as a vertical hierarchy of power and not simply as a vestigial South Asian cultural formation, we have to do this preliminary work before giving more poignant examples of how caste-dominant South Asian scholarship works transnationally to maintain caste power. Using a couple of examples from anti-racist and transnational feminist scholarship, we intend to make clear why we, two authors from different castes, religions, and countries of origin, could not readily collaborate to write about our complicity in upholding systems of domination. We make brief pauses to open up about our feelings in the process—the anger, the quiet, the fears, all while recognizing that this interpersonal friction, temporary abandonment, friendship, and love have to be rooted in an analysis of caste relationalities.

On Caste, Knowledge Production and Dehumanization

Caste is one of the oldest forms of violence, segregation, and incarceration in the world. It affects millions of people worldwide, whether they belong to dominant castes, or those made into lowered caste peoples called *Bahujan*. Dalits comprise approximately 260 million people worldwide, while the word *Bahujan*, meaning "many (*Bahu*) people (*jan*)," comprise the majority of people in the caste-based society of India.[1] Brahmins make up less than 5% of the total Indian population and yet, have the most institutional power.[2] While not unique to South Asia, the deep dehumanizing hierarchy of this 2,500-year-old caste system structures South Asian lives in minute and banal ways, scripting our access to land, labor, education, other state institutions, and even love and other intimacies. It is difficult to explain the expanse, depth, and intimacies of caste in the lives of South Asians back home in the subcontinent and in the diaspora, because caste underwrites every public and private expression of our living.[3]

There is a vast archive of scholarly books, articles and documents discussing both caste and casteism (caste-based violence) from the early 20th century onward in particular.[4] In this

1 Patel is grateful to Kashmiri Muslim feminist scholar, Huma Dar, for reminding her of the meaning of the term Bahujan.
2 "Who are the Brahmins?" ThoughtCo. (Jan 28, 2020). https://www.thoughtco.com/who-are-the-brahmins-195316 (Accessed July 11, 2021). While this article lists the population of Brahmins at 5% of Indian population, other articles also released within last 10 years list the population to be anywhere between 4.3% and 5%.
3 For a one-of-its-kind survey of the impact of caste in the U.S. see Equality Labs (2018) "Caste in the United States: A survey of caste among South Asians". https://www.equalitylabs.org/caste-in-the-united-states (accessed Dec 13, 2019). Comprising of 47 questions engaged with by over 1,500 respondents in the U.S., the results from the survey illustrate how casteism underwrites every intimate and public aspect of South Asian life in America.
4 For example, we encourage readers interested in learning more about caste to begin with the many powerful Dalit auto-biographies which clearly relay the spectacular violence of caste at other intersections of oppressions, such as Bama's (2000) *Karukku*, Baby Kamble's (2008) *The Prisons we Broke*, Sujatha Gidla's (2017) *Ants Among Elephants*, Vasant Moon's (2001) *Growing Up Untouchable in India*, Urmila Pawar's (2009) *The Weave of My Life* among many others. There is a vast archive of written work by Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar, and most of his writings are available free of cost on the internet. There are many other contemporary Dalit scholars whose work needs to be engaged with in order to understand casteism including Shailaja Paik (2011, 2014, 2016), Sunaina Arya (2020), Sanober Umar (2020), Sunder John Boopalan (2017), Chinnaiah Jangam (2017), and Ramnarayan Rawat (2011). I also want to mention the powerful Dalit-American visionary and leader, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, whose critiques have been central to the consolidation of anti-caste movement since the early 2010s in the U.S. Her numerous public media articles and projects are also available online.

article we are not able to capture the historical, political, regional, and religious complexities of caste and its manifestations across different parts of South Asia or even in India, but we want readers to understand that caste is a systemic structure of social hierarchy that defines a person's societal rank and occupation, based on the family into which they are born. The caste one is born into determines their occupation, the people they can marry, who and where they can worship, the foods they can eat, and the spaces they can access. Caste is about the power to thrive, to kill with impunity, and to let live under asphyxiated conditions for Dalits. Caste, therefore, is about power, about the systemic; it is historical, political, socio-economic, and consolidates future-restrictive power, targeting caste-oppressed people. At its core, caste is about dehumanizing the majority of Indian society's population as undeserving of dignity and life. Caste, while not the same as race, is about access to life and living in the same ways that racial hierarchies structure life and living.

In western academia, South Asians are flattened into the EDI categorizations of brown or Asian, and circulate as hailing from the same or similar cultures, histories, racial and political locations. In North America, Brahmins presenting themselves as injured racialized people of white supremacist universities, and touting postcolonial and subaltern theories, pretend to present seemingly 'alternative' archives of history from those of their British colonizers. There is much respect for the field of Subaltern Studies in South Asia and in the western academy. However, this field has been led by Brahmin and other Indian academics.

Our concern for some time has been with this figure of the Subaltern and its placement within and across systems of domination and subordination. What has been taken for granted, especially by Western scholars and students reading Subaltern Studies, is an understanding of the subaltern as a colonized figure, marginalized in terms of gender, class, and coloniality with little attention paid to caste or to the complexities of Indigeneity. There seems to be an assumption that the subaltern is a colonized and racialized figure, indigenous to South Asia by dint of not being British, rather than considering the specific histories of caste and Indigeneity to the region. The anti-British-colonial, nationalist, and Marxist frameworks employed by Subaltern Studies do not let these scholars place themselves more honestly within the contexts of the politics they theorize. While we suggest turning to the scholarship of Uday Chandra (see 2013a, 2013b, 2015a, 2015b 2017, 2019) for learning about how subaltern studies essentialized the figure of the Adivasi (Indigenous peoples of India), here, we will give an example to show how caste complexities were also erased.

How many of us know to ask what kind of subaltern Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is talking about in her essay, "Can the Subaltern speak?" In that essay, the primary subaltern that the argument rests on, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, is a young woman who took her own life in 1926 Bengal, apparently after a failed attempt at political assassination for which she had promised herself. That subaltern woman who commits suicide while menstruating was Spivak's relative, one of her grand aunties. As Spivak notes in a 2016 interview with the *Los Angeles Review of Books*:

> She [Bhaduri] left a letter for my grandmother. I heard the story from my mom, but I did not reveal that the woman in the essay was my great aunt. As a

subaltern completely outside of these structures, she had spoken with her body, but could not be heard. To say the subaltern cannot speak is like saying there's no justice.

She talks about this woman, her aunt, as a subaltern, while mentioning that, for millennia, subaltern groups have been kept away from accessing "intellectual labor" by her "own ancestors –caste Hindus." The fact that Bhaduri's caste (and she could have been from an oppressed caste since we do not know the caste of Spivak's maternal side of the family), effectively tells us that caste-as-complicity is a nod and not a positionality from which the study of the 'Indian' subaltern is approached.[5] We appreciated reading this acknowledgement and mention of casteist exploitative accumulation of intellectual property in Spivak's family. However, when she writes later that "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow" (1988, pp. 82-83), this undifferentiated female subaltern figure is colonized, anticolonial, postcolonial, but can also be casteist and a Hindu nationalist.

It has also been troubling that Spivak argues that she's at the very lower echelons of Brahmin hierarchy. A *New York Times* article quotes her as saying, "I am, unfortunately, a Brahmin, but from an inferior sect of the Brahmin cast (sic)."[6] There is nothing unfortunate about being a Brahmin in terms of how the world becomes one's oyster, up for taking, using, and discarding. While Dalit and other caste-oppressed scholars are forced to commit suicide in India because of the rampant casteist harassment, Spivak cannot refer to herself, ethically, as "unfortunately a Brahmin." Despite the fact that Spivak is frequently self-reflexive about her own privileged academic position working as a "native informant" in the Western academy, Brahmins like her nonetheless circulate under the guise of people of colour "from former colonies", carefully erasing their own ancestral and ongoing complicities within casteist and anti-Muslim systems of intellectual, economic, and political dispossession. Spivak's critique of postcolonial, imperial and liberal reason fails to confront its casteism.

As Dilip Mandal (2020) notes of canonical Indian sociology on caste, it was studied "not as a problem, but as a system" (para 14). Some Brahmin scholars reject the existence of brutal violence, while others study caste as a benign "cultural" formation in which casteism exists without casteists. These Brahmin and other caste-privileged scholars may stand with *Black Lives Matter* or *Idle No More* movements or with Palestine, while staying silent on the matter of caste, intense Islamophobia, and colonialism happening in their own backyard, by them and

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5 We use single quotes around the term 'Indian' in this context because we are critical of its coherence as a postcolonial secular democratic nation-state. Many people(s) in India live under occupied conditions, such as in Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Ladakh, and in the northeast (of) colonial India, including Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura, and Chhattisgarh. The Indigenous peoples of India, known as Adivasis, who according to the 2011 census, account for at least 104.3 million distinct Indigenous people(s), actively resist being referred to as Indians while continuing to fight against constant colonial encroachment upon their lands and lives. In our theorizing, as in the work of these scholars from occupied homelands, India is a casteist and colonial occupation.
6 Dinita Smith, (Feb 9, 2002) "Creating a Stir Wherever She Goes," The *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/09/arts/creating-a-stir-wherever-she-goes.html (accessed Jan 17, 2022).

their kin, and in their names, such as in the example of Indian-occupied Kashmir (Da Costa, 2020). Furthermore, when trying to explain caste to non-South Asians, particularly white people who racialize and Orientalize us, we are heard as saying that caste is a case of lateral violence within a singular racial group, leaving us perplexed about where our description of caste violence went wrong.

After briefly discussing the politics of seemingly liberatory knowledge production that is underwritten by caste hierarchies, here we would like to outline a particular feature of caste-based societies: that of division of labourers. Ambedkar's too-radical-to-be-delivered at the time speech from 1936, *Annihilation of Caste*, serves as the classic text for all students of Dalit and anti-caste theory. Here we discuss just one vignette from that text's theorizing of labour relations. For Ambedkar, caste was the *division of laborers*, thus, a divided humanity itself. Its foundation in ascription-based class position contrasts poignantly with conceptions of class that are grounded in divisions of labour, understood in relation to capitalist accumulation. Ambedkar (1936) wrote:

> …that the caste system is not merely a division of labour. *It is also a division of labourers*. Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments. Caste system is not merely a division of labourers—which is quite different from division of labour—it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers. (n.p., emphasis original)[7]

This division of labourers on the Brahminical principle of predestination (the belief that one was supposed to be born into their caste based on good or evil deeds in a previous birth) has intimately infused into all seemingly secular South Asian institutions, including that of academia, whether in South Asia or everywhere in the diaspora where Brahmins and savarna [caste-privileged people] go. Ambedkar captures the singularity of a division of labour founded upon inalienable characteristics of whole groups of people, reproduced as such, in perpetuity. Based on a violently-enforced caste system consolidated at the site of occupation, endogamy, control over women's sexuality, and rituals of purity, a casteist division of labourers continues to hold sway across time and space, so that losing capital fails to dismantle this Brahminical patriarchal supremacy (Chakravarti, 1993), and accumulating capital and moving overseas fails to relieve Dalit people of the everyday materiality of casteist dehumanization. Ambedkar was clear that political organizations that did not confront the problem of caste first, would not be able to pursue their policies of material improvement for the masses in India. As Gail Omvedt (1994) reflecting on Ambedkar's thinking of caste as the base of social inequity writes:

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7 http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/02.Annihilation%20of%20Caste.htm

> The 'class' category provided a marvellous tool for Indian Marxists to interpret what they saw around them within one grand framework of a theory of exploitation and liberation, but at the same time blinding them to other factors in their environment, so that instead of being inspired by the multifaceted struggles of low-caste peasants and workers to develop their own theory and practice, they instead sought to narrow these struggles and confine them within a 'class' framework. In one form or another they said, seize state power, redistribute land and your problems will be solved. 'Marxism' was taken in practice as a closed theory, not a developing science. As a result, there could be no dialogue with leaders like Ambedkar. Thus, when Ambedkar reacted to Marxism, he reacted to it only as a closed system which was at crucial points not simply indifferent but in opposition to struggles of the Dalits. He borrowed themes from Marxism, as we shall see later, but he never took it as a resource for analysis and action. (p.185)

Our intention is not to set up a binary between Marx and Ambedkar or between class and caste. We are arguing that class and caste struggles, while intertwined, cannot be collapsed into each other or necessarily interpreted through a reductive understanding of 'class.' Caste violence is foundational to economic disparities for Indians back home and in diaspora. Caste is not only about class—no matter how many stories of the class struggles of their immigrant parents "with only a few dollars in their pockets at the time of arrival in North America"—caste-privileged Indian academics tell their friends, colleagues, and students.

Caste continues to play a central factor in Indian and Indian diasporic economic life (Guérin et al., Iversen & Raghavendra, 2006; D'espallier & Venkatasubramanian, 2015; Oh, 2019). Suanna Oh's (2021) India-based study, entitled, "Does Identity Affect Labor Supply?" asked 630 daily wage labouring men in Odisha, India, to review real job offers that have been hereditarily assigned to particular caste groups. As Oh (2021) notes in their findings:

> Despite having interest in an [*sic*] one-day manufacturing job, many workers are averse to taking up a similar job when it requires spending just ten minutes on caste-inconsistent tasks. This tendency is present even when the castes linked to the tasks rank relatively higher than the workers' own castes, but is stronger when they rank lower. Nearly half of the workers are willing to forego ten times their daily wage—nearly a months' wage income in the agricultural lean season—in order to avoid working on identity-violating tasks, claiming that they would never engage in such jobs regardless of wage offered. (pp. 35-36)

This study clearly helps us to understand why caste, while constituting the terms of capitalist modes of living, is also more than about structuring division of labour in society. Notions of purity and pollution, while not discussed in Oh's study, centrally determine which castes are allowed to take up which occupations. Moreover, the threat of casteist violence as an

ever-present reality also deters lowered caste people from taking up job opportunities reserved for dominating caste people. As Ambedkar notes in his conception of graded inequality, there is an ordaining, a descending scale of humiliation, of dehumanization, through which the untouchable became the linchpin of the entire caste system, as it was their manifest impurity against which other castes were defined and ranked. So strongly was this dehumanization structured into everyday life and institutions that Ambedkar noticed that the division of labourers produced preordained divisions *among* the proletariat. Thus, Ambedkar questioned Indian socialists asking how, without the annihilation of caste, people struggling for the equalization of property can know that "after the revolution is achieved, they will be treated equally, and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed" (Ambedkar, 1936, n.p.).

To reiterate what we have explained above, caste is not about South Asian "in-fighting" or lateral violence. Caste is necessarily a vertical hierarchy of dehumanization. We cannot understand the limits of cross-caste collaboration between the two of us without understanding the preordained inequalities actively reproduced within material social relations and knowledge production through millennia, within and beyond South Asia. In the next section, we briefly consider what it means to think about caste as instituting a division of labourers within the Canadian state and academe.

Caste and Labour in Canada

Although caste has varying manifestations across varied contexts, can we trace the principle of division of labourers within Canadian state-formation, given South Asian presence on these lands since the late 19th century? Because caste is the entrenched division of labourers, for many caste-oppressed people, even indentured labour provided a possibility of escape from centuries of oppression of colonialism, casteism, and feudalism (Gupta, 2016; Lal, 1985), which was apparent also in their refusal to return to the subcontinent after their contracts were over (Dua, 2003, p. 49). Black Caribbean historian, Shona Jackson draws attention to the ways in which the Hegelian and Marxian fixation on labour as the teleological mode of acquiring humanity toward "Progress," sanctifies the civilizing and modernizing claims of the colonial state and anti-colonial nationalist political subjectivity (Jackson, 2012; King, 2019). Within this frame, labour has performed an indigenizing function through the logic of "I have worked hard, therefore I belong," which ultimately reproduces white settler ideology (Jackson, 2012, p. 33). But what is important to note is that the myth that one loses their caste when crossing *kala pani*, prevented caste-privileged Hindus from leaving India. In Caribbean diasporas, *at least temporarily*, Dalits and lowered caste people got relief from the violence of Brahminism (Misrahi-Barak & Bharadwaj, 2021). It was not just their labour, then, but also finding a place where they could, even under destitution and mistreatment by their new white masters, find some shelter from casteism, that allowed these labourers to find a sense of home. Jackson, when read alongside Ambedkar, makes it crucial to notice that the hierarchical difference within the South Asian diaspora—for example, between the descendants of indentured labourers and the cosmopolitan dominant caste scholar who travelled abroad for education—is not just a matter of division of labour, but also of division of labourers. Escape from casteism and the

monetizing of labour, performed an indigenizing function for these 19th century Indians in the Caribbean. Structures that keep caste violence intact, yet invisible to broader society, thus variously deepen labour's indigenizing function across lines of Brahmin entitlement and the Dalit search for liberation.

There is another aspect to caste which we would like to highlight here. The "global" in global capitalism is not just about European orchestrations of genocidal conquest, exploitation, extraction, and enslavement, and the displacements that generated immigrant labour to do the work of settler colonization (Sharma, 2006). It is also about noticing the foundation of caste in the ways in which Brahmins and other dominant caste rulers and merchants collaborated with Europeans to then dig the violent lines of caste deeper into the flows of labour across seas and into lands across every latitude and longitude of the globe (Gupta, 2016; Patel, 2016). Patel's previous writing explains the relationship between caste and colonialism — building on Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd's (2011) conception of "horizontal relations of violence" — capturing the ways in which variously racialized and colonized people engage in "zero-sum struggles for hegemony," and in so doing, invest in Indigenous peoples' erasure and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous lands (p. xxxiv). Patel's scholarship foregrounds histories of caste-oppressed and Muslim people considering the conventional flattening of non-Indigenous, non-Black people under the homogenizing umbrellas of "South Asians," "racialized," "brown" and "people of colour," and discusses the ways in which whiteness and caste fashioned each other in South Asia. This is also why we want to refuse the exceptionalism afforded to intra-racial collaborations. For dominant caste South Asians who come to the Americas and operate as casteless to evade their anti-Indigenous and anti-Black histories, Dalit feminist scholarship highlights that caste and various converging *colonialisms* (the coloniality of caste, British colonialism, ongoing Indian colonialisms, as well as settler colonialism in North America)—are each vertical forms of violence that play out and converge in complex and obscured ways in the diaspora.

It is difficult to trace the exact contours of the relationship between the Canadian state's white settler ideology and its seemingly inadvertent, but de facto, casteism. Sunera Thobani's (2007) careful study of Canadian nation-building demonstrates that racially 'non-preferred' immigrants, such as South Asians, were nonetheless relatively exalted as outsiders-turned-insiders (compared to Indigenous insiders-turned-outsiders) within the white settler ideology of the Canadian state, which was founded upon Indigenous peoples' dispossession and genocide (pp. 74-75; see also Bannerji, 2000). Furthermore, as Enakshi Dua's (2003) work has shown, early 20th century Canadian immigration policy debates on who counts as a British "subject" and "alien," were underpinned by transnational white settler ideologies. Yet, caste-differentiated data and analysis is hard to locate within such Canadian state-formation processes. However, there are clues that this absence of caste as a category of Canadian state policy is not necessarily a passive absence, even if it is an obscured one.

The 19th century British colonial state in the subcontinent has been characterized as an "ethnographic state" obsessively producing knowledge about caste and religion, as this caste-based census/knowledge was important for continuing to divide-and-rule the subcontinent

(Dirks, 2001). It was no secret that caste and whiteness were in deep collusion in the workings of the British Raj. If we are to understand that white settler colonialism in Canada was not cut off from other transnational colonial and imperial projects, how then is it possible that the British Canadian colonial state could be oblivious to the caste of South Asians coming to its shores? While we do not have a concrete answer to this question as yet, we raise it to note that in the subcontinent, modern casteism came to be institutionally-entrenched through what Satish Deshpande has called "castelessness" in the course of anti-colonial nationalist movements against the British Raj, beginning in the late 19th century. By castelessness, Deshpande (2013) means the self-interested dominant caste institutionalized misrepresentation that caste only shapes the lives of the caste-oppressed.[8] As he explains, "upper caste identity is such that it can be completely overwritten by modern professional identities of choice, whereas lower caste identity is so indelibly engraved that it overwrites all other identities and renders them illegible, along with the choices they may represent" (p. 32). The caste-privileged (racialized) subject is the Cartesian subject of sorts who can move around and mark his territory in both national and international contexts while the Dalit subject remains constricted and immovable under the caste burden.

Both colonialism and anti-colonial movements of Indians were scripted by caste. There are also deep histories of collusions and collaborations between Brahmin families and British colonizers in India (Chandra, 2011). These were often the same Brahmins who turned to Indian nationalism once they began to experience the kind of humiliation from the British, which they had bestowed on Dalits and Bahujan for centuries. We want to quote at length from Dalit leader, Mata Prasad's 2002 autobiography here. He notes:

> These privileged young Indians [studying in England] during English rule [*gulami*, or slavery] in India had to suffer humiliation [*apaman*] at every step of their stay in England, unable, for example, to travel by first class even though they had a first-class railway ticket. They could not enter some hotels. They had to listen to the humiliating [*apaman-janak*] English term "Indian dog". Such humiliation [*apaman*] enraged them. These elite Indians didn't know that Dalits in India had to suffer the worst kind of humiliation… (Mata Prasad, cited in Rawat & Satyanarayana, 2016, p. 1)

It was the refusal to be treated as outcasts by the British that infuriated and created the category of Indian nationalists, with caste Hindus as the main contributors to the movement. And yet, it is not the case that caste-oppressed peoples did not participate in anti-colonial struggles, and made a commitment to human dignity and egalitarian democracy for all. For the caste-oppressed people, anti-colonial nationalism against the British was not possible without anti-caste commitment of Indian nationalists developing an anti-caste commitment. Yet, as Chinnaiah

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8 For a powerful and illuminating study on how mid 20th century South Asians carried caste in Canada, see Cecil Patrick Pereira's dissertation from 1971, titled, "East Indians in Winnipeg: a study in the consequences of immigration for an ethnic group in Canada" from The University of Manitoba.

Jangam (2017) powerfully notes in his study, "if one consults the canon of nationalism in India, Dalits as political actors and visionaries fail to even feature in the footnotes" (p.1). As our discussion on Indian subaltern studies above, clearly shows, caste Hindus can become the colonized, the subaltern, and the anti-colonial subjects in Indian history and politics, but Dalits are to remain the specters in these archives. Caste, as Ambedkar (1936) noted, was and is so pervasive, that there is no outside to it unless it is annihilated. Therefore, we allege that caste was never absent, even if not publicly documented or acknowledged by white people, in how the immigration authorities viewed immigration patterns of South Asians in the 19th and 20th centuries. From the late nineteenth century arrival of people from the subcontinent to the points system of the late 20th century, to the present moment, there is no outside to race, caste, and gender, which has informed Canadian immigration policies.

Taking the liberty to apply the category of castelessness to early 20th century immigration to Canada allows us to consider the ways in which caste informs Canadian state-formation, even if the lack of data obscures specificity and does not permit concrete analysis because of the use of racialized colonial categories such as "Hindoos" to refer not just to Hindu South Asians, but South Asians of all backgrounds. For example, Dua's work on early twentieth century debates "across virtually all sectors of Canadian society," including colonial officials, shows that competing views on the question of allowing "Hindoo" women to join their husbands in Canada were equally committed to keeping Canada white—detractors did not want to allow women of colour to corrupt whiteness, and proponents thought miscegenation would do the same (Dua, 2000, p.59). Here, the intensely-racial category of "Hindoo woman" is haunted by the "family values" of Brahminical and British patriarchy, even if we do not know her specific religion or caste in this case. Dua (2000) notes:

> the question of South Asian women migrating into Canada was limited to the entry of the spouses of Asian men already residing in the country. … single Asian women or those women with spouses elsewhere were prohibited from entering Canada. *It is important to note that the South Asian community failed to address these barriers*, as South Asian men focused on the legislative prohibitions against the entry of their spouses—not on the prohibitions against the entry of all South Asian women. Thus, the gendering of South Asian women in Canada was limited to that of a spouse. (p. 59, emphasis added)

The mobility and "protection" afforded to the South Asian woman was thus subject to the collaborative Brahminical and British patriarchies, through which men defined the "family values" appropriate to their respective communities via hetero-patriarchal casteist, racist, and imperial logics. The triangulated dynamics of race, caste, and sexuality have to be held together in our analysis of Canadian immigration policies with respect to South Asians.

Focusing on state policy, we can see a contradiction. At the time when British patriarchy was defending the migration of indentured labouring women from the subcontinent to plantations across the world, the migration of South Asian women to Canada was seen as such a threat

to the white colonial world order (Dua, 2003, p. 60). In the case of indentured labourer women, Charu Gupta (2016) shows that most were sex workers, widows, and Dalit—caught between the moralizing tones of nationalists who wanted to save Indian women from white sexual and labour exploitation, and the deceptions of the British who claimed that there was no exploitation of indentured women. Placing Gupta's work in conversation with Dua's, we can surmise, then, that Canada's prohibition against the migration of "single Asian women or those with spouses elsewhere," was effectively a prohibition against the immigration of those most likely to travel to the diaspora without husbands, who were also those most adversely-affected by Brahminical patriarchy—sex workers, widows, and caste-oppressed women (see also Bahadur 2014). The white geography of Canada with its miscegenation policies, while very racist against all migrants (caste privileged or not), still did not want caste-oppressed Indian women outside the fold of heterosexual marriages with Indian men.

If racist and, as we note, casteist heteropatriarchy shaped immigrant labour for colonial settlement in early Canadian nation-building (Bolaria and Li, 1988, Dua, 2000), the same is true of liberalized Canadian immigration addressing the desperate shortages of labour in the Canadian economy in the 1960s onwards (Cohen, 1994; Sharma, 2000; Trumper & Wong, 2007). Beginning in the 1990s, there has been an over-representation of Indian immigrants among the hi-tech and professional sectors, compared to other immigrants coming to do agricultural and service/domestic work (Trumper & Wong, 2007, pp. 164-165). Thus, Canadian immigration policy in the service of white capitalist economy did not simply consolidate along the lines of race and gender, but also caste. As we discussed above too, what is crucial in any analysis having to do with South Asians and diasporic nations' immigration policies, is the foundational ideology of division of labourers as it structures public and intimate expressions of life, labour, and living. In not explicitly acknowledging caste in various local and transnational sites of data collection and analysis, caste is made illegible, and whether they are cognizant of it or not, contemporary institutions are keeping alive an age-old collaboration of Brahminical supremacy and white supremacy (Patel, 2019b; Chandra, 2011). This filters into the university context in which the transnational formation of race by caste histories remains obscured.

The Il/legibility of Caste in the Canadian EDI University
A growing body of literature has significantly advanced the conversation on equity by focusing on race and colonialism in the Canadian university, and challenging the unmitigated re/production of cis white heteropatriarchal approaches to gender inclusion (Henry & Tator, 2009; Henry et. al., 2017). Consider Toronto-based Caribbean sociologist, Camille Hernandez Ramdwar's words in Henry and Tator's volume about racism in the Canadian university. She notes:

> Divisions between racialized peoples operate to ensure a 'divide-and-rule' status quo which allows white supremacy to operate un-contested. One of the ways that racism is constructed in Canada is to maintain discrete boundaries between racialized groups (such as Aboriginal, Black/African, South Asian,

Asian, European) when, in the case of the Caribbean, many of these racial groups share a similar cultural background. The ethno-racial divisions between students which operate through the propensity of student groups on campus can also work in a similar fashion. Instead of racialized students uniting to combat the larger structural oppressor, inner divisions and competition for resources keep students who are all affected by racism continually divided. (Ramdwar, 2009, p. 117)

While refusing the lateral violence which whiteness generates, we might also remember that white people are not the only ones who uphold white supremacy. Colonized collaborators/native informants, and postcolonial nationalist elites actively reproduce colonial continuities and world orders, as the Martinican psychiatrist and anti-colonial revolutionary thinker Frantz Fanon (1963/2004) pointed out long ago. In Ramdwar's account, "South Asian" is not only a homogenous category; it is included as one among many forms of racial heritage that a person from the Caribbean may embody. But to acknowledge the multiplicity of racial and ethnic groups in the Caribbean is not the same as attending to the very different histories which brought white people as colonizers, Black people as enslaved, and Indians, Chinese, Filipinos and other people as indentured labourers, post the so-called 'emancipation' in the 19th century to different parts of the Caribbean.

Our call to look searchingly at the history of relationships among variously racialized and colonized groups (Alexander, 2005; Byrd, 2011; Lowe, 2015; Patel, 2019a) is a call to understand the pre-existing ideologies, beliefs, and power relations through which white supremacy has exploited differentially racialized people and gained traction among us. We also want the reader to know that those South Asian scholars who work on the assumption that South Asian can be a monolithic category of people, usually mean caste Indian Hindus.

As we have been saying, caste is so invisibilized and illegible that it is not understandable even as "institutional cultural work." Brahminical patriarchal supremacy (Chakravarti, 1993)—that is, gender and sexual relations organized along the lines of caste—is so carefully disappeared through the labor of Brahmins and dominant caste people that it first needs to be made legible, if not familiar, to become something that can be seen and witnessed by non-South Asian anti-caste allies in academia and beyond. And it is Dalit Bahujan people who bear that workload, in the academy, and beyond, as we discuss below. An analysis of racism alone is not sufficient to understand Brahmin networks operating in Canadian universities and how labour gets not only distributed, but also upholds the dehumanizing of Dalit, Bahujan, and caste-oppressed Muslims and others considered religious minorities in India. It is within these deeply intersectional and complicated systems of violence that we have been wondering about whether collaborative writing amounts to "willing helpfulness" (Ahmed, 2019) to colonial and casteist institutions of education. To raise the question of caste is not intended to dilute the force of anti-racist critiques of universities, but in fact to consider their inextricable relationship to the question of racialized colonial capitalism. It is to "thicken" our descriptions of what diversity work does and does not do in Canadian universities (Ahmed, 2012).

Consider some inadvertent but ordinary manifestations of casteism in the Canadian university:

- Brahmin scholars cite and collaborate with Indigenous and Black scholars, but very likely cannot name any Dalit scholars whose work they engage with, ethically.
- White faculty assume that students interested in South Asian studies should use postcolonial theoretical frameworks without understanding these as casteist and erasing Dalit-Bahujan interruptions and liberation project.
- South Asian studies scholars teach everyone from Gandhi to Marx and Agamben, but not Ambedkar; they especially never teach Dalit feminist scholarship, even when mentioning caste, because their caste-privileged friends writing about caste do the work more "gently."
- Marxian and postcolonial scholars resist teaching about caste for fear of reproducing Orientalized views of South Asia.
- South Asian faculty on admissions and hiring committees read applicant profiles in ways familiar to them, grounded in names that Brahmins know—i.e., names of casteist academic institutions in India, and people of prominence in the academy who tend to be from dominant castes.
- Dalit students and faculty are patronized as tokens on conference panels and edited volumes by Brahmin scholars, who with entry of Dalits into academia, feel the pressure to perform their anti-casteism and solidarity.
- The academy in general and EDI leadership, in particular, tends to see caste as a cultural thing among South Asians, without understanding its broader, systemic implications, on rare occasions when they know what caste is.

We list these actively-voiced and practiced positions, not to disparage but to highlight the pervasive and myriad texture of its ordinary existence among South Asians and non-South Asians alike. They demonstrate that the structural need to not know about caste, or "Brahminical ignorance," following Charles Mills work (Da Costa, 2021), reproduces Brahminical supremacy in higher education, and inadvertent non-South Asian ignorance about caste also benefits Brahminical supremacy.

Among these erasures of horizontal relations of power (Byrd, 2011), the brutality and banality of caste violence remains perfectly invisible and illegible to all but the caste-oppressed in every institution. The labour of caste-oppressed academics is rendered invisible in university departments understood to be divided along the ternary lines of white, Indigenous, and racialized faculty, staff, and students. By labour here, we do not simply mean the apparent process of creating economic value, but also life, intimacies, alternative world orders, and futurities for variously marginalized people, and also trauma and death for these same people.

Drawing upon Rita Kaur Dhamoon's (2020) conceptualization of "racism as a workload and bargaining issue" in academia, we argue that caste work in universities also needs to be

framed as a matter of workload. Dhamoon notes that racism and workload are "inseparable" for racialized and Indigenous faculty (n.p) because "i) it changes the distribution of labor from that undertaken by white faculty; and ii) it is work that is not accounted for in initial appointment discussions/letters of offer, revised individual agreements, faculty-university agreements, and departmental standards and responsibilities, pay scales, the distribution of labour, and unwritten practices" (n.p.). In an academy where we are fighting to make visible the fact that labor is also gendered, racialized, and sexualized bodies, what the labor of caste-oppressed faculty, staff, and students does will take more work and time to be fleshed out, and western academia is certainly not at the point of putting caste on the table as a bargaining issue. No matter how attuned to power relations some university departments are, and there are some better ones that seek to confront the constant cis-heteropatriarchal white workings of the university, there still remains an assumption that at least all the brown faculty will be in solidarity with each other.

Often, if there are two or more South Asian faculty members in the department, everybody from one's colleagues to the chair and the dean assume that solidarity, and even friendship binds us. Requests are made for us to co-design and co-teach courses, we are encouraged to apply together for grants, collaborate on projects, and are often treated as a homogenous entity. Even worse, savarna academics are assigned as faculty mentors of us Muslim, Dalit, and other caste oppressed faculty (Patel). Nobody understands that whereas the savarna colleague might still be obsessed with teaching reverential courses on the casteist and anti-Black Mohandas Gandhi, the Dalit academic is doing the tedious work of introducing new courses on Dalit feminisms, educating the department (including colleagues and not just the students) and allies in other departments on how to understand casteism, and mobilizing these large universities to include caste in our universities' anti-discrimination policies.

Overshadowed by Brahminical Indian and often very Islamophobic South Asian studies departments, centers and initiatives, we (Patel in this case) do the unseen, unacknowledged, and sometimes-treated-with-hostility soul-crushing and bone-crunching work because Dalits and caste-oppressed Muslim scholars are only at the threshold of academia whether in South Asia or in North America. This purposeful stance, and a position at the threshold, allows one the perspective of both the view behind, based on centuries of histories of anti-caste consciousness and survival, and the view in front of the open/ing door. Dalits stand at the door as people whose epistemologies will crumble the very buildings they are refused entry into, and people on the other side know that the Dalit feminist epistemologies can never be commensurable with how they live, learn, teach, write and uphold their networks of power. But often times, anti-caste resistance becomes a workload issue for Dalit and caste-oppressed academics, as they work to conceal their caste backgrounds. For those of us who have the privilege to do so, we have sometimes done it in order to avoid the deathly stigmatization that comes with our castes and our actual last names.

Our Process of How We Came to Collaborate

Dia's Reflections

Shaista and I met at a conference in 2016. I was beginning to write on my responsibility as a dominant caste Indian for colonialism in Canada and in Kashmir. Ironically, I approached the former by thinking with the example of the Dene delegation to Japan to offer their apology to Hiroshima survivors, bypassing the Canadian state. I was also reflecting on stories from my memories and family's relationship to Kashmir, a place and people colonized by India. In large part due to my conversations with Shaista and her ethical orientations, I learned why my approach to the Dene story was, what Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck calls "extractive" (Smith, Tuck, & Yang, 2018), and why it was worth continuing the work on Kashmir. I will always be grateful beyond words for the gift of her work, honesty, and eventually friendship in my life.

A few years into a growing academic relationship and friendship, Shaista brought up the question of writing something together. An unspoken but deep discomfort punctuated my genuine excitement about the prospect. I was keenly aware of the patronage offered by caste-dominant Brahmin scholars to caste-oppressed Dalit-Bahujan and Muslim scholars, and I noticed the reproductive and even aggrandizing work such patronage practices yielded for the individual Brahmin academic and for Brahminical supremacy, regardless of the benefits that also accrued to the Dalit-Bahujan and Muslim students and faculty persons concerned. In harboring such concerns, I naively chased an idea of an imaginary relationship between Shaista and I, as if the one we had was not already deeply marked by the violence of patronage politics and its reproduction.

We started concretely talking about writing together in 2020, during a pandemic. I was nursing accumulating burnout and heartbreak in academia during a sabbatical. Because of her vastly different experience in academia compared to mine, Shaista already juggles burnout in the crucial early years of being an assistant professor. From there, we wrote an abstract for a paper tentatively entitled "Complicity and challenges of addressing whiteness in higher education" for a conference panel in June 2021. We wanted to locate our uneven complicity in settler colonial institutions of higher education. Caste was unavoidable, and in the conference abstract which we submitted, we committed to emphasizing "structures of 'our' particular and uneven complicity with racist, colonial power, while considering their practical implications."

But then, in the face of collaborative writing, for various reasons, we both struggled and found ourselves hesitating. We made reading lists, read and discussed our favourite quotes, annotated texts, and discussed its relevance to writing about complicity. We talked about the ethics of writing collaboratively across caste lines, and our search for an adequate vocabulary for these challenges. Doubts about overcoming my usual practice of individualized writing seized me and overlayed doubts about being able to write ethically and together across caste lines. Avoiding the truth behind these doubts, I feverishly summarized Shaista's previous writing for the parts of this piece that we knew we would need. I compulsively cut and pasted from my own previously drafted prose, trying desperately to quell my anxiety of presuming to write collaboratively with Shaista. Without knowing for sure, I got the sense that we both felt the deep chasm between us, notwithstanding our friendship. Such chasms are wide and deep.

Proponents of Brahminical supremacy would rather they remain unnoticed, unremarkable, like a natural landscape. How do we honour the places where our relationship doesn't want to go, when we have committed to writing together for an event?

I could not write with Shaista without reproducing Brahminical patronage—it was not a matter of will and conviction. I knew that. I also knew that I didn't have much to offer as far as ethical, historical, theoretical knowledge of caste and colonialism. What then could I write with Shaista that could escape the agony of using, extracting from, and hurting a friend that Brahminical socialization instilled in me, even as I tried to consciously think about not doing so? My search for escape and caste-innocence was constant. My political commitment to foreground and cite Dalit-Bahujan writers doesn't prescribe an ethics of when *not* to use their words for my own purposes. My political commitment to do more work than I ask of Dalit-Bahujan does not prevent me from doing that work unethically by taking up too much space. These ordinary moments when I had nothing ethical to offer made it difficult to believe in this collaboration. I have no verbal balm to offer here, no template for doing better. The challenge of confronting an animated manifestation of caste violence in our relationship generated a whole lot of silence within me—my silence exemplifying Brahminical ignorance, violence, and lack of basic education in ethics—impossible to overcome simply through collaborative writing.

Soon enough, Shaista noted that we cannot write about complicity together. She reframed it as an honest reckoning with the structural failure of cross-caste collaborative writing and the kind of friendship that is unafraid to countenance the limits of friendship. In the end, we didn't want to allow the white and Brahminical academy to consume the story of the limits of our friendship either. Instead, we decided to focus on foregrounding caste in conversations about collaborations.

Shaista's Reflections

Can that which is felt be theorized in words? One can try to write about caste terror and anti-Muslimness one lives with, but sometimes there are no words. In graduate school, I never had any good relationships with any of the (one or two) Brahmins I worked with, even as I deceived myself into thinking that there was actual care and friendship. I now know that one cannot be friends with one's murderers, and that there can be only bloodied transactions with one's "assassins" as the narrator of *Theory* cited at the outset of this article calls these academic colleagues. And yet, in order to survive in spaces where we appear as pus-filled wounds only, not even the kind of wound where light enters according to Rumi, we often rely on finding Brahmin and white patronage. This is not about caste-oppressed people being deceiving, cunning, or traitors to our multiple histories of marginality. Brahmin networks are just so transnationally powerful and so engulfing that there is no outside to them in academia. There are no Dalit or caste-oppressed Muslim academics I know whose lives have not been punctuated by patronage of one or two "kind" Brahmin academics. This is our caste debt, accumulated over generations, and needing to be expressed as an obligation, every step of the way from acknowledgements in our books to a lifetime commitment, to subservience and an expectation of silence and data. The historical, contemporary, and allegorical dimensions of this caste debt are a multitude to which there are no alternative economies unless caste is annihilated (Ambedkar, 1936).

Challenging the moral and economic grammar of this terrifying caste debt is an important praxis of anti-casteism, and this is the labour which Dalit Bahujan people do all the time. Brahmin patronage, or more aptly parsimonious casteist/predatory lending of that which is actually accumulated from our bodily, spiritual, intellectual, and economic dispossession over generations in the first place, becomes a site of further dehumanization of caste-oppressed people as even "well meaning" Brahmins structurally thrive on devouring our bones, skin, flesh, intellect, soul, and futurities. Caste debt is always meant to keep us alienated from ourselves, and always in our place—that is, outside the sketch of modernity's figure of the human. The humanization of the small minority of Brahmins rests on caste-oppressed peoples' constant dehumanization.

It is in this context of generational debt and dehumanization that my friendship with Dia was cultivated. To her credit, I have never had more open and honest conversations about caste complicity of Brahmins with another caste-privileged scholar. In the beginning, she very graciously came onto my dissertation committee and her unconditional support for me has meant a lot to me in an interpersonal way, even as we both recognize the broader and historical context of Brahmin patronage and Dalit's caste debt. We understand that ours is an imperfect and difficult friendship at structural, and sometimes interpersonal, levels, but still one in which we are both invested for reasons of love and working toward an anti-caste future for both our people yet to come.

I suggested to Dia that we write about our complicity in white settler colonialism while considering our differential caste positions within the context of white supremacy. I am exhausted by the move of homogenizing all South Asians as settlers of the same kind, a move often made by Brahmins and savarna as they bring Dalit and caste-oppressed Muslims into the fold of complicity, while erasing their local and transnational Brahminical supremacist power and its historical and ongoing role in consolidating white supremacy. However, many conversations later, I was firm in my belief that my injury and anger were so deep that even writing a short article on complicity was not possible for me. We cannot write about complicity together, even while centering caste power. This collaboration has been very difficult for me, despite a great level of comfort and friendship between us.

Initially, I could not articulate the difficulty to her, and expressed my discomfort through going very quiet, something unusual for me, or I expressed it unwittingly through my failure to meet up to talk through things which needed to be done for writing this paper. I now know that going quiet in meetings with her was not a lack of feelings, but a re-routing of feelings that one fears will not be understood by the other person. I had been reading Kevin Quashie's (2012) book, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, and reflecting on the work of quiet. This thinking happens for me alongside my "emotional outbursts," my "breakdowns," and my "meltdowns." These are the words I have used to characterize my (lack of useful or utilitarian, for this article) contributions in conversations with Dia. Quashie theorizes going quiet as part of Black aesthetics. Refusing to be over-expressive, one of the ways in which Blackness makes an appearance in the American cultural and political landscape, quiet instead is "about expressiveness that is shaped by the vagaries of the inner life. Such expressiveness is not *necessarily articulate*—it isn't always publicly

legible, and can be random and multiple in ways that makes it hard to codify singularly" (p. 103, emphasis added). Quiet is not a passive or disengaged state of being. It is not about the lack of feelings. Quiet is not the expected-to-be-silent in front of our various masters either. The inner life, of which quiet is an active state of *engaging with*, allows one to be expressive without wanting to be public, without showing everything that lives within one, and without allowing one's body and mind to be theorized and written about by one's masters, those who have for centuries drawn on your lives and labour for extraction. Here I am reminded of the deep and powerful words of the late Indigenous/Adivasi rights activist and intellectual, Abhay Flavian Xaxa (2011) who wrote:

> "I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank,
> I am not your project, or any exotic museum object,
> I am not the soul waiting to be harvested…⁹"

I draw on Xaxa's words to note that going quiet was both a turn inward to wait, to search for or dream up different wor(l)ds, not to live up to their expectations of polemical and emotional "us," and sensible, objective, and theoretical "them" making sense of "our" lives and living. A collective but heterogeneous "we" has been the Brahmin site of theorizing for their publications and grants long enough. Suspicion and vigilance were ever-present despite trust and comfort on an interpersonal level.

I am not being contradictory here. The heart knows what it knows, but then there are thousands of years of being exploited by Brahmins and that historical and ongoing violence does mediate all relationships across caste lines, whether personal or professional. There were too many overlooked or difficult to articulate feelings, of which going quiet was but one manifestation. It was an active refusal to become data, to become something Brahmins get inspired to find/write words from. This going quiet is not being apolitical, uncaring, unfeeling; rather, it is about *not* letting the full range of one's inner life be "determined entirely by publicness" (Quashie, p.6), while dreaming up a bloody revolution.

Collaborating with One's Data

Having discussed our investments in wanting to collaborate ethically and not being able to join hands over the ongoing caste apartheid, we invite readers to question the place of caste in canonical texts on collaborative work by dominant caste transnational feminists (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Grewal & Caplan, 1994; Mohanty, 2003; Swarr & Nagar, 2010). We are refraining from citing particular South Asian feminist scholarship on friendship that mines the depths of history and academic life to find, construct, or curate rare formations of friendship across power lines. Even though these texts are held up as exemplary gems, given our own experience with collaboration described above, we are citing the kind of work on collaboration and friendship that most enables us to take seriously the feminism of making legible the deep

9 Abhay Xaxa (Sept 19, 2011), "I am not your data," https://roundtableindia.co.in/lit-blogs/?tag=abhay-xaxa (accessed July 11, 2018).

challenges and limits of friendship across power lines, alongside prompting readers to see feminism in searching the possibility of friendship across borders. We briefly turn to Richa Nagar's (2006) much-celebrated book on feminist commitment to friendship, reciprocity, and solidarity, *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* which she co-wrote with eight other grassroots activists from mostly rural, and belonging to different caste and class locations in Uttar Pradesh, India. This book has a wide reach in South Asia and transnationally. We both have either been taught this book in graduate school or have taught it to our students before.

While appreciating the book, we would also like to remind the reader that staging critical inquiries into much-beloved texts is not to reject the work of its authors or the ways in which important theoretical work is done at multiple sites. Indeed, it made sense for us to gravitate toward this text to think through our collaboration. This text has made us ask several questions in relation to our own struggle for collaborating with each other. We are interested in thinking through what allows the use of a "blended 'we,'" to become grounded as a methodology across vertical and horizontal power lines. In the introduction to the book, solely authored by Richa Nagar (2006), she writes:

> The use of a blended "we" is a deliberate strategy on the collective's part, as is our decision to share quotes from the diaries in a minimal way. Rather than encouraging our readers to follow the trajectories of the lives of seven women, we braid the stories to highlight our analysis of specific moments in those lives. … We want to interrupt the popular practice of representation in the media, NGO reports, and academic analyses, in which the writing voice of the one who is analyzing or reporting as the "expert" is separated from the voice of the persons who are recounting their lives and opinions. One way we have chosen to eliminate this separation is by ensuring that our nine voices emerge as a chorus, even if the diaries of only seven of us are the focus of our discussions. At no time is this unity meant to achieve resolution on issues of casteism, communalism, and hierarchy within the collective, however. … In other words, the blended "we" hinged on the trust and honesty with which each author could articulate her disagreements and tensions. (pp. xxxiv-xxxv).

These words and the intentions embodied in them sound good. Collaborative writing across uneven locations in, for, and beyond the academy has in this way been championed for its capacity to generate dialogue across disagreements, a praxis grounded in social change, and a challenge to the academy's notions of individual knowledge-production and merit (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006 Nagar and Swarr, 2010). However, if we two Indian Hindu and Pakistani Muslim university professors, respectively, albeit at different stages of our careers, could not find ethical ways to form a "we," across fractured lines of caste apartheid, then we cannot help but wonder about the ways in which a "blended 'we'" relies on obscuring one's own caste power and generational and ongoing complicities in the violence.

Guided by concerns brought forward by caste-oppressed feminists, we bring to fore the power that hides behind this "blended 'we'" of collaboration, especially in a book where the caste locations of rural women mark the lives of others – and in quite totalizing ways, but caste does not seem to overdetermine the lives of the dominant caste academic. Consider this second quote also from the introduction in which Nagar (2006) explains the rationale for why material from seven rural activists' diaries formed the core of this book, whilst the two urban educated dominant caste women's diaries were not considered appropriate for the book.

> Furthermore, although Richa Singh and I can by no means be described as coming from the same background, our Hindu and upper-caste affiliations and our socioeconomic and geographical locations and histories were radically different from the varying backgrounds of the autobiographers. Both Richas' diaries on childhood, youth, and marriage also *sidetracked* the discussion toward contexts, issues, and power relationships that were not shaped by the politics of NGO work, rural women's empowerment, and knowledge production about rural women's lives in the same ways as the lives of other seven authors were. The collective decided that Richa Singh and I would write and share our personal stories, but these would become part of the collective's discussions only when they seemed relevant to the issues that the autobiographers' diaries inspired. (Nagar, 2006, xxxvi-xxxvii, emphasis added).

While it is certainly laudable that a collective's politics determined whose lives constitute its data and central politics and whose doesn't, we limit ourselves to asking what notion of relationality guides this collaboration, where the lives of dominant caste actors are taken to "sidetrack" the critique of this NGO's politics, despite the fact that it is precisely caste Hindu supremacy which structures the politics of development in India. Moreover, it feels like where some lives are laid out for the reader to probe at, the two women with the same name keep their lives on the relative sidelines, affording them the mystifications of irrelevance, privacy, respectability, distance, and therefore, greater value than those whose lives were made public to the readers. Gopal Guru (2002), a Dalit scholar aptly said that in Indian social sciences, while Brahmins circulate as theoretical as people with power to write different worlds, give shape to ideas, caste-oppressed people, the Dalit-Bahujan remain as empirical. They remain as data and at the mercy of dominant caste scholars to give them whatever shape is needed to get their (caste) work done.

So, we ask: Was it a sidetracking or a clear recognition that their lives, especially the life of the upper-caste U.S.-based academic, were so different that braiding those lives together would make their positions across the barricades even more clear? Was it sidetracking, plain incommensurability, or such starkly demarcated lines of the kind that broke the words into nonsense? The incommensurability, after all, is not just about different lives, but precisely about the reality that one's humanization has historically relied on the other's dehumanization. After all, what Fanon (1963) has said about the colonial world being "divided into compartments,

this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species" (pp. 39-40) also holds true for a world where caste apartheid is 2,500 years old.

Conclusion

Our effort to collaborate prompted the realization that we cannot write about complicity together. Our argument is not intended as a blanket recommendation never to collaborate across differential power lines. Nor do we suggest that collaborations are essentially colonial, casteist, or otherwise transactional. We want to make caste legible where it runs for cover in academia. We are writing against the commonplace assumption that those racialized as brown, or South Asian are automatically suitable to form alliances or collaborations because we are in the same racial checkbox. We write to make apparent the structural relationship of Brahminical supremacy to a monopoly over education systems, to canonical racialized knowledge, and to white supremacy's prospecting of collaborations among "people of colour" for new frontiers of value. We also write this because we believe that cross-caste collaborative work should be ethically predicated on making specific, relevant histories of Brahminical and dominant caste violence publicly legible, especially when spelling out those histories can crack the veneer of more tidy narratives—even those that seemingly project radical messiness. Against this paradigmatic and fantastical model of cross-caste racial solidarity and collaboration, we write about the collective exhaustion but also of caste-oppressed students and faculty invited as props to allow caste-dominant South Asian scholars to claim anti-caste politics, which always comes with the perks of funding and recognition as being "not casteist." We also write to reflect on what it means for dominant caste scholars to refuse any place of innocence through such collaboration when caste violence has been a site of genocide. Ultimately, we write to encourage South Asian academics to think critically about what remains unsaid and becomes epistemological and material violence in this encounter of Brahmin patronage and Dalit debt, which continues the casteist project of humiliation and dehumanization of caste-oppressed people. For us, this difficult work of thinking through caste hierarchies and our investments in either upholding or working towards the Dalit feminist project of caste annihilation is both urgent, and the only way we can enter into conversations on decolonization and abolition in North America.

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Avoiding Risk, Protecting the "Vulnerable": A Story of Performative Ethics and Community Research Relationships

Rachel Loewen Walker, Andrew Hartman

ABSTRACT   In February 2019, OUTSaskatoon, a 2SLGBTQ+ resource centre in Saskatoon, SK, received 1.1 M in federal funds to support a five-year project set to intervene in the instances and societal perpetuation of gender-based violence toward the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The project involved partnerships between OUTSaskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan, including a comprehensive research and evaluation stream to accompany the delivery of front-line services and educational activities. During the project's application to the University's Research Ethics Board (REB), members of the ethics review committee expressed heightened levels of fear and discomfort not only with the subject-matter, but with the role (and centrality) of the community organization within the research process. The documented experience explores pressing barriers to effective and ethical community-university research partnerships. To this end, the authors explore their communications with the REB alongside the themes of "vulnerability," "risk-aversion," and more broadly regarding the timelines of community work versus university processes. Together these themes maintain a culture of academic exceptionalism that causes significant barriers to the development of reciprocal partnerships between community partners and universities. In this case, the outcome was hopeful, as a formal complaint to the REB received a documented apology. In documenting this specific, though not unique, experience, we aim to highlight the possibilities for leaning in and building ethical space between and through community and academic environments to foreground both needed critique and collaborative pathways forward.

KEYWORDS   Research Ethics Board, community-based research, non-profit organizations, ethics, risk, vulnerability

AH: I receive an email from my University's Research Ethics Board (REB) requesting that I attend a full board review meeting of a community-based research project I was working on with a local 2SLGBTQ+ organization. I was nervous. Although I had been through the ethics process before, this was my first time addressing the full review board. Neither of my previous projects had sparked any ethical concerns, including a project on queer youth homelessness with the same agency, nor my Masters' thesis research looking at undergraduate student experiences of shame in university. Both

of these passed through with only minor grammatical corrections, even though the latter project resulted in participants coming forward and disclosing experiences of sexual violence and bullying. The ethics application before the board was the largest research initiative I had ever been a part of. It was the culmination of several years of working closely with OUTSaskatoon, my own graduate research interests, and my personal experience as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The importance of this work, and the pressure of these relationships, weighed on my shoulders.

I arrived at the meeting and was invited into the room where I sat down across from eight faculty members and a community representative. We were offered beverages and then we began. Within the first few exchanges, it was clear that I was on trial for future harms I had no intention of committing. More painful, however, was the combination of paternalism, discrimination, and unease expressed by the members of the REB. I was struck by the reactions of a board intended to serve as the ethical safeguard for our institution as they proceeded to question my work, the potential research participants, and the partner organization.

I left the meeting feeling confused, as though I had just experienced a hazing ritual, and in the following days I received eight and half pages of follow-up questions which included, among many other concerning items, problematic prejudicial remarks regarding the 2SLGBTQ+ community and requests to distance the community organization from the research activities. The process delayed the project considerably and redirected research efforts away from the community towards academia. This interaction sparked conversations about ethics, care, power, and vulnerability. I always thought that the REB existed as a collaborative body meant to minimize harm in its support of good and ethical research. Given what I experienced, I wasn't sure anymore. How was it that my training around community-based research models was so different from what the REB understood? Why did I feel like I was letting my community down?

In February of 2019, OUTSaskatoon, a trans, Two Spirit, and queer community centre in Saskatoon, SK, received 1.1 M from the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) and the Public Health Association of Canada (PHAC) to support a five-year project designed to intervene in both interpersonal instances and societal perpetuation of gender-based violence toward the 2SLGBTQ+ community (see Olsen, 2019). Upon obtaining the funding, a partnership was struck between OUTSaskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan, which included a comprehensive research and evaluation stream to accompany the delivery of front-line services and educational activities. Neither WAGE nor PHAC constitute federal research bodies, and so academic rigour was not required for the project's deliverables. However, given the projected scope and the value of the research, OUTSaskatoon determined that it was important to conduct the grant in alignment with community-based participatory research practices and guidelines, including applying to the University's Research Ethics Board (REB), and being able to publish and present on our findings.

We submitted an application to the REB entitled "A Gender Based Violence Needs Assessment in LGBTQ2+ Populations," which identified a shared governance model between OUTSaskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan. As the opening vignette indicates, upon submission to the REB, members of the ethics review committee expressed high levels of discomfort with the project, largely in relation to two different areas. The first was in regard to the subject-matter: research involving members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community who had experienced gender-based violence. The second area of concern was regarding the role of the community organization within the research process, as REB members considered them to be too involved in the design and execution of the project. In the time that has passed since the ethics review, the research team has spent a great deal of time ruminating over these areas of discomfort, both of which reveal significant areas of concern not only in relation to the experience recounted here, but with the gatekeeping role that ethics boards play in setting the terms for community-based research.

This paper discusses this experience in detail, as it tells a particular story about the insulation of academic environments and the fact that there are pressing barriers to effective and *ethical* community-university partnerships. While we focus on this specific case, we comment on a larger narrative that is consistent within similar accounts of experiences with REBs across Canada, whereby many scholars have experienced unnecessary delays, inappropriate questioning, and negative evaluations of engaged community partners when engaging with their institutional ethics boards in good faith (Gustafson & Brunger, 2014; Small et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2013; Wood, 2017).

This story is told from the perspective of two queer community-based researchers and scholars operating within incongruous systems. At the time of the experience, one author was the Executive Director of OUTSaskatoon, while the other was a graduate student who had been working in a research capacity with OUTSaskatoon for two years prior to the project's onset. With these relationships and experiences in hand, we highlight and develop three areas of interest: 1) the landscape of community research as it intersects with narratives of vulnerability and risk; 2) the competing timelines of community organizations and university systems and the impact this has on the research relationship; and 3) the hierarchical power dynamics that continue to devalue community leadership and knowledge within research relationships. Through these discussions we demonstrate that the prevalence and impacts of a risk-aversion and risk-mitigation model, in the landscape of community-based research, maintains a culture of academic exceptionalism (Burris & Davis, 2009; Fiske, 2009). By contrast, community-based participatory research methods, such as ours, operate to facilitate social justice efforts and to amplify the agency and expertise of the involved communities (Flicker et al., 2007; Kwan & Walsh, 2018).

In the case recounted here, we identify several key concerns surrounding the ethics review process; however, more importantly, we identify the ways in which any intended relationship between community and academe faces considerable barriers to reciprocal engagement, which are reinforced by the policies and procedures of university research ethics boards, but which are also embedded in divergent understandings of *ethics, vulnerability,* and even *temporality.*

Within the landscape of community-based research, these concerns are not *new.* Twenty years ago, Van den Hoonaard's collection *Walking the tightrope: Ethical issues for qualitative researchers* (2002) brought together 16 accounts of the barriers that social science researchers face in relation to overly quantitative and bio-medical ethics criteria. Clearly, such concerns remain relevant as researchers continue to face heavy-handed criteria surrounding the role of community organizations within the research process, and heightened risk-aversion in relation to various research topics and subjects. In our case, we filed a formal complaint in response to the ethics process; this complaint found resolve in a documented apology, which gestured toward future efforts to counteract the detrimental effects of the process. Moving forward, we are intent upon analyzing and assessing this experience with the aim of both tempering the hierarchical dynamic between community and academic researchers, and engendering ethical, reciprocal partnerships.

Positioning Community Research

Despite its vast landscape, community-based participatory research is still a relatively new field of practice and within theoretical audiences—including among feminist theorists, philosophers, and other critical theorists—it warrants nuanced explanation (Gustafson & Brunger, 2014). Understanding prior research approaches is important in documenting the journey toward community-based participatory research. More traditional research has located itself within the realm of academe with the goal of knowledge production (Teufel-Shone, 2011); both laboratory and fieldwork research engage the realm of academic practice. Community-based research, however, takes place "in the thick of it," in settings where particular social and cultural phenomena occur *in situ.*

Practices of community-based research can be varied, ranging from conducting research on community, that is, "parachuting in" and engaging community superficially for the sole purpose of access to research participants, to substantive community engaged research, which provides community a place at the table where decisions are made. For the purpose of this article, we use community-based research (CBR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR), distinctly. The former term refers to research that has a goal of creating knowledge and advancing theory from within a community setting, while the latter focuses on engaging community throughout the research process while focusing on action-oriented outcomes (Teufel-Shone, 2011). Thus, despite their contextual differences, both laboratory and community-based research share a similar direction in that they are generally both driven by the goals, interests, and funding of the primary academic researcher and are focused on exploring phenomena. Understandably, research that takes place in a laboratory or other more academically-controlled settings may have differing aims than those of community engaged research.

Enter Community-Based Participatory Research. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Health Scholars Program defines CBPR as a collaborative approach that begins with community strengths and concerns and seeks to translate knowledge into action, with a particular focus on social change (Griffith et al., 2009). Aiming for equitable participation,

CBPR recognizes the agency, positionality, and rights of individuals and communities engaged in various research processes. One of the most significant shifts from CBR to CBPR is recognition that community knowledge is of reciprocal value to that of academic research and so within such a landscape, the researcher's role shifts from the "objective" knowledge seeker to the facilitator or the convener of situated, deeply contextually relevant knowers and ways of knowing (Wood, 2017). The researcher works alongside community partners to support the knowledge building process, but refrains from determining the outcome and, where possible, from setting the objectives of the research initiative apart from community needs and concerns.

We revisit the basic tenets of community-based participatory research because it is widely endorsed within social sciences and humanities research environments, and because it shaped the methods of the project in question, especially its expectation that community partners lead the development of research questions and the process. That said, our experience with the REB demonstrated that they had a different understanding of what constitutes both CBR and CBPR. Consequently, we acknowledge the need for shared terminology and understandings around diverse research methods in efforts to assess and comment equitably on research initiatives.

Positioning Ethics Protocols

> *AH: During the meeting with the full ethics review board, one of the reviewers turned to me and asked how we were going to prevent "chicken hawking" following the focus groups. I balked. It was a term I had never heard. I had to ask for clarification, though I sensed the intent of the question. "Chicken hawking" is a discriminatory slang term that refers to instances where older gay men prey upon younger gay men. In a community research project aimed at recognizing and understanding instances of gender-based violence, it was telling that I was encountering precisely the types of homophobia in responses to our ethics application as were shared with us by survivors of gender-based violence. I educated the ethics review committee on the harm of this language, the experiences of survivors, and asked that the language not be used within the deliberations. The meeting and the term's usage carried on, and when I received the list of follow-up questions, I saw that my request had again been ignored. They wrote: "Please discuss the likelihood of violence (physical or otherwise) and predation (e.g., chicken hawking) during or after the focus group" (Behavioural Research Ethics Board, personal communication, April 30th, 2019). I was forced to reply both verbally and in writing to an antiquated stereotype that implied that the community organization was unable to protect "vulnerable" participants and that the 2SLGBTQ+ community was rife with predatory behaviours.*

Ethics are woven into every layer of our society. Should I buy a car that runs on gas or electricity? Do I stop to pick someone up on the highway? Should I grade student assignments without names or with identifying, contextual factors? Ethics constitute contested societal ideas about

how to live, including what we find acceptable or unacceptable, and what beliefs and values govern our behaviour. Ethics also offers a birds-eye view of who we are, how we are, and how we might behave (Wittgenstein, 1965).

American philosopher Simon Blackburn discusses ethics in terms of an ethical climate, referencing the ideological and epistemological norms that exist within a particular environment to influence the moral behaviours of a given community. For example, the ethical climate that enabled Hitler to come to power was characterized by beliefs in the purity of one race over another (Blackburn, 1999). Likewise, the explosion of the #MeToo movement on social media occurred in relation to a society whose ethical climate condones sexual violence and misogyny. Beliefs about right and wrong, good and bad, about who is valued and who is not, are all part of an ethical system. As each of these queries shift in relation to the surrounding cultural, social, and geographical environment, our very cultures and climates are created through their performative iterations.

Queries into that which is *ethical,* draw us in to relationships, social behaviours, cultural practices, and economic systems. One of the most compelling accounts of ethical practices of engagement from the last twenty years, particularly within a Canadian landscape, is Willie Ermine's concept of "ethical space." Speaking to the relationship between Indigenous law and Canadian legal systems, Ermine (2007) defines "ethics" as the "the capacity to know what harms or enhances the well-being of sentient creatures" (p. 195). The concept of ethical space, then, works to create sites of possibility and understanding between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. Such a contact zone is not without difficulty, however, as Ermine (2007) notes the ways in which the "ethical" can so easily be used as a mechanism for gatekeeping, racism, and paternalism. Such effects are borne not only from power imbalances, but from a false belief in any universal system of human knowledge and the centuries-old attribution of this universalism to Western ways of knowing. To this effect, Ermine (2007) writes:

> One of the festering irritants for Indigenous peoples, in their encounter with the West, is the brick wall of a deeply embedded belief and practice of Western universality. Central to the issue of universality is the dissemination of a singular world consciousness, a monoculture with a claim to one model of humanity and one model of society. (p. 198)

For decades, Indigenous communities have been studied by researchers from outside of their communities, not been involved in the research design and development, with limited or no access to research data and results, and perhaps most problematic of all, much research has been conducted without the intent to benefit Indigenous people, themselves. For example, between 1982 and 1985, Richard Ward took 833 vials of blood from a First Nations community for a Health Canada funded study about arthritis. After the blood was collected, Ward relocated from Canada to the United States and proceeded to use the blood samples in decades of research on HIV/AIDS, population genetics, and migration, none of which had originally been approved or agreed upon between Ward and the original First Nations community (Wiwchar, 2004).

Canada's development of the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®) in 1998 was one among many attempts to balance research relationships more equitably and to right the wrongs committed against Indigenous peoples. OCAP® stands for ownership, control, access, and possession, and it is intended to support data sovereignty for Indigenous communities, serving as a key reference point when it comes to building relationships around both scientific and community-based research (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014).

2SLGBTQ+ communities share in some of these types of exceptionalist experiences because researchers have a history of studying 2SLGBTQ+ communities without ensuring community safety and guidance. Snyder (2011) conducted a trend analysis of medical publications that focused on LGBT people over a 57-year span, finding that nearly 15% of research focused on the pathologization of 2SLGTBQ+ people, rather than acceptance and acknowledgement. Just as the legacy of colonization has impacted relationships between universities and Indigenous communities, negative and pathologizing research on 2SLGBTQ+ communities has increased levels of distrust toward academia and bolstered homophobic/homonegative perspectives.

In Canada, university ethics boards operate under the guidance of the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics which brings together the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to support the Tri-Council Policy Statement on ethical conduct for research involving human participants (CIHR et al., 2019). The Tri-Council guidelines seek primarily to protect communities involved in research relationships and to guide REBs as they assess local proposals. Under the guidance of the Tri-Council Policy, Canadian University REBs are poised to prevent such risks to community, working to ensure that researchers are following best practices around community-based research, and that their research activities do not increase the social vulnerability of the research participants.

When it comes to the ethical climate of community-based participatory research, there is no shortage of literature regarding practice and process (Banks et al., 2013; Kwan & Walsh, 2018; Miller & Wertheimer, 2007; Wallerstein et al., 2019; Wood, 2017). Many have examined the limits and risks of consent, anonymity, ownership of data, self-determination of community partners, and the impacts on research participants. However, there is no escaping the structural power differences between community and academic partners, most notably owing to the fact that REBs are part of the institutional framework of universities and not formed as community-engaged entities, where, for knowledge to be credible it must first be approved via publication in the pages of a peer-reviewed academic journal. This sets up a gatekeeping mechanism, whereby community-based researchers and organizations are largely dependent upon academics to gain access to the tools, procedures, and evaluative import of the research ethics landscape.

Returning to Ermine's (2007) concept of ethical space, then, such a model offers opportunities for non-hierarchical and reciprocal engagement, rendered impossible if the dominant epistemological framework is never released. Put another way, community-based participatory research can never truly be reciprocal, nor evolve mutually if university

ethics boards fail to recognize the leadership and agency of community partners. In the case of the project at hand, such failure relied on an inability to view the 2SLGBTQ+ community itself as an agential research partner, just as past researchers too often refused to recognize Indigenous peoples as part of sovereign communities. Repeating old narratives, the research participants were cast as "marginalized," "at risk," and "vulnerable," language which operates as much to exclude as it does to protect minoritized communities.[1]

Ethics as Protecting the "Vulnerable"

One of the most striking outcomes of our engagement with the REB was around "vulnerability." Today you can barely open a newspaper without coming across the term "vulnerable populations." Like research environments, social service agencies, medical systems, even education systems are intent upon "protecting" the health and well-being of vulnerable populations (Miller & Wertheimer, 2007). Protections which, although they respond to socio-economic, institutional, and structural barriers, may in fact, restrict target populations from full access to services and supports. "Protection," then, stands in for paternalism, a practice and ideology that undergirds delimited terms of participation and thereby influences the prevailing perception and treatment of groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ or Indigenous communities (and of course the intersections between communities).

Framing populations as "vulnerable" can often be used synonymously with "weak" or "fragile," thus influencing beliefs that individuals, communities, and research participants, in our case, are unable to exercise their own agency and/or to make their own educated decisions about the research process. This was a key experience of our ethics review process as the reviewers asked questions about the safety and vulnerability of research participants, throughout. We recognize that the role of an REB is precisely to ensure that research participants are not made vulnerable by *the research process,* an aim with which we fully agree. However, communications from the REB extended well beyond this concern as they inquired:

> Given the ethical issues associated with this project (potential for distress, potential for violence, absolute need for confidentiality), it is unclear that focus groups are an appropriate means for data collection, as opposed to individual interviews, which offer much more security to the participants. Please discuss and provide a justification for the use of focus groups. (REB personal communication, April 30, 2019)

This statement raises concern that 2SLGBTQ+ project participants would be rendered "vulnerable" based on unverifiable mutual commitments to confidentiality, as if the stakes

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1 This language was used in verbal communications, with the following written communication assuming increased risk for older adults and Two Spirit people: "You state that one focus group will be exclusive to LGBTQ2+ youth and one to service providers. Please clarify the population pools for the other focus groups (since you intend to have 4-6). For example, will there be a focus group for elderly LGBTQ2+ participants (i.e., 65+)? Please include in your description any further supports that will be in place to ensure the comfort and safety of these groups, if they carry any extra vulnerabilities (e.g., Two Spirits [sic])" (Behavioural Research Ethics Board, personal communication, April 30th, 2019).

would not be evident to everyone present within a focus group context, or that connecting with others targeted by GBV would not be healing, in and of itself. Expectations that queer, trans, and two spirit communities necessarily operate from socially targeted standpoints that lack safety, reproduce shaming stigmas, or even attract harm or damage from within and beyond the community, becomes unexamined justification for asserting a need for protection.

Another problematic framing included the assumption that the larger queer community was likely to perpetrate violence. Use of the term "chicken hawking" revealed expectations that older gay men are pedophiles who would lure young men out of the focus group for sexualization. Such a fear reveals decades-old prejudicial characterizations of the 2SLGBTQ+ community as dangerous, over-sexualized, and predatory, as well as a complete disregard for the expertise and competency of the community organization in providing professional and safe services. The REB also expressed great concern over the possibility of physical altercations occurring within the focus groups, which left the research team dumbfounded. Why would violent acts occur within a focus group? Was this question specific to the 2SLGBTQ+ community or based on prior experience with other communities of research? Without further context, we were unsure as to the intentions of the REB, but we surmise that this was not a question regularly asked of other research teams proposing to conduct focus groups.

Judith Butler's (2020) recent *The force of non-violence: An ethico-political bind* provides vital insight into characterizations of vulnerability, citing that shared (albeit unique) experiences of vulnerability offer the starting point for ethics to acknowledge the dangers of the discourse on "vulnerable populations" and its reinforcement of paternalism. Echoing our discussion above, Butler demonstrates that vulnerability narratives not only construe communities such as women, trans, and queer communities as victims, but cast the researcher, the writer, or even the aid organization as the subject intent upon relieving them of their vulnerability. In so doing, entire communities are detached from their own theories, networks, and power to wage resistances of their own. Butler (2020) writes: "Once 'the vulnerable' are constituted as such, are they understood to still maintain and exercise their own power? Or has all the power vanished from the situation of the vulnerable, resurfacing as the power of paternalistic care now obligated to intervene?" (p. 191).

One of the most compelling encounters with Butler's careful navigation of the landscape of vulnerability and precarity is in relation to the involvement of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in the study. We proposed a series of focus groups with 2SLGBTQ+ youth ages 13–17. OUTSaskatoon regularly works with this age group and was aware of their significant experiences of GBV within various systems (i.e., with education and healthcare experiences). OUTSaskatoon had its own internal policy and procedure that enabled youth in this age group to access professional counselling services in instances where requesting parental consent would have negative consequences. However, the REB was not comfortable with this strategy and requested parental consent, given the nature of research topic.

The REB's insistence on parental consent failed to take into account the precarious experiences and positions of 2SLGBTQ+ youth in relation to parents who are not affirming, or not aware of their 2SLGBTQ+ identity, at the same time that it refused 2SLGBTQ+ members' ability to speak up, to make decisions, and to recognize their own limits. To circumvent this

systemic barrier, the researchers developed a capacity to consent protocol (Nadin et al., 2018) that built upon OUTSaskatoon's internal practice. The capacity to consent protocol took the form of a phone interview with the youth where the researcher and the youth went through the consent form section by section. After each section, youth would repeat the meaning of the section (e.g., purpose, risks, benefits) in their own words and confirm their consent. This protocol was eventually accepted by the REB, signaling a positive engagement between the researchers and the REB and underscoring the value of this more nuanced commitment to inclusion, as our research activities revealed that parents often represented a barrier to youth participation in support programs aimed at experiences of gender and sexual diversities. Had we moved ahead with the limited consent process, these youth would have been excluded from our research activities and we would have missed many vitally relevant stories of gender-based violence that youth experience within their own homes.

Although we were able to make headway on this particular concern, it also demonstrates the force of vulnerability narratives and their relationships to perceived risk within the research project evaluation process. In this case, the REB was resistant to trusting the internal protocols of an organization that regularly serves and supports the population in question. As well, it aligned with other accounts of the ways in which research subjects are rarely recognized as agents of their own participation (Miller & Wertheimer, 2007). To this effect, our response to the REB sought to explain both the value of youth participation and some of the nuances surrounding the concept of "vulnerability":

> We believe that if youth are placed within systems (e.g., education) where they experience gender-based violence in their daily interactions, they have a stake in engaging in the conversations where the issue is being discussed. We believe that while this specific population is vulnerable, that should not be mistaken for being weak. As such we believe we have ensured the proper supports are in place for this specific population to participate in a meaningful and safe way. Not to provide agency to these voices we believe would be unethical and cause further harm to these youth who suffer in silence because no one will listen. (research team to REB, personal communication, June 2019)

Expanding the discussion from the issues surrounding informed consent to the protection and empowerment of members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community requires a shift in "object" or rather "subject" of research thinking, moving toward seeing the research participant as a creative contributor to the research process and its outcomes. Linking with contemporary social justice models of research, such a shift recognizes that structural inequity is itself too often an unacknowledged determinant of health and well-being. The academic institution itself serves as the structure which regulates, allows, and determines research portfolios and in doing so, determines community outcomes.

Ethics as Avoiding Risk

Any discussion of vulnerability leads into conversations about "at-risk" populations or the "avoidance of risk" in both human and institutional contexts. As it is used within REB contexts, the concept of "risk" is largely invoked in relation to the risk of the research in harming participants, a frame that is valuable given long histories of harmful and unethical research, as discussed above. At the same time, the entrenchment of this concept *reinforces* the "vulnerability" of the research participant.

Organizations such as OUTSaskatoon provide front-line services to a variety of community members on a daily basis, whether through counselling, peer support, crisis support, advocacy, or even providing access to food, bathrooms, and computers. From a community perspective, REBs are separated from community organizations by an emphasis on risk-aversion, which reveals limited experience in providing front-line services to so-called vulnerable populations. When used in such a context, "risk-aversion" reads as a liability issue: it is used to protect the university, not to protect the community. It reminds us that that there are great benefits to laboratory research environments where the research is controlled for mitigating factors and is protected from the messiness and unpredictability of direct socio-cultural influences. CBPR opens up a petri dish of inputs: participants of different ages and backgrounds, community partners that do not understand research protocols, community staff that know research participants outside of the research relationship, and many other relational overlaps which create "risk" after "risk" for the research institution. Returning to the case of youth involvement in research, if we had not pushed back, the intersecting "vulnerability" factors of age, sexuality, gender, and disclosure would have led to their exclusion.

Timelines

> AH: It only took two weeks for the review committee to review our application and when we met face-to-face, I spent an hour answering question after question about the research plan. However, as the end of the hour approached, the chair of the ethics committee halted the process, indicating that we had run out of time. We were informed that the rest of the questions would be shared through email, and we later received an additional eight and half pages of questions from the board.
>
> Reflecting on both the questions and the experience of meeting with the ethics board, the research team and the community agency had an important decision to make regarding steps forward. Do we water down our research design to appease the ethics board or do we disagree and contest their decisions, thus inviting further project delays? The community agency was ready to start working, the funder was keen to obtain progress reports, and the ethics board moved slowly. We knew that time was not on our side for this one, that it would be faster to acquiesce than it would be to stay true to our research plan, one that had been designed by and for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

It may seem strange to think about community-university engagement through a temporal lens, but it is likely less strange to think about power dynamics using a temporal lens. *Time* easily relates to privilege, access, and power. The one that controls the timeline controls the actions of others, the latecomer to a meeting disrupts all others—and likewise can be shamed and exiled for failing to meet a societal norm. In the experience recounted here, it was clear from the very beginning that the community timeline was easily three spins ahead of the university's and that this was a point of contention. Universities operate according to the timelines of the school year. September's rush of new classes serves as the starting point for many research projects and initiatives. The term calms down in October, only to speed up again in November, rendering itself entirely off-limits in December as students and instructors are caught up in the bustle of final assignments, exams, and grant and job application deadlines. The cycle repeats in the second term before sliding into the more languid summer months. Figure one demonstrates the steady linear timelines of the fall and winter terms in dark green, while the shorter, light-green sections represent the spring and summer terms. Time is broken into academic terms, but marches ever forward.

Figure 1. **University Time**

In contrast, most non-profit organizations operate according to the cycle of the fiscal year—April to March. Grants are due year-round, but most require completion, or some stage of reporting following the fiscal year-end, with financial and project updates mid-way through the year. Community timelines are tight and projects move quickly as a grant could be received in April for a program implemented by June and completed by February. Often the final report and evaluation must be on the funder's desk before the next grant is due. Within the non-profit sector, there is no languid summer; September is no different from January, and delays mean that money does not flow.

The ethics application for the GBV Project was submitted to the University in March 2019 and although it went to full board review only two weeks later, several back-and-forth communications meant that the project took until July 2019 to receive full approval, a delay that interacted negatively with OUTSaskatoon's internal operations. OUTSaskatoon was not able to report on relevant research activities by the mid-term reporting period, turning a three-month ethics delay into a six-month project delay. As it played out further, the incongruent timelines resulted in delays in the release of additional grant funds for the project and further impacts on project delivery.

When it came to disparate timelines between the University and the community agency, the community researchers were profoundly aware of, and responsive to, these competing timelines in a way that the REB was not. In fact, many community researchers have indicated that *time*

and *timing* play a key role within any research project, particularly between community and university environments. In a survey of parties involved in community-based researcher efforts, Flicker and colleagues (2007) asked the question "If there was one thing you could change about [your last CBR] project, what would it be?" (p. 244). Respondents felt as though they had not planned enough time for relationship building, while also expressing disparate understandings of "time" and "timelines" as they operated between university and community partners. These timelines were impacted by funding and resource availability whereas comparatively university researchers are generally much more stably funded, with many opportunities for extension so that "money and time for academic partners is not an issue" (Flicker et al., 2007, p. 245). On the flipside, non-profit community partners are often engaged in front-line services that must respond directly and immediately to service users, leaving little time for (or prioritization of) research activities and tight turnarounds for grant delivery and reporting.

In the case of the project at hand, we were fortunate to be working within an existing and long-standing relationship between the community organization and the research partners, so *time* was on our side in terms of building relationships and trust. As well, the community organization held the research funds, not the University, further offsetting the historically problematic power-dynamics that exist when the university maintains control of the funds. That said, we undoubtedly felt the impacts of competing timelines, with impacts ranging from slight to extreme.
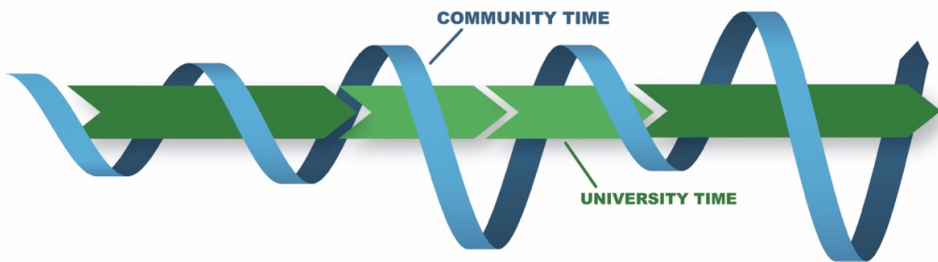
Figure 2. **University and Community Timelines**

Figure two layers the linear forward movement of the University with a ribbon of community time. It is clear that in addition to having the luxury of time and stable funding, university timelines follow a consistent rhythm, made stronger every year as it repeats patterns established many years previous and knows that it will continue along the same lines for years to come. In contrast, community time rarely has the privilege of falling into rhythm. Disruptions are common, crises are everyday occurrences, and as community needs never end, community work never pauses. Thus, community time loops and threads around the stalwart progression of the academic year. Though community-engaged service delivery undoubtedly has its own rhythms and patterns, these differ drastically from the steady September to August rhythm of the University, outlined above.

In a discussion of the push and pull of various timelines on feminist initiatives in the present, Loewen Walker (2022) demonstrates that our anticipation of future outcomes, whether positive or negative, reinforce progress narratives. We assume that all movement is toward a safer, better future and that we must take direct steps in the present in order to achieve said outcomes. Of course, we all hope for a future that is "better" than the past, but the ensuing anticipatory regime shuts down moments of possibility and engagement that are otherwise invisible within such progress-oriented timelines (Loewen Walker, 2022). Regarding our encounter with the University REB, the anticipatory regime draws a causal relationship between vulnerability and liability, or fragility and risk, whereby vulnerable populations are assumed to increase the risk of liability. This assumed causality requires present actions that will avoid the anticipated future instead of starting from a present moment that looks to the strengths and expertise of the community partner, the research team, and even the research participants.

Caught between two divergent timelines, the research project was unable to create momentum of its own and the impacts of the University's linear timeline heightened the performative effects of anticipation in creating the vision of the world assumed to lie ahead. To reimagine that narrative, we may want to start from a strengths-based position, instead of one with frames of risk and vulnerability. In so doing, we may be able to lean in to an ethical space of engagement as a mechanism to ensure the safety and agency of those participating in the research. We may be able to side-step the propulsive force of linearity to recognize that the evolving ribbon of community time is precisely what opens us up to what Ermine (2007) calls "the electrifying nature of that area between entities" (p. 194). It is in spaces and efforts toward engagement that we can open sites of collaborative community-led research. The question, however, is can we overcome the power imbalances that plague community-university partnerships?

Where Exceptionalism Lingers, Reciprocity and Collaboration Flounder
Universities across Canada have made grand statements about the value of community engagement and, in fact, even the University of Saskatchewan's own Strategic Research Plan includes dedicated guideposts aimed at increasing community impact and collaboration efforts when it comes to research platforms. That plan states, "we will be better community partners, deepening connections that fuel creativity, expand horizons and ensure that the world benefits from our work" (University of Saskatchewan, 2018, p. 7).

It is reasonable to expect that our REB would be made up of individuals and faculty intending to support capacity for such engagement. That said, REB boards are often not fully prepared for the range of emerging methods, participatory action research, patient-oriented research, and evaluation activities. Though it is impossible for one board to have all of the necessary knowledge for the assorted topics, populations, and methodologies presented, individual members are selected based on relevant and applicable expertise and receive training on the Tri-Council ethics guidelines. Even though ethics boards often strive for gender parity, include community representatives, and seek members with diverse and relevant expertise, social justice efforts that align with CBPR methods still appear to push REBs outside their

comfort zones and expertise (Flicker et al., 2007; Kwan & Walsh, 2018). Dominant ideological and epistemological framings still so often insert hierarchies into the research relationship making it difficult to ignore both the language and impact of "risk."

As shown by University of Saskatchewan policies for conducting research on human subjects, concern for welfare includes "[minimizing] foreseeable risks to those participants and their communities, and [informing] research participants of those risks" (University of Saskatchewan, 2013). This is a worthy aim; however, when it comes to deciding what constitutes safe and acceptable research, including what minimizes risk and what exacerbates vulnerability, community partners do not have a seat at the decision-making table, while REBs hold the authority to refuse various methods at the expense of the voices and needs of specific communities (Wallerstein et al., 2019).

Our experience throughout this process repeatedly demonstrated that the REB endorsed the moral superiority of the academic research process, a process whereby the researcher determines the scope of the project, identifies the objectives, and ensures that the "community" does not "skew" the data or affect the approved research methodologies. In addition to making this clear in the verbal review, their follow-up questions amplified this standpoint as they asked the following:

1. Please address whether it is appropriate for OUTSaskatoon to provide support to participants, since they are the funder of this project. Instead, please consider providing professional support that is independent of OUTSaskatoon.
2. In a suggestion to move the research activities away from OUTSaskatoon: "Given the possibility that participants' perpetrator may interact within OUTSaskatoon's spaces, please hold the focus groups away from OUTSaskatoon, to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants." (REB, personal communication, April 30, 2019)

Regarding the first request, the REB mistakenly attributes OUTSaskatoon as the funder, when in fact the project was funded federally. The query lands uncomfortably considering that most of the time it is the academic researcher and, therefore, the university that holds the funds. Given that REBs have little issue with holding research activities on campus, our assessment of this comment was that they did not trust OUTSaskatoon to provide fair and "unbiased" support to research participants.

This assessment was amplified by comments that OUTSaskatoon should not be providing support services to research participants following and during the interviews and focus groups. In a city of just under 300,000 people, with one primary 2SLGBTQ+ community centre that serves as a provincial expert in 2SLGBTQ-specific counselling, education, youth housing, support services, and referrals, this comment entirely underestimates OUTSaskatoon's far-reaching expertise and leading national work on 2SLGBTQ+ social issues (i.e., 2SLGBTQ youth homelessness) (OUTSaskatoon 2019; Pillar, 2019; Short, 2020). Furthermore, given

that our project specifically focused on the ways that homophobia and transphobia operate as largely unacknowledged arms of gender-based violence, it was ill-conceived to assume that we should look elsewhere for "professional support." This request was made even more absurd given the fact that OUTSaskatoon regularly advises and educates other counsellors and healthcare providers on how to provide comprehensive and safe services to 2SLGBTQ+ people. The second comment revisits the prejudice of earlier questions about "chicken-hawking" in its assumption that the larger 2SLGBTQ+ community is rife with predators and that the so-called "perpetrators" of gender-based violence against 2SLGBTQ+ people are loitering about and otherwise engaged in activities at the centre. By seemingly assuming that OUTSaskatoon is neither aware nor capable of ensuring the safety of all who engage in support and professional services, the comment reinforces the REB's failure to recognize OUTSaskatoon as a legitimate and expert service provider.

It bears mentioning that the crucial nuance around GBV that the research ultimately revealed was that its impact on 2SLGBTQ+ communities is primarily by way of parents, educators, health care providers, and other individuals generally *outside* of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The REB's relentless efforts to frame the 2SLGBTQ+ community as a site of sexual violence and predation itself reminded us that although we have come a long way in terms of 2SLGBTQ+ acceptance and understanding, many still understand our community through these long-standing stigmas, whether overtly or not. Our responses to the REB firmly upheld the value of conducting research activities at OUTSaskatoon in order to connect participants with existing services as well as to ensure that we could promise a safe and 2SLGBTQ-affirming space to those engaged in the project.

This feedback from the REB, underlined continued distrust of community knowledge, and their own precarious knowledge around the practices and principles of CBPR (Travers et al., 2013). As a project entirely initiated by the community agency, it was disheartening to experience academic distrust of the organization's ability to play a leadership role in the research activities. This distrust exposed a continued reliance on a model whereby community-based research is still a top-down activity: a researcher develops a compelling hypothesis or research question then applies it to a community setting in order to test its validity.

Such views surfaced again when we supplied comment on the value that focus groups played in allowing for social sharing and connection, a process which research participants have since described as cathartic and healing (Morse, 2007; Moyle, 2002; Rossetto, 2014; Wilson, 2011). In our verbal exchange, the REB avowed that research is not therapeutic and should not be recognized as such; however, when we look at the changing landscape of community engagement with research, especially as it relates to diverse healing paradigms and worldviews, this traditional reliance on a western clinical model of therapy is clearly no longer the only valid option. CBPR's focus on social justice and empowerment undoubtedly muddies the waters of some research paradigms as social justice outcomes rely on the lived experiences of those most affected by unjust systems, while "empowerment" is the product of both individual change and social transformation. To draw a line in the sand around the experiences of participants in the research is to refuse to recognize the multiple experiences that already take place, as well as the

potential for much deeper and more collaborative experiences of community research to come. Again, Willie Ermine's ethical space reminds us that to know the "other" is to step into the ring of shared learning, and to thereby extend the horizons of relational possibility.

Conclusion: Building Ethical Spaces of Engagement

To the great credit of the University of Saskatchewan's REB, they issued a formal apology following our response to the written questions:

> The previous Notice of Ethical Review for this project included language that was not appropriate to a formal notice and indeed was offensive. Thank you for bringing this to our attention. The Behavioural Research Ethics Board recognizes its error and apologizes unreservedly for the use of this offensive and stigmatizing language. We have updated our processes to ensure that this does not happen again. (REB, personal communication, 27 June 2019)

The apology was well-received by the researchers/authors and community partners. Not only did it acknowledge the harm that was caused, but it also indicated that there are possibilities for future engagement and transformation regarding such dialogues. Although the path has been difficult for us, as researchers, authors, and members of the queer community, we are deeply invested in the collaborative contact zones between academic and community environments within which research ethics boards are one point among many other sites of potentially productive difficulty. We are also interested in further illustrating the key differences between community-based research and community-driven and/or community-led research, a category within which CBPR strives to be situated. The distinction between these various modes of framing and knowledge-building plays a key role in the levels of collaboration and reciprocity both needed and made possible within the community research landscape. In fact, it might be helpful to call such projects social innovation efforts, as they operate to further destabilize the potentially objectifying language that still informs academic conventions and to better situate the value of community and social impact that is so needed from our research efforts.

The other key narrative we sought to illustrate is the role of the anticipatory regime of risk aversion. An ethical framework based on reducing risk at the expense of listening to and engaging with complex and diverse individuals and communities, inevitably maintains a hierarchical relationship between "community partners" and "academic researchers." Such an approach ensures that community-based research is not necessarily to be about getting the most informed people around the table and trusting the collaborative skills of the team, but about reducing the presumed vulnerability of the research subject by working backward to remove perceived and/or actual elevated risk indicators, whether they are considered to arise from people, organizations, models, or methods. If we are to build ethical spaces of engagement we *must* focus less on the anticipated risk and more on the relationships, experiences, and knowledge systems we bring together as community representatives, researchers, research participants, and decision makers.

Acknowledgements

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Rethinking Gendered Violence Through Critical Feminist Community-Engaged Research

Emily M. Colpitts, Alison Crosby

Abstract   This article analyzes how the conceptualization of gendered violence shapes responses and possibilities for redress in two very different community-engaged research contexts and projects. The first case study examines how Canadian universities enact sexual violence policies from the perspective of student activists and other stakeholders to understand the struggle over the power to define violence and shape institutional responses. The second case study is a participatory action research project that explores how transnational feminist and human rights regimes shape, inform, and often occlude or over-determine the struggles for redress by Indigenous women survivors of wartime sexual violence in Guatemala. In both contexts, we identify the persistent circulation of a particular 'violence against women' paradigm that functions as a universalizing exceptionalist imaginary which excludes more complex and situated understandings of violence while legitimizing certain responses over others. We consider the possibilities of critical community-engaged research as a means of challenging this presumed universalism. We explore the complexities of conducting such research as white scholars located within the neoliberal academy, given how its investment in community engagement serves to mask the implications of academic knowledge production in colonial and imperial projects and positions the university and the researcher as "saviours" of the "community."

KeyWords   gendered violence, community-engaged research, violence against women, participatory action research, intersectionality

As feminist scholars engaged in research on gendered violence, specifically sexual violence, we share an interest in how violence is conceptualized and how this shapes possible responses for redress. Our research is situated in different contexts. Emily engages student activists and other 'stakeholders'[1] at Canadian universities to understand the complex power relations inherent in the development of institutional sexual violence policies and responses (Colpitts, 2021). Her research challenges the construction of universities as homogenous spaces of privilege that are separate from the 'communities' that are framed as the ideal sites of community-engaged

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1 Emily uses the term 'stakeholders' to refer to the range of campus community members involved in her research while recognizing that the 'stakes' in this research are not the same for all. Rather, what is at stake and for whom are central concerns of this research. It is important to acknowledge the settler colonial connotations of claim staking (Tuck & Yang, 2012) and interrogate who is able to stake a claim and have it recognized, particularly in the context of research at Canadian universities, which are often located on unceded territory (Hunt, 2016).

research and teaching (Dean, 2019). Alison's research traces how transnational feminist and human rights regimes shape, inform, and often occlude or over-determine the struggles for redress by Indigenous women survivors of wartime sexual violence in Guatemala. Her work focuses on the possibilities and challenges for decolonial feminist methodologies that centre survivor protagonism, including feminist participatory action research (PAR), within this terrain (Crosby & Lykes, 2019).

Despite these differences in research focus, we have both observed the persistent circulation of a particular 'violence against women' (VAW) paradigm, which is rooted in radical feminism and remains central to institutionalized approaches and responses to gendered violence. As such, we argue, this paradigm functions as a universalizing exceptionalist imaginary (Jaleel, 2013) that excludes more complex and situated understandings of gendered violence and legitimizes certain responses over others. By positing a universal experience of gendered oppression, its circulation also contributes to an uncritical sense of global 'sisterhood' that obscures how white Western feminists are ourselves implicated in the structures and systems that produce violence, as well the potential for our research to reproduce harm and marginalization (Mohanty, 2003; Tuck, 2009). We consider the potentiality of critical community-engaged research as a means of challenging this presumed universalism while also recognizing the complexities of conducting this research within the broader context of the neoliberal university's investment in community engagement, which serves to mask the historical and ongoing implication of academic knowledge production in colonial and imperial projects (Luhmann et al., 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In this way, both the VAW paradigm and the university's investment in community engagement reproduce existing power arrangements by positioning the university and white Western feminist researchers as 'saviours' of the 'community.' As researchers located in Canadian academic institutions, we participate in these systems of power, and, as such, in this article we are critically reflexive of our own positionality within white supremacy. Drawing on the work of Kahnawake scholar Audra Simpson, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2014) call for a "methodology of refusal" (p. 239) of settler colonial knowledge production of violence. Such refusal "shifts the gaze from the violated body to the violating instruments […] Refusal helps us move from thinking of violence as an event and toward an analysis of it as a structure" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 241). In this article, we refuse the VAW paradigm in favour of more intersectional, complex, and situated understandings of violence as a structural condition.

We begin the article with a brief overview of critical feminist scholarship on the politics of community engagement. We then trace the history of the universalizing VAW paradigm, along with the implications of its circulation. Offering two cases, we discuss how we have each encountered and sought to challenge this conceptualization of violence through our community-engaged research. Finally, we conclude with a reflection on the complexities of conducting this research as white scholars located within the neoliberal academy who are working to refuse settler colonial knowledge production of violence.

Critical Feminist Perspectives on Community Engagement

In recent years, Canadian universities have increasingly promoted community-engaged research and teaching as an opportunity for students and faculty to enter into mutually beneficial relationships with the 'community.' This institutional investment in community engagement rarely addresses how power shapes interactions between members of the university and the community or within the university itself (Dean, 2019). As Susanne Luhmann, Jennifer Johnson, and Amber Dean (2019) explain,

> by contrasting an alleged 'real-world' community always imagined outside of the university to the fantasy of the university as a rarefied 'ivory tower,' the university risks being imagined as a supposedly safe, gated community rather than as a site of complex social and power relationships and deeply entrenched inequities, injustices, and exclusions. (p. 18)

The overarching result is that community engagement is framed as "opportunities for students and faculty to demonstrate compassion, benevolence, philanthropy, and good citizenship by giving back to a community *that we are simultaneously framed as both separate from and superior to*" (Dean, 2019, p. 29, emphasis in original). Unsurprisingly, the neocolonial and imperialist undertones of the construction of the university as a 'saviour' and community engagement as 'doing good' are generally left unaddressed (Luhmann et al., 2019).

Gender and Women's Studies is often assumed to have an affinity with community-engaged research and teaching based on the narrative that the field grew out of the so-called 'second-wave' feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s and that activism is therefore "the raison d'être of the field" (Luhmann et al., 2019, pp. 9-10). Community engagement is constructed as a means of overcoming the perceived divide between academic feminism and feminist activism, and thus serves to legitimize the field and assuage anxieties about its depoliticization and disciplinarity (Gotell, 2019; Wiegman, 2012). In this respect, Robin Wiegman (2012) argues that gendered violence is privileged as an object of study because it "lives up to the political desire invested in the field as a project of social transformation" (p. 76). As such, community-engaged feminist anti-violence research is specifically positioned as having the potential to resist the depoliticizing force of the neoliberal university.

At the same time, feminist, post-colonial, and Indigenous scholars have produced significant critical scholarship on the politics of community engagement. This scholarship renders visible the power relations inherent in community-engaged research by troubling discourses of 'partnership' and knowledge 'co-creation,' as well as essentialist notions of 'community' while exploring possibilities for solidarity (Creese & Frisby, 2011; Lykes & Crosby, 2014; Mohanty, 2003). As Amber Dean (2019) notes, key questions include: "(1) Who benefits? (2) Who can/should speak for whom? and (3) How are authority and resources distributed, and what are the consequences […] of choosing *not* to engage?" (p. 35, emphasis in original). These questions are particularly relevant in the context of research on violence and oppression, which, as Tuck and Yang (2014) explain, often involves voyeuristic and consumptive "telling and retelling

[of] narratives of pain" (p. 227) that serve to justify "a host of interventions into communities and treats communities as frontiers to civilize" (p. 244). This critical scholarship challenges constructions of engagement as politically neutral or, worse, as inherently benevolent, and renders visible the ways in which academic research, including feminist research on gendered violence, has been and continues to be implicated in colonialism, imperialism, and other systems of oppression. As we trace in the next section, the universalizing VAW paradigm functions as a particular kind of exceptionalist imaginary and we reflect on how we have encountered its ongoing productive power within our own research.

Violence Against Women as a Universalizing Exceptionalist Imaginary
Conceptualizations of violence are always competing and contested. However, the VAW paradigm is privileged within the North American context and circulates transnationally through feminist and human rights discourses and research regimes. This paradigm emerged from the radical feminist consciousness raising groups of the 1960s and 1970s and frames violence as a shared political experience rather than only a personal or private one. Radical feminism posits the constitution of the category of 'woman' as its central organizing premise and frames patriarchy as "the earliest and most fundamental form of oppression" (Mann, 2012, p. 88). One of the most prominent examples of radical feminist theorizing on violence is Susan Brownmiller's (1975) conceptualization of rape as "nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (p. 15). The VAW paradigm has been critiqued for universalizing the category of 'woman' and for framing women as inherently vulnerable and violable (Reich, 2002). At the same time, radical feminists employed the shared experience of vulnerability as a foundation for collective action against violence (Mardorossian, 2002).

This conceptualization of VAW is troublesome in that it often delimits the category of 'woman' through the exclusion of trans women. Trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) generally subscribe to an essentialist understanding of sex to assert that trans women are not 'real' women (Williams, 2014) while dismissing the identity claims of trans men and non-binary people (Awkward-Rich, 2017). TERF logic is mobilized to exclude trans people from 'women's spaces,' including services for women experiencing violence, and constructs trans women as potential perpetrators (Pyne, 2015). These arguments ignore the fact that trans people experience sexual violence at higher rates than cisgender women (Jaffray, 2020) and reproduce barriers that impact their ability to access support.

The VAW paradigm has also been critiqued for ignoring other differences among women by universalizing violence as an issue of gendered power relations. For example, Black feminists have highlighted how this framing ignores the use of sexual violence as a "weapon of racial terror" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 158) and leads to anti-violence efforts that centre the 'ideal' survivor, who is understood to be a white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender woman (Richie, 2000). They have also challenged the characterization of all cisgender men as potential perpetrators (Combahee River Collective, 1977), particularly as it ignores how the pervasive myth of the Black rapist is used "as an incitement to racist aggression" (Davis, 1981,

p. 173). Black feminist activists and scholars have articulated intersectionality as a framework to address the inseparability of systems of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1989), which challenges the framing of violence against women as exclusively or even primarily a gendered issue. It also demonstrates how anti-violence efforts can "themselves function as sites that produc[e] and legitimiz[e] marginalization" when these intersections are ignored (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 304).

Indigenous feminist scholars and activists have similarly articulated more complex and situated understandings of violence that challenge the narrow VAW paradigm by demonstrating the inseparability of patriarchy, white supremacy, and settler colonialism (Simpson, 2015). They highlight how colonial constructions of Indigenous womanhood are (re)produced through sexual violence (Anderson, 2000) and conceptualize the imposition of Western gender norms as a form of colonial violence that obscures the diversity of Indigenous gender roles and identities (Hunt, 2016; Simpson, 2015). Further, Leanne Simpson (2015) argues that while Indigenous people have always resisted, gendered violence is used as a tool to perpetuate settler colonialism and capitalism by facilitating the theft of land and resource extraction and by impeding community mobilization toward decolonization. Again, by focusing exclusively on patriarchy, the VAW paradigm fails to address these complexities.

These limitations are compounded by the ways in which the VAW paradigm has been co-opted by neoliberalism. Kristin Bumiller (2008) argues that the need for stable funding has contributed to the increasing incorporation of anti-violence organizing into the state's social service and criminal justice bureaucracies. VAW is thus constructed as a depoliticized, individual issue to be managed through the criminal justice system and the surveillance and management of survivors rather than as a political problem (Bumiller, 2008). Elizabeth Bernstein (2012) is similarly critical of feminist anti-violence efforts that legitimize criminal justice responses, which she calls forms of 'carceral feminism.' Further, survivors' ability to access increasingly scarce resources and supports relies on their ability to render their experiences of violence intelligible within the medical and psychological language used by the state (Bumiller, 2008). This model leaves little room for more complex and situated understandings of violence or for addressing how intersecting systems of oppression shape whose experiences of violence are rendered (un)intelligible.

Although the VAW paradigm emerged in North America, its circulation is much broader, particularly through international human rights regimes to redress wartime sexual violence. Rana Jaleel (2013) argues that this circulation is the result, at least in part, of concerted efforts by American feminist attorneys to "consciously fram[e] rape and sexual violence in conflict zones within ongoing campaigns to help enshrine 'violence against women' […] within an international human rights framework" (p. 120). In so doing, VAW is promoted as a consensus issue for international feminist organizing (Jaleel, 2013). However, by framing feminism as inherently Western, its international circulation has the potential to construct white, Western feminists as the 'saviours' of non-Western women while obscuring how we are implicated in the systems and structures that contribute to violence (Mohanty, 2003).

The proliferation of the VAW paradigm and its reification of sexual harm obscures more situated understandings of both gender and violence. As Jaleel (2013) explains, "universalizing

both women-as-a-category and rape-as-an-act places these terms on a theoretically pristine plane untouched by socio-historical context or competing, interrelated iterations of violence" (p. 123). This framing thus encourages "all women to evaluate their oppression as gender oppression […] and then value this core analytic of gender oppression as the most pressing site for solidarity" (Jaleel, 2013, p. 121). In so doing, it delineates how survivors must narrate their experiences of violence to access support and redress while also shaping what these supports and possibilities for redress are, as illustrated by the way that embedding wartime rape in international law legitimizes carceral responses to violence (Jaleel, 2013). Veena Das (2007) challenges the impulse to 'break the silence' or 'give voice to the voiceless' that animates many transnational feminist campaigns as "even the idea that we should recover the narratives of violence becomes problematic when we realize that such narratives cannot be told unless we see the relation between pain and language that a culture has evolved" (p. 57). By jettisoning these more nuanced and situated understandings of both gender and violence, Meghana Nayak and Jennifer Suchland (2006) conclude that adopting the VAW paradigm "for political ends may unwittingly help to sustain hegemonic projects" (p. 468).

While our own research on gendered violence is situated in different contexts, we have observed the persistent circulation of the VAW paradigm and its impacts. Specifically, we have noticed how this universalizing exceptionalism shapes understandings of what "counts" as and causes gendered violence, which, in turn, informs responses to violence. As the following sections demonstrate, we reach similar conclusions that when anti-violence efforts are not grounded in more nuanced and situated understandings of violence, they may not only fail to address the complex systems and structures that give rise to violence but may also reproduce harm and marginalization.

Challenging VAW in the Canadian University Context: Emily's Research

I have been researching gendered violence over the past decade, with a focus on prevention and engaging men. My scholarship is informed by my experiences in student activism and community-based anti-violence organizing. I currently sit on the Board of Directors at Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape. As a Master's student, my research focused on men's anti-violence efforts in South Africa. Shortly after I returned to Dalhousie University following my fieldwork, the Faculty of Dentistry scandal erupted (Halsall, 2015), which was preceded by rape chants at neighbouring Saint Mary's University during the previous year (Haiven, 2017). As a result of ongoing student activism and heightened public attention in response to media coverage of these and other incidents, Canadian universities have faced unprecedented pressure to address gendered violence. Since 2016, five Canadian provinces have also introduced legislation that mandates post-secondary institutions to develop sexual violence policies and complaint resolution processes. Based on these developments, my doctoral research examined the struggle over the power to define sexual violence and shape institutional responses at universities in Ontario.

I conducted this research in 2018/19 by analyzing the sexual violence policies at all public universities in Ontario and interviewing 31 stakeholders from three universities. This project

was approved by the Research Ethics Board at York University (December 17, 2017) and I secured additional permissions from the case study universities. This process was lengthy and each institution's permission requirements were different. The political implications of requiring researchers to gain permission from institutions that they are seeking to critique are troubling, particularly when this process involves individuals outside of the ethics boards, which was the case at two of the institutions that I sought to access. This process might be understood as part of the broader constraints on what can be said about campus sexual violence and by whom (Colpitts, 2020). Allegations of violence are constructed as potential threats to the neoliberal university's public image that must be carefully managed or disavowed (Ahmed, 2015) and research that could expose violence may be treated as a reputational risk.

Research on campus sexual violence often reproduces the narrow VAW paradigm by focusing exclusively on cisgender men's perpetration and cisgender women's victimization. For example, one of the most frequently cited Canadian studies examined the prevalence of sexual violence among cisgender women in their first year of university using gendered measures such as "a man put his penis into my vagina" (Senn et al. 2014, p. 136). This narrow framing not only excludes survivors[2] who are male, trans, and/or non-binary, but also reproduces the rigid victim/perpetrator binary that fails to account for the fact that those who perpetrate violence have often experienced violence themselves (Casey et al., 2017).

By focusing primarily on gender, research on campus sexual violence overrepresents the experiences of white, cisgender women who approximate the 'ideal' survivor (Linder et al., 2017). An analysis of American research on this subject found that over the last 10 years, only 20% of studies collected data on sexual orientation, 0.9 percent on ability status, and 1.4 percent on 'non-normative' gender identity (Linder et al., 2017). While 72% of the studies collected data on ethnicity, less than 22% addressed ethnicity or racism in the analysis of their study's findings (Linder et al., 2017). As a result, identity is often only referenced in the context of heightened vulnerability, which serves to reproduce harmful pathologizing narratives (Hunt, 2016) and frames violence as an event rather than a structural condition (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

By contrast, my research was grounded in an intersectional analysis and sought to challenge the narrow VAW paradigm by engaging a wide range of stakeholders and centring the perspectives of those who are typically underrepresented, including those who are racialized, Indigenous, trans, and/or queer. I was particularly invested in recruiting student activists; although students are often included in research as victims and/or perpetrators, their roles as powerful agents of change are rarely addressed (Krause et al., 2017). To disrupt the construction of the university as separate from the community, I also included members of local community anti-violence organizations. As someone who in many ways approximates the 'ideal' survivor and is affiliated with an academic institution, I am conscious of how my privilege impacted my relationship to this research and whether and how participants chose to engage. I sought to maximize accountability to participants by providing verbatim interview transcripts and the opportunity

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2 I use the term 'survivor' because although it has been critiqued as a feature of the depoliticized psychological framing of sexual violence (Bumiller, 2008), it is the term most commonly used by student activists and community organizers working to address campus sexual violence.

to revise or withdraw the information they shared, as well as by disseminating my findings into a public report, workshop,[3] and blog posts. While I recognize the limits of research to respond to the demands of social justice, given how academic knowledge is privileged within the university, I hope that my findings might be useful to stakeholders who are seeking to hold their institutions accountable to the commitments outlined in their sexual violence policies.

In turning the research gaze toward the university, I sought to refuse its construction as "a homogenous site of privilege" (Dean, 2019, p. 29) by revealing how sexual violence is produced and sustained through deeply entrenched institutional power arrangements. These power structures are evident in whose voices and interests are taken seriously in the development of institutional responses to violence. Participants described, for example, how the sexual violence policymaking committee at one Ontario university was chaired by a white male administrator who exercised his privilege to silence other committee members: "it was a committee of strong women, strong voices, [and] sometimes those voices were not being heard, specifically racialized voices." Participants also described student consultations as shallow and inaccessible.

While the majority of universities refer to intersectionality in their sexual violence policies, my findings suggest that this reference rarely translates into practice in their approaches to prevention and support for survivors (Colpitts, 2021). As such, participants characterized this engagement with intersectionality as abstract and theoretical. For example, one participant, who is Indigenous, explained that although universities' sexual violence policies often acknowledge the heightened levels of vulnerability experienced by Indigenous women, this does not materialize in their responses to violence on campus. This contradiction led her to conclude that "Indigenous women are here but nobody gets that they are here." Similarly, Kwagu'ł scholar Sarah Hunt (2016) argues there is an urgent need to name the colonial nature of campus sexual violence to disrupt and refuse the logic that "the legacy of sexual violence originating in colonial processes and policies, including residential schools, is only felt intergenerationally within Indigenous communities imagined at a distance from th[e] university" (p. 3). This imagined distance not only erases the experiences of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff but also produces the university as a neutral space separate from community, and thus obscures its relationship to colonialism and location on unceded territory (Hunt, 2016).

As this example illustrates, while institutional responses to violence do not necessarily employ the term VAW, they continue to centre the experiences of the 'ideal' survivor. Representation is important in anti-violence campaign posters and in the hiring of staff to support survivors on campus. However, representation alone does not address the structural and systemic barriers that marginalized survivors may face in accessing support. Participants highlighted the necessity of explicitly naming the fact that those who do not approximate the 'ideal' survivor "deserve to seek support as well" and of de-pathologizing these barriers and creating opportunities for marginalized communities to determine what this support entails. They emphasized the importance of expanding the way that survivorship is conceptualized so

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3 This workshop was scheduled in late March 2020 and was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I subsequently shared my findings in guest blog posts on the website of Courage to Act, a national initiative to address gendered violence on campus.

that those who have "untraditional pathways" are not forced to narrate their experiences of violence in a particular and narrow way to access support.

The influence of the VAW paradigm is also evident in the persistent focus on cisgender men's violence against cisgender women in prevention efforts on campus. One participant argued that:

> some people feel threatened that if they're talking about intersectionality or you're not just talking about violence against women, you're […] taking away from the specific and disproportionate violence that women face […] I understand that, but I also see sort of a way that [white] feminism pushes back against certain groups.

This narrow focus may ultimately limit the effectiveness of prevention efforts. For example, one participant argued that if bystander training "only talk[s] about the heterosexual forms of violence […] and] violence that happens to women without contextualizing who those women are," bystanders may not intervene on behalf of those who do not approximate the 'ideal' survivor. Similarly, absent an intersectional analysis (Dunn et al., 2020), anti-violence efforts often fail to address how privilege and oppression shape bystanders' safety and ability to intervene without the risk of escalating violence or criminalization (Elk & Devereaux, 2014; Rentschler, 2017).

When the university is constructed as separate from the community (Dean, 2019), it becomes possible to displace the issue of violence onto the community, which obscures how violence is produced and sustained through deeply entrenched institutional power relations. The perpetrator is thus constructed as a 'stranger' to the university (Ahmed, 2017) and as "the racialized Other, the non-student, who comes to campus for the purpose of sexually assaulting students" (Gray & Pin, 2017, p. 104). This framing legitimizes the reliance on securitization and policing to prevent violence, which ignores how it has functioned as a pretext for the criminalization of racialized men (Davis, 1981). As one participant explained, increased police presence makes racialized members of the university community less safe: "when there were safety concerns on campus, Black men were being stopped and asked why they were on campus, as if they couldn't be students going to class." This example clearly illustrates how anti-violence efforts can reproduce harm and marginalization by legitimizing carceral responses.

The imagined distance between the campus and the community also serves to displace the burden of responsibility for preventing and responding to violence onto the community. While the relationship with community anti-violence organizations may vary from institution to institution, my research participants generally characterized it as one-sided and extractive. As one explained, "our relationship with community organizations was essentially delegating our work to them; there wasn't even a conversation." This dynamic is particularly troubling given the vast difference in resources and capacity as community anti-violence organizations face chronic underfunding (Rushowy, 2019). As such, a member of one organization argued that universities should establish clear memoranda of understanding and provide funding to avoid exacerbating

existing capacity constraints. Without additional funding, the local universities' reliance on her organization threatened to increase wait times for individual counselling, which were already over 18 months long (Colpitts, 2021). Further, despite the fact that these organizations often have extensive experience supporting survivors and facilitating prevention education, they were not necessarily consulted in the development of the universities' sexual violence policies or responses. As such, one organization member concluded that the administration's priority was not "about supporting survivors but protecting the university." Instead of recognizing this expertise and forming partnerships, universities seem to be increasingly invested in bringing these services in-house (McQuigge, 2018; Paddon, 2019).

Ultimately, my research demonstrates the importance of disrupting the construction of the university as "a homogenous site of privilege" (Dean, 2019, p. 29) and of engaging with intersectional analyses of violence to avoid reproducing harm and marginalization in anti-violence efforts. It challenges the construction of the university as 'saviour' and the false separation of the university and the community by revealing how violence is produced and sustained through deeply embedded institutional inequities rather than by 'strangers' to the university (Ahmed, 2017). By refusing the VAW paradigm, this community-engaged research gives rise to more complex understandings of campus sexual violence and of the institutional transformation required for its eradication. At the same time, I recognize that by virtue of being based within a Western, neoliberal academic institution, my work is never outside of the history and ongoing reality of exploitation and harm in the name of research, or of my institution's complex relationship with the surrounding communities. Despite my commitment to naming and critiquing these power relations, I am conscious that my research might be appropriated by the university as a sign of its own 'progress.' As Sara Ahmed (2017) explains, "feminist work in addressing institutional failure is appropriated as evidence of institutional success. The very labor of feminist critique ends up supporting what you critique" (p. 111). As such, it is important to resist and refuse any co-optation of my research as an expression of the university's commitment to addressing violence.

Challenging VAW in Postgenocide Guatemala: Alison's Research

On February 26th, 2016 in a crowded courtroom in Guatemala City, two former low-ranking members of the Guatemalan military were convicted of crimes against humanity in the form of sexual violence and domestic and sexual slavery perpetrated against 15 Maya Q'eqchi' women at the Sepur Zarco military outpost in El Estor, Izabal in northeastern Guatemala in the early 1980s, the height of the 36-year genocidal armed conflict (1960-1996). This was the first time that these specific crimes had been successfully prosecuted in the country in which they had been committed, and the trial and verdict were celebrated transnationally as a victory for gender justice (Nobel Women's Initiative, 2016).

I have had the privilege of being able to document part of the plaintiffs' long struggle for redress as part of an eight-year (2009-17) feminist PAR project that my research collaborator Professor M. Brinton Lykes (Boston College) and I conducted with 54 Maya Q'eqchi', Kaqchikel, Mam, Chuj, and Poptí women who survived wartime sexual violence. We refer

to them as protagonists "to deconstruct dominant psychological positionings of women as 'victims,' 'survivors,' 'selves,' 'individuals,' and/or 'subjects'" (Crosby & Lykes, 2019, p. 2). The project was a collaborative endeavour with the National Union of Guatemalan Women (UNAMG), who, as part of the Actors for Change Consortium, began accompanying the group of 54 protagonists in 2003, which is when I first became involved in this work. At the time, following a few years living and working in Guatemala, I was working for the Canadian social justice organization Inter Pares, whose support to the Consortium was part of a Latin America gender justice program funded by the Canadian government, which accompanied protagonists in their search for truth, justice, reparations, and the guarantee of non-repetition, the four pillars of the ascendent transitional justice paradigm (Teitel, 2000). I participated in extensive conversations with the Consortium as this work got off the ground and they navigated the precarious terrain of accompanying protagonists through mutual support groups and women's rights workshops, as well as in giving testimony of harm suffered in a ground-breaking oral history project (Fulchiron et al., 2009). In 2007, Brinton and I worked with colleagues in Guatemala to organize a workshop on mental health and legal advocacy with practitioners from Peru, Colombia, and Guatemala, including Consortium members.

When I returned to academia in 2007, Brinton and I began conversations with UNAMG about a collaborative research project that would document protagonists' struggles for redress. UNAMG was keen to further develop their own research capacity, and we addressed in our discussions the longstanding, ongoing neocolonial dynamics of researchers from the global North extracting knowledge from Guatemala, which was a key tension. We also acknowledged the disparity in access to time and resources to actually conduct research between Alison and Brinton as researchers based in North American universities and UNAMG as a Guatemalan NGO, and we agreed that some of the research funds would be directed towards paying part of the salary of the coordinator of UNAMG's research unit, Brisna Caxaj, to facilitate her active participation in the project as co-researcher (while also recognizing that this was a small gesture given UNAMG's pressing workload). It was also stipulated in the formal agreement signed by our three respective institutions that all parties would co-own the data generated, to use in a range of outcomes—from academic texts to policy proposals, popular education materials, radio programs, and public discussion forums.

There was no formal ethics review process available in Guatemala for our research; as such, we followed the two universities' protocols,[4] conducting ethics training workshops with the research team, including students from our universities, UNAMG staff, and the Mayan interpreters who were going to be accompanying us in the workshops with protagonists (the project worked across four Mayan languages and Spanish). Our access to the 54 protagonists was facilitated through UNAMG; they agreed to participate in our research as part of their ongoing work with UNAMG, building on the prior oral history project (Fulchiron et al., 2009). A critical ethical commitment to protagonists was that we would not revisit the pain narratives that they had had to retell to a multiplicity of audiences over many years. They

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4 The project was approved by York University's Ethics Review Board (May 6, 2009) and Boston College's Institutional Review Board (May 15, 2009) and renewed every year thereafter through 2020.

invoked a refusal to continue to do so during the informed consent process, and indeed made such refusal a condition of their participation. What they asked from us was our continued presence and commitment to maintaining this collective space for dialogue and reflection to accompany their collective actions. Others who agreed to participate, for similar reasons, included the Mayan, ladina and international lawyers, psychologists, feminists, human rights practitioners, activists, interpreters, and researchers who were accompanying protagonists in their struggle for redress, whom we refer to as intermediaries (Merry, 2006). As such, while organized around a common goal, the transnational 'community of women' we engaged in our research was diverse and heterogenous.

At every stage in the research, each action-reflection process was explained prior to participants giving their informed consent. To enact accountability, our use of creative resources in the participatory workshops enabled the first stage of iterative data analysis by participants and provided opportunities for them to give input into the research results as they emerged. The creative resources also facilitated (but of course did not resolve) a dialogical encounter constrained by our linguistic differences. As we began to write up our research, UNAMG hosted a *Conversatorio* [Dialogue] in June 2013 to get feedback on initial drafts (see Crosby & Lykes, 2019, for the specifics of our methodological approach). In July 2019, when the Spanish version of our book came out, published in Guatemala by the Mayan press Cholsamaj, we travelled throughout Guatemala holding book launches where we gave out free copies and invited protagonists, intermediaries, and Mayan and human rights activists and scholars to comment on its findings and the research process. Hundreds of people attended these events.

During the primary period of data collection (2009-13), we facilitated workshops with protagonists and intermediaries (both together and apart). The workshops were a space in which they could reflect on their engagement with the transitional justice paradigm, which had become the primary mechanism in post-genocide Guatemala through which wartime sexual violence could be redressed, specifically, a Tribunal of Conscience held in 2010, the Sepur Zarco case, and the state-sponsored National Reparations Program. The prosecution of rape and sexual violence as genocide and crimes against humanity in the ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the 1990s, and the subsequent incorporation of these violations into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which came into effect in 2002, were important influences in how gender justice was conceptualized within these processes.

In their struggles for redress, Mayan protagonists have found themselves at the interstices of transitional justice and international feminist human rights and research regimes, including the VAW paradigm, which, rooted as they are in Western onto-epistemologies, rely upon individuated narratives of trauma to prove harm suffered. This convergence has served to produce the transnational figure of the 'raped woman,' an absent-presence reduced to her pain, her wound (Mookherjee, 2015). As Tuck and Yang (2014) argue:

> Logics of pain focus upon events, sometimes hiding structure, always adhering
> to a teleological trajectory of pain, brokenness, repair, or irreparability—from
> unbroken, to broken, and then to unbroken again. Logics of pain require time

> to be organized as linear and rigid, in which the pained body (or community or people) is set back or delayed on some kind of path of humanization, and now must catch up (but never can) to the settler/unpained/abled body (or community or people or society or philosophy or knowledge system). (p. 231)

The creative techniques we used in the workshops, including drawing, dramatization, collage, image theatre, and beliefs and practices from the Mayan cosmovision, facilitated the performance of more complex, situated, and dialogical narratives of agency and resistance in protagonists' "everyday work of repair" (Das, 2007, p. 62). What emerged was a deep-seated contestation of the fetishism of sexual harm found in the VAW paradigm and a foregrounding of structural racialized gendered colonial violence and Mayan resistance and persistence. In one workshop we conducted in July 2012, protagonists used a photograph of a woman "carrying the heavy load" of impoverishment to depict their experience of racialized gendered violence (Crosby et al., 2016). While in a workshop we facilitated in Sepur Zarco with the 14 surviving plaintiffs in August 2017, a year and a half after the trial, they reminded us that, "we can't forget that this struggle is for the land." Their husbands had been disappeared because they had organized to legalize their lands, which led to their widows being forced to 'serve' at the military outpost. The return of their lands remains the pending outcome of the trial; the gaping wound of land theft festers and is not resolved by carceral justice. Throughout our research protagonists continuously situated the ongoing colonial dispossession of Indigenous land and livelihoods as central to their experiences of violence and as the focal point of their struggle for redress, seeking to suture land and body as the urgent collective work of resistance to colonial harm.

Inequities of racialized and classed power permeate the dynamics of community-engaged research. As Tuck and Yang (2014) point out, PAR is:

> not immune to the fetish of the pain narratives. It is a misconception that by simply building participation into a project—by increasing the number of people who collaborate in collecting data—ethical issues of representation, voice, consumption, and voyeurism are resolved. (p. 230)

Mayan women's protagonism was shaped through their dialogical engagement with Mayan, ladina/mestiza,[5] and white intermediaries, ourselves as researchers included, and it is this relationality, underpinned by the racism inherent to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and its role in shaping the nature and form of understandings of justice and redress, that surfaced as increasingly central in our project.

Intermediaries, particularly those of us who are non-Indigenous, vernacularize (Merry, 2006) the hegemonic understanding of VAW into the struggle for redress as well as into knowledge production; I can certainly see that in my own trajectory as intermediary in this struggle. In one workshop with intermediaries in July 2011, a tension arose concerning the

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5 In Guatemala, 'ladina/o' refers to those who are non-Indigenous; some prefer to identify as 'mestiza/o' to recognize their history of being 'mixed.'

notion that, as one ladina intermediary put it, "All women are the 'spoils of war,' whether ladina or indigenous," a statement that seemed to occlude the stark fact that Mayan women were disproportionately targeted during the genocidal violence (CEH, 1999). In the ensuing discussion, Mayan intermediaries situated the specificities of Mayan women's experiences of racialized gendered violence within their membership of the Mayan collectivity. They contested the teleological notion of time and repair, critiqued above by Tuck and Yang (2014), noting that Mayan understandings of reparation challenge the possibility of repair; as "it will never be the same; one would have to raise our ancestors from the dead" for that to be possible. The discussion revealed the chasm between Western and Mayan onto-epistemological positionings, and the continued occlusion of the latter, including within the 'community of women' formed through collective action.

This erasure of Indigeneity through the transnational travellings of the narrow frame of the VAW paradigm could also be seen in the international response to the Sepur Zarco verdict, which was celebrated as a victory for "all survivors of sexual violence worldwide" (Nobel Women's Initiative, 2016, para. 1), but not as part of the decolonial struggle for Indigenous justice. This response, together with the transnational circulation of hashtags such as #IamSepurZarco and #WeAreAllSepurZarco throughout the trial, speaks to the ability of said paradigm to create a facile sense of intimacy through an assumption of commonality (and even perhaps community) based on gender oppression and an inability to reckon with the structural condition of violence that is shaped through colonial power. We are not all Sepur Zarco; such refusal both matters and is material.

An important critique of critical reflexivity central to community-engaged research is that it can continue to place the individuated white subject at the centre; I can still make it all about *me*. Instead, it is incumbent upon me to recognize my "white immunity" (Cabrera, 2017), which necessitates listening to and learning from the experiences of racial oppression lived by Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) communities that make visible the systemic nature of white supremacy that I benefit from and therefore have a responsibility to dismantle. I am also challenged to recognize and, indeed, embrace doubt, unknowingness and what I should not actually be allowed to know. This is integral to enacting a politics of refusal of a transnational VAW paradigm that assumes commensurability and translatability under the Western hegemonic frame and occludes the condition of structural colonial violence. As part of this politics, I turn towards other ways of knowing and being that refuse the universalism of Western onto-epistemology and instead recognize the pluriverse, "a world where many worlds fit" (Escobar, 2016, p. 20). Mayan women draw on their cosmovision as a decolonial onto-epistemology that challenges Western dualisms and emphasizes "heterogeneity, diversity, and plurality" (Chirix García, 2019, p. 149). They centre their decolonial struggle against racialized gendered violence in the integrality of the active relationship between land and body as territories to be defended and reclaimed (Cabnal, 2019). They contest the abjection of racialized gendered bodies in transnational spectacles of harm; "we are living bodies, peoples in movement who aspire to bodily wellbeing and that of Mother Earth" (Chirix García, 2019, p. 139).

Conclusion

Our community-engaged research, albeit in very different contexts, reveals the ongoing power of the universalizing exceptionalist imaginary of the VAW paradigm as it circulates through feminist and human rights regimes. The experience of sexual violence is often reified, producing both an 'ideal' survivor who is assumed to be a white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender woman, and the racialized transnational spectacle of 'the raped woman' who is reduced to her wound. These figures are of course interrelated, (re)produced through dynamics of victimhood and spectatorship within systems of neocolonial and neoliberal power underpinned by white supremacy. As white researchers located within the neoliberal academy, we must refuse such formulations, and instead turn to more intersectional, complex, and situated understandings of violence and its contestation articulated by protagonists themselves, while acknowledging our own situatedness and related unknowingness. Such a methodology of refusal lays bare the complexity of power inherent in community-engaged research and the danger of researcher spectatorship through the production of pain narratives, "making the spectator the spectacle" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 244) to be dismantled.

As feminist scholars, we are critical of the neoliberal university's investment in community engagement, which positions the university and the researcher as 'saviours' of the 'community' and obscures the implication of academic knowledge production in colonial and imperial projects. We refuse the construction of community engagement as politically neutral or inherently benevolent and the false separation between the university and the 'community.' At the same time, we recognize the potential for critical feminist community-engaged research to challenge universalizing exceptionalist imaginaries and centre more nuanced and situated understandings. This research requires attending to the power relations inherent in community engagement, being critically reflexive about our own positionality as researchers, and problematizing essentialist notions of 'community.' It also necessitates recognizing the limits of what is knowable as white, Western scholars and embracing incommensurability by resisting the impulse to render situated knowledge intelligible through universalizing frames or neocolonial narratives about 'giving voice to the voiceless.'

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Women and Allies in Action: College Students as 'Diversity Workers' in the Activism Classroom

Ina Seethaler

ABSTRACT   Research on feminist pedagogy has analyzed activism-based teaching practices in introductory courses and special topics courses in Women's and Gender Studies (WGS). Few studies have focused on courses that entirely center on feminist activism and have students implement weeks-long activism projects. In this article, I investigate how we can transfer an activist consciousness to our students, some of whom might not consider themselves feminists, might not have thought of themselves as activists, have not participated in any form of activism, or might be taking a WGS course only for general education or diversity credit. Using data collected in my "Women and Allies in Action" class via surveys, interviews, and analysis of students' reflective writing, I assess which challenges hold students back and what motivates them to create and implement complex, creative, and sustainable feminist activism projects.

KEYWORDS   Feminist activism, feminist pedagogy, experiential learning

Some have argued that Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) as an academic discipline has lost its connection to the activist movements out of which it emerged, and that the focus on community engagement and social change needs to be re-introduced into the WGS classroom to counteract academia's exclusivity (Messer-Davidow, 2002). I concur that it is not enough to raise students' consciousness in the WGS classroom; students need to learn how to implement that consciousness through meaningful action, based on a more substantive foundation than charity and volunteerism (Bubriski & Semaan, 2009). To grow our understanding of how to facilitate such active engagements, I investigate the similarities I see between my students and academic diversity workers who, as Ahmed (2017) demonstrates, consistently "come up against brick walls" (p. 91). Considering Ahmed's (2015) claim that "it is often students who are leading discussions of 'difficult issues' on campus," my comparison digs into the context in which my students plan and execute projects and their hesitancies about feminist activisms.

WGST 310 "Women and Allies in Action," which is the foundation for this article, is designed as a semester-long class in which students learn about what activism is, what makes activism feminist, and how to design and implement intersectional and sustainable activism projects on their own, either benefiting our campus or the wider community. The setting of my course is a public comprehensive liberal arts university in the South of the U.S. with roughly 10,000 students—half in-state students and half out-of-state primarily from the

Northeast. In WGST 310, students study the history of feminist activism as well as current examples; they interview someone they consider to be an activist for their midterm project; and, for the latter half of the semester, students work on activist group projects of their own design. Groups form based on interest in topics that students suggest. They can collaborate with community organizations, but they may not simply volunteer their time—they need to implement a project. Each group member completes at least 15 hours of work and keeps a journal to emphasize the importance of personal assessment in effective activism. Lastly, each group writes a collaborative reflection paper. The course has no pre-requisites and fulfills a general education requirement, which attracts lower- and upper-level students as well as a majority of non-WGS majors and minors.

Students, over the years, have implemented impressive projects, presenting on sexist dress codes for a local accounting firm, preparing a well-researched report for our director of Student Health about the need for more women wellness hours on campus, and writing a chosen name policy for our school, which was shared in a meeting with the provost, registrar, dean of students, and a number of vice-presidents. Yet, most often, students opt for basic forms of activism, like tabling in the student union, distributing a flyer, or creating an Instagram feed. By no means do I want to discredit the impact these projects might have. In fact, a red thread throughout the semester is the claim that everyday acts can constitute activism. But does it take four students spending 15 hours each over the course of 10 weeks to design and hang up flyers? Where do students draw inspiration for their projects and what limits them in dreaming big?

In this article, I investigate the factors which influence student motivation to create and implement substantial, creative, and sustainable feminist activism. In doing so, I am conscious of neoliberal institutional tendencies to blame students, rendering them a problem "when what they want is not in accordance with what academics want or what academics want them to want" (Ahmed, 2015). In contrast to this accusatory attitude, I discuss the conditions under which my students perform their academic work and stand in solidarity with them and the communities they hope to support. Following a short literature review and a methodology section, I offer detailed descriptions of my students' projects and present collected data that speak to patterns in my students' attitudes toward their activism projects. I then analyze said patterns through the lens of Ahmed's theorizing on "diversity work" to help instructors better prepare their students for meaningful engagement with feminist activism.

Why Activism?

The historical connection between activism and teaching WGS as activism as well as WGS' intention to connect theory with praxis have been well-documented (Naples, 2002). Acknowledging that "changes in social relations, including the nature of the women's movement and feminist politics, have dramatically affected this [supposed natural] relationship between academics and activism" (Zimmerman, 2002, p. 186) as well as the "endless elasticity of [the term activism] that nevertheless serves for so many in WGS as that which the field has and should continue to embrace as its *raison d'être*" (Orr, 2012, p. 88, emphasis in original), I examine here how we can encourage an activist consciousness in our students, some of whom

do not consider themselves feminists, have not thought of themselves as activists or participated in activism, or might be taking a WGS course for general education or diversity credit.

A wide range of scholarship exists on service learning, internships, and other forms of experiential learning in connection with feminist pedagogy (Seethaler, 2016; Tice, 2002). Many articles investigate how to incorporate activism techniques into classes, how to design classes on a type of activism, or how to employ activism assignments in Introduction to Women's (and Gender) Studies courses (see Dean et al., 2019). Peet and Reed (2002) stress how activism provides students with the "opportunity to experience themselves and others as conscious social actors who are able to influence social and political structures" (p. 107), which "increases their confidence and skills, . . . helps to reshape their assumptions about what is appropriate, possible and necessary" (p. 112), and "enhance[s their] self-efficacy" (p. 115).

I am indebted to Arnold (2014), who notes eloquently that activism: 1) targets the source of some social problem rather than mitigating its consequences after-the-fact; 2) is oriented to long-term change rather than solely meeting immediate needs; 3) is intended to have an impact beyond those immediately involved; 4) should challenge the existing structures of power and decision-making; 5) engenders a critical consciousness, on the part of those affected, among the general public, or both; and 6) contributes to building social movements for justice by making connections across all identity markers.[1] In class, I relied on Arnold's definition to broaden students' initially narrow conceptualizations of what might constitute activism. In a pre-survey I administered on the first day of class, most students' descriptions can be summarized by this particular quote, "taking action to change what you feel needs to be changed in society." When asked to name examples of activism, 16 of 18 participants mentioned marches, protests, or rallies. Of the other two, the first one listed the Black Lives Matter Movement as well as the Women's Movement, and the second referenced Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ghandi. While calling senators, reading literature, collecting money, founding an organization, and raising awareness each received one mention, the answers indicate that, at the beginning of the semester, most students thought of activism as happening on a large scale, involving masses of people.

I challenged students to question this narrow, grandiose definition of activism, but we also collectively cautioned against an "anything counts as activism" approach. We discussed how activism needs political consciousness, a clear intention, a realistic plan, an identifiable constituency, and an acknowledgement of injustice, and how it must go further than ranting, volunteering, or charity, with the goal of restructuring society. As Baumgardner and Richards (2005) put it in *Grassroots*, one of our textbooks, activism is "consistently expressing one's values with the goal of making the world more just" (p. xix) since "everyone has the power to impact the world" (p. xviii). The midterm assignment to interview someone students perceive as an activist is designed to drive home these claims and raise students' confidence in their own activism in the second half of the semester.

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1 Arnold has not yet published on her insightful conceptualization of activism.

Methodological Context

Before starting the fall 2018 semester, I received Institutional Review Board approval for each element of my study. In addition, I informed my students about their work's role in my research and assured them that they would remain completely anonymous. I administered an in-class pre-survey with 18 students on the first day of the semester about their past experiences with and perceptions of activism. Nine students took a modified post-survey that included questions about the course on the last meeting of the semester. The survey asked participants to define and list examples of activism, whether they consider themselves activists, if they had participated in activism before taking the class, and, lastly, what makes an activism project effective and sustainable. I also analyzed all students' reflective journals, which they had to update weekly. The journals added up to 296 individual entries, ranging in length from a sentence to multiple paragraphs. I further looked at eight group reflection papers of around twelve pages each in which students assessed their work process and project outcomes, when I taught the course in fall 2017 and 2018. Via these artefacts, I gained insights into participating groups' planning and implementation processes, as well as their comfort and struggles with projects. Finally, I invited all students to join me individually for approximately thirty-minute long, semi-structured interviews building on the pre- and post-surveys as well as their reflective writing. Two students volunteered to share thoughts on their work in this manner. Qualitative data analysis software helped me sort through all the collected data and establish the following patterns in students' thinking about their activism.

Structural Pressures on Students

The eight activism projects I analyze here include four groups tabling on campus to raise awareness about an issue (with one of the groups having people sign postcards for state politicians), a group handing out goody-bags to people experiencing homelessness, another creating a sticker for trashcans to encourage recycling, a team creating a promotional video for our campus food pantry, and the last one using social media to share information about women in the arts. All groups, initially, had more intricate plans for pursuing their activism than they were able to actualize.

My pre-survey shows that 50% (n=9) of students had participated in activism before class. 16.6% (n=3) of students strongly agreed that they considered themselves activists, 50% (n=9) agreed, 27.8% (n=5) disagreed, and 5.6% (n=1) strongly disagreed. The post-survey, on the last day of the semester, displays slightly shifted numbers. Out of nine students, 22.2% (n=2) strongly agreed that they consider themselves activists, 66.7% (n=6) agreed, and 11.1% (n=1) disagreed. While the survey suggests that more students became more comfortable with the term "activist," we did not see a huge change in levels of self-identification.

Some days—when few students attend a social justice gathering, or our feminist student organization lacks help to implement an event—it is hard not to consider our students apathetic to social change. But, of course, that myopic vision does not take into consideration students' commitments to families, friends, work (often full-time) to pay for college, and their other passions, all of which compete with their classes and studying. What I usually see in "Women

and Allies in Action" classes counters this perception of a lack of student engagement. Most students are excited to work for change, which is why they chose my course. In the pre-survey, when asked why they considered themselves an activist, students' responses included "I have strong beliefs regarding equality and I tend to voice them" and "I'm still in the beginning stages of activism. . . I'll protest with people, but I haven't found the strength to do my own form of activism." While some students enter class as fully-fledged activists, others are still hesitant about their capabilities; and yet others acknowledge that activism has been a distant thought, but that they are open-minded about it, like the student who wrote, "I guess if it meant a lot to me I would want to fight for a change!"

Personal transformations during project implementation were often striking. G., who distributed stickers on trash cans to get more people to recycle on campus, noted in her journal: "I've never . . . been a part of an activism project, so this was very eye-opening. We helped even though it was something small. This truly inspired me to want to engage in more projects . . . in hopes to make an even bigger difference for our world!" J., whose group handed out goody-bags to folx experiencing homelessness, mentioned that "nothing could have prepared us for how truly emotional this experience would be." J.'s group reflected in their paper that this "project taught us that we need to be more involved in the community and be more proactive about making changes that will have a lasting impact." Group 1, who tabled about sexual violence on college campuses, declared that their assignment "lit a small fire for activism in each one of us and helped us each get out of our comfort zones." Clearly, the work they undertook together impacted some students in positive ways, making visible for them the influence they can have in effecting change.

Accompanying their affirmative feedback, students were also frank about the challenges they faced in pursuing activism. In addition to ubiquitous apprehension about group work, which students indicated had lowered their ambitions, problems with effective time management was the most common rationale for students' limited activism agendas. Many of our students work full-time while also being enrolled full-time in classes. The difficulty with planning and executing might suggest a lack of belief in the impact activism that is not perfectly executed can have, causing a decrease in dedication to the task. When asked in the pre-survey about what students think makes an effective activism project, the most frequent answer was passion, followed by organization, a clear goal, and being intersectional in one's approaches.

My interviews with two students in group 2 (trans deaths awareness) revealed that both students were very satisfied with their project. When questioned about their planning process, each student expressed some regret over not having done anything "bigger;" for example, one interviewee suggested that it would have been more effective to drive to the state capital and bring their message directly to lawmakers. But each student was clear that these were "ideal" plans, which were simply not feasible. While the students demonstrated genuine excitement about their projects, they felt hindered in their implementation processes by their academic workloads and non-academic work schedules. As a result, working in groups was cited as both an advantage—as it allowed for a division of tasks—and one of the biggest disadvantages—as true team work outside of class time was deemed virtually impossible.

Other groups reiterated the same concerns: Group 1 initially wanted to bring an art exhibit about sexual assault to campus, but, as D. explained in her journal, they had "to change the activism part of the project due to time constraints." The group ended up tabling and encouraging peers to use an app to contact their representatives about proposed changes to Title IX under the Trump administration that limited the definition of sexual assault and gave more rights to assumed perpetrators. In their paper, the members mentioned that they had "considered getting some of the groups that are already on campus to partner with us, but time did not permit us to get all of them together." In the end, they did not collaborate with any other groups and had about 20 people visit their table.

Group 4 had planned an interactive tabling event about women's contributions to the arts, including stickers and buttons, "so that people in attendance could take a physical reminder of something from the experience and promote conversation by walking through campus." But the "group spent a lot of time organizing and preparing—so much that [they] ended up running out of time to execute the original plan," and instead created a social media site with images "to empower the followers who find interest in them and inform those who do not usually find [the topic] interesting." According to them, "it was a little more convenient having the activism on social media because people tend to find time to check their social media pages even on the go," but they did not offer data on how many people visited their site.

Most reflections presented time issues as an inevitable circumstance. Despite the call for self-assessment, no group brought forward a critical evaluation regarding different approaches to planning, scheduling, or organizing. Tackling this lack of concrete answers, I venture to deduce from some of their comments and behavior that engaging in activism required students to exert a larger amount of emotional labor than their usual graded assignments in college. The social weight of the topics they had chosen, high self-expectations to effect tangible change, as well as the knowledge that people invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion are rarely received with open arms, all made activism seem like a daunting endeavor. Concerns about pushback rooted in racism, (cis)sexism, and classism partially paralyzed some students' efforts; their own precarities also rendered them hesitant to become publicly vulnerable. As Johnson (2018) has helpfully assessed, engaging in a praxis-focused class can create more stress for students, because any kind of outside-of-scheduled-class projects might, among others, affect their work schedules, create costs for additional driving to and from campus, and complicate any kind of unpaid labor—such as care responsibilities—students are engaged in. Johnson and Luhmann (2015/16) add that the confounding and conflicting neoliberal rhetorics pervading higher education pressure students not to get too invested in classes that supposedly do not contain "skills training for . . . so-called 'real world'" jobs to which they may aspire (p. 54). I intend for these insights to demonstrate that students are not to be blamed on an individual level for their projects' perceived shortcomings, but that structural issues shaping the lives of current college students exert a significant impact on their abilities to engage in feminist experiential learning.

Baumgardner and Richards (2005) emphasize college students' power due to their numbers and because their tuition funds most institutions of higher education, so they encourage students to "not [be] afraid of power," specifically administrators (p. 73). While students did

not particularly worry about censorship from higher-ups—likely because none of their small-scale events would trigger the attention of the administration—two groups were worried about their audience's possible reactions. D., who sat at the table with information about sexual violence, remarks that she "was very worried with what some of them were going to say to us." In our conservative region and on a campus that hosts a Turning Point USA student chapter,[2] any discussion of sexual violence has the potential to be met with misogynistic rhetoric. Luckily, the group did not experience any controversy, but their decision to lower the scope of their activism in an effort to avoid distressing encounters is noteworthy.

One of B.'s first journal entries about her work on a tabling event to raise awareness about violent deaths in the trans community emphasized the importance the group put on the need for all "to feel comfortable with the ideas." Two of B.'s (who is white) Black peers' comments explain further this necessity for addressing audience comfort in planning. First, A. says that they "were afraid that this would get backlash, because of all the counter movements to Black Lives Matter," since they had decided to call their project "Trans Lives Matter." Beyond explaining that their slogan was intentionally trying to catch the interest of people who might be skeptical of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, the group did not dig further into issues of appropriation—despite being prompted to do so. While none of the white team members made an explicit reference to overt criticism, F., the only other Black student in the group, "[p]repar[ed] [her]self for any type of push back that we would possibly receive from people on the day that we did our activism component." The racial implications with regard to the ability to consider oneself an activist and how others will receive your activism reveal themselves acutely in these reflections. While white students could take their comfort levels into consideration, for students of color, their bodily safety might be at greater risk as their protests have historically been vilified as riots—as epitomized in the difference in reactions toward unarmed Black Lives Matter protests against the shootings of Black men, compared with predominantly white and heavily armed men storming the United States Capitol. While, in many instances, members of the first group were tear-gassed, the latter received wide-spread sympathy to express their right to freedom of speech. Understandably, minoritized students might be more hesitant to engage in any form of overtly attention-seeking activism. I am glad to report that A. and F.'s group was pleased by the positive responses they received while tabling.

Group 2's experiences showcase the extra emotional labor students had to navigate in the transphobic and racist environment that is neoliberal U.S. academia. Whitney (2018) offers astute observations about the impact that laboring with and around others' feelings can create: "the work of managing feeling may or may not be successful at producing dispositions in others, but regardless of its success at that purported goal, it invariably has byproducts in the worker herself—byproducts that may themselves be (at least comparatively) unmanageable" (p. 645). In gearing their activism projects toward their audiences' values, ideologies, and deeply-held belief systems, my students functioned as affective workers whose bodies, according to

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2 Turning Point USA is a conservative organization most well-known for its "Professor Watchlist" that publishes the names and affiliations of university faculty who are accused of "discriminating" against conservative students in their classrooms and on their campuses.

Whitney (2018), are shaped by their efforts as "waste or excess [affect] is part of the after-hours cost of affective labor for the worker" (p. 646). Affective labor creates a special kind of emotional strain and "affective depletion" (Whitney, 2018, p. 647). It is incumbent upon instructors who make activism a part of the classroom to be conscious of students' reasonable nervousness with regard to the emotional labor asked of them and to accommodate it in assignment set-up, preparation techniques, and grading structures.

Anxiety about Complex Strategies
Baumgardner and Richards (2005) caution that college students "need strategies for effective activism, ways to take them beyond their outrage and move them toward solutions," preferably tactics that counteract a "shortage of fresh and relevant ideas—something that will grab students' attention when they have a million things vying for their time" (p. 59). But which strategies do students actually feel comfortable embracing? Despite students defining activism mostly as rallies, marches, and protests at the beginning of the semester, none of my groups has ever taken on an issue via a public and disruptive approach. I noticed that in their group papers, and even less so in their individual journals, students rarely referred to their "activism" but mostly mentioned their "projects," which perhaps insinuates that they were still seeing their activities as a school assignment and less as social change action. This conceptual perception of their work as an assignment might further explain their hesitancy to take on more complex techniques, a theory which contradicts the students' assessment of what makes effective activism in the post-survey. Their answers include reference to their experiences of "making effort to actually change something, not just educating or volunteering" and the "capability to bring about long lasting change." Few of the groups met these criteria. Instead, most groups' evaluative mantra can be captured as, "If it even changes just one person's mind, the project was successful because that's one more person in the world who's now fighting for change as well." The difference in using social change versus getting one person's attention as a tool for assessing the impact (not the validity) of activism is substantial.

Students, as I mentioned, developed fascinating and practicable ideas; but the follow-through often did not resemble them. For example, the group who created recycling stickers mentions in their paper that they "could have sponsored a zero-waste event at a football game and [had] a tent set up that directly shows the process of sorting trash." They did not go into detail with why this idea was not pursued further. F. revealed in a journal entry that the same group also considered creating more recycling locations for plastic bags on campus, but abandoned the idea because it "would be hard to get [the university] on board with such a big task and it would be costly." Group 6 started off with the clear assessment that "[j]ust setting up a table with facts on sexual harassment was the norm for a lot of the movements on campus. We strived to do something a little different." The first word "just" implies that they saw tabling as a minimally effective technique. So they planned on stringing bras across a bridge at the center of our campus as they "thought that it would be very eye-catching." But, alas, they "knew getting [the school] to approve hanging bras across the bridge would be difficult." So they set up a table with some bras strung across it. Lastly, G., who worked on issues with

our food pantry, explained that she and her partner knew from a survey that they had sent out that the prominent location of the pantry was a big issue as it makes students self-conscious about being seen when accessing it. Yet, "being unable to figure a spot it could be moved to made [them] back off from the idea" to push for relocation. None of the groups contacted university officials to inquire about the feasibility of their ideas. It seems that Baumgardner and Richards' (2005) appeal to students' power on campus did not embolden even some of my groups enough to test their influence.

I discern as at least one of the root causes of this resistance to "go big" an issue present in many WGS classes, from which mine are not exempt. As Taylor (2019) delineates, feminist pedagogy can have a tendency to train students in the "rapid-fire inclination to discount, dismiss, judge, distance, and hold in contempt rather than question with the aim to learn more than their observations can reveal" (p. 107). My students, too, often seem comfortable critiquing situations and people's behavior, but they stop short of creating multifaceted and sustainable solutions based on their critique. The present study has sensitized me to the fact that I need to focus much more on problem-solving skills in all of my classes. Instead of feeling empowered by the possibilities, the students I worked with for this research were stifled by their issues' complexity and were unable to distill a concrete element that could be realistically and effectively targeted. K.—whose group had planned not only to give out essentials to homeless individuals, but also to collect their stories and curate them to call on the local legislature to pass ordinances in support of the community—reflected that the "amount of issues I found became a bit overwhelming due to just the large amount of different types of action . . . needed to help the individuals in the situation." H.'s first journal entry on the sexual harassment tabling project echoed K.'s stress: "None of us have any experience with activism, so honestly we don't even know where to start." The inability to decide on a topic in a timely fashion produced discouragement for many team members. L., who was tabling about environmental issues, admitted that she "wasn't feeling very confident about [their] project because of the many setbacks [they] kept experiencing. [When] [they] realized that [their] original plan wasn't going to work[, they] decided on a light and seemingly easier topic." I want to be clear that I am not insinuating that my students are lazy, but the words "light" and "easier" are indicative of the limited choices the students felt they had.

The paper of the group working on homelessness presented telling insights into their thought processes. They acknowledged that while they "could have done a wide array of things, like propose a social policy, implement [their] own event, or even create an organization, [they] instead decided to take the time to put together care packages." I pause to point to the phrase "take the time," as it implies a greater sacrifice than the other approaches. The group continued:

> Our activism derived from the fundraising and poster-board awareness event. We explained the importance of getting involved . . ., whether it be donating, . . ., volunteering . . ., or . . . helping a homeless person out by purchasing food or supplies . . . We also explained that these small actions are more charity than activism.

This statement identifies the group's own project as mainly charity, trapping them in a very common, often more comfortable "volunteer ethos, a philanthropic or charitable viewpoint that ignores the structural reasons to help others" (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002, p. 230). Their self-assessment further reflects a persistent approach to community service as "at best an exercise in observing otherness and at worst a missionary expedition" (Forbes et al., 1999, p. 162), which equates "difference with deficiency" (p. 163). Yet, the group was confident in their success: "The project in its entirety was meaningful because of the difference we made in the community." Of course, students praise their work in a final paper, but the lack of critical self-assessment indicates an over-estimation of their impact and a meeting of rather low expectations of what constitutes effective activism—for reference, the group tabled one day for a couple of hours, raised $40 ($20 of which came from a parent), and interacted with fewer than 10 homeless individuals.

The impact the group saw might have been more personal. According to them, the "experience . . . sparked conversation about how different our lives are from these individuals." Dangerously close to poverty porn—exploitative depictions of poor people for the personal gain of the non-poor portrayer and audience—their activism became about the students not the marginalized community they set out to support. In that context, it is less surprising to hear that they were appalled by one individual's lack of gratefulness: A "negative experience we had during distribution was a man who was less than grateful for the supplies we provided him with and kept asking for other items[, like] a jacket, money [and], a ride to the doughnut shop." The students' frustration betrays the nature of their "activism" as charity and reveals the groups' inadequate grasp of activism as work for structural change. To me, their reaction demonstrates students' (academic) training in neoliberal virtue-signaling—the practice of insinuating moral superiority by expressing rage about an issue without investing in actual change—and a paternalistic belief in meritocracy. Their shaming mirrors the behavior Dean (2019) has observed in some of her students who:

> position[…] themselves as 'experts' . . . about a particular issue or problem, charging themselves with raising awareness about the suffering or struggles of people they tend to view and often represent as less fortunate 'others' in dire need of their benevolence, charity, or philanthropy. (p. 25)

Dean (2019) assesses these views as "entirely consistent with models for social responsibility that cohere with neoliberal governmentality, for students view themselves as deploying their superior (entrepreneurial) skills to 'develop' or 'improve' others who are largely imagined as the authors of their own suffering" (p. 25).

This way of thinking exemplifies a deep division between supposedly superior and privileged students and the university on the one hand and a community "framed as the site of underprivilege and 'otherness'" on the other (Dean, 2019, p. 29). It is essential that WGS instructors help students demolish these oppressive divisions. One way to facilitate this growth is to expose them to the voices and experiences of the communities with whom they want to work early in the semester and to consistently challenge them to assess their own privilege and

perceptions of power. Continuous reflection on their experiences, for example in the form of weekly journal entries that are only read by the individual student and the instructor, can also create a fruitful space for honest self-assessment. Lastly, the activism assignment should call on students to share any collected data with their partners and to submit a final report collecting all of their insights for any group with whom they might have worked. It should be clear to the students that their community partners will have a say in evaluating them for grading purposes.

My study further reveals that while my class broadened students' perceptions of possible activisms, it inadvertently limited the goals they set for their projects—which is only natural if "anything" can count as activism. While this shift increased students' confidence in themselves as activists, we did lose the focus on political, structural change. Evidently, institutional expectations can lead instructors to fall into the trap of creating "a . . . one-dimensional classroom, where we train students to identify oppression but not to understand the myriad ways one might respond to it" (Taylor, 2019, p. 110). In the end, most projects' objectives centered on "awareness-raising," and almost any activity could be deemed to raise "critical consciousness." Group 2 reported that "Trans Lives Matter" successfully created "a *critical consciousness* in others. Even though [their] project was small, [they] took a baby step in creating a more just society through education and action" (emphases added). Group 6, via their tabling against sexual harassment, "create[d] a movement on . . . campus that brought *awareness*" (emphasis added). Group 4 (women in arts) wanted to "expand *awareness*" (emphasis added). Group 7 set as "the goal for [their environmental tips] project . . . to raise *awareness* and plant a seed" (emphasis added). To their credit, group 7 recognized that "effective activism is not an easy and simple task to undertake." Ipso facto, not every project can automatically count as activism.

Group 1, who informed students about possible changes to Title IX with regard to sexual violence at institutions of higher education, cited *Grassroots* for their understanding that

> '[o]utrage is only valuable when it leads to reform;' and that is what really spoke to us. . . . [Our instructor] . . . described activism as not a 'band aid' to cover up an issue, but something that you do to change the system.

They explained that this conceptualization of activism was the reason they did not simply volunteer at the local Rape Crisis Center. Instead, theirs "was an effective form of activism because *educating* people is the first step to fixing a problem" (emphasis mine). They did not connect this education back to actual reform.

The definitions of activism provided by students in the post-survey emphasize that system change did not make a lasting impression. Out of nine replies, only one mentioned political consciousness, while none of Arnold's other essential components, which we repeatedly covered in class, were listed. On the contrary, the response "[a]nything a person does to spread awareness and bring about change" recaps most of the information provided. This reduction of activism to individual awareness is neatly summarized in a comment to the post-survey prompt asking for helpful examples of activism, which reads "[a]ctivism that fits within my own schedule" and prioritizes the needs of the activist, instead of the targeted oppression.

Students as Diversity Workers

After analyzing my students' projects and reflections, I sense that what is holding them back in their implementation of activism can be compared to some of the thought processes that Ahmed recorded in her extensive interviews with diversity workers. In *On Being Included*, the author presents and investigates the multilevel frustrations of diversity workers, including the amount of invisible labor they perform, and the struggles they encounter, which are consistently ignored by their colleagues (Ahmed, 2012). Many students in my study expressed similar emotions, which fed them the message that executing an impactful activism project on our campus was virtually impossible. Additionally, fighting institutional racism, whiteness, and other oppressive power relationships drains diversity workers and creates the feeling of continuously hitting a brick wall.

Perhaps one of Ahmed's (2017) most impactful findings is that the "feeling of doing diversity work is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move" (p. 96). If students' pre-existing perceptions mainly mark activism as an amalgam of overwhelming tasks for which they will most certainly be criticized, then it should come as little surprise that they are hesitant to venture far out of their comfort zones, as "[d]iversity workers become conscious of the resistance to their work" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 98). My students are very aware that, on our campus, the only events and trainings with a diversity, equity, and inclusion focus come out of the same (very) few units and are delivered by the same faces. They are not oblivious to the symbolic nature of my hiring at the Assistant Professor level as the sole full-time person in WGS to direct and grow the program, despite a heavy service, teaching, and advising load, as well as research expectations. They have witnessed that "to build women's studies is to build in an environment that needs to be transformed by women's studies; . . . [and] that if we try to shatter the foundations upon which we build something, what we build is fragile" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 174). Many of them have undoubtedly noticed that, due to my precarity as a diversity worker, I "too [pose] a problem because [I] [keep] exposing a problem" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 99). Taking on this vicious cycle might seem like an insurmountable mission to my students and might, therefore, negatively affect their views on the efficacy of feminist activism.

Their observations on our campus have likely taught my students that a "diversity worker has to manage how she appears to others" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 99), which at least partially explains why participants in my activism class opted for projects that they thought would not be perceived as "radical," nor offend their audience. They have noticed that diversity work "to make [change] come about is too much to sustain," as "[m]aking feminist points, antiracist points, sore points, is about pointing out structures that many are invested in not recognizing" (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 113, 158). This recognition, understandably, shapes the amount of time and effort they assume is realistic to invest in their projects. Lastly, students understand that "diversity work is judged as not only coming from the outside in but as brought about by outsiders" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 113). This ostracization can be intimidating; and while I encourage my students to embrace vulnerability and discomfort, these are not easy tasks to take on. As hooks (1994) has made clear, transgressing boundaries is frightening, but a necessary skill we need to instill in students in order to reap the full benefits of liberatory pedagogies that create a "connection between what [students] are learning and their overall life experiences" (p. 19).

To this end, I intend to focus more concretely on discussing diversity work strategies with my students; for, "when your task is to get information out that is less valued by an organization, the techniques for moving information become even more important" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 95). I plan on starting the semester off by discussing students' impressions of diversity work and their anxieties around it. This step will include guest visits by diversity workers on our campus. Class sessions will hold space regularly for sharing experiences with challenges and pushback that will be tackled communally. Additionally, I will guide students in more thorough research on the issues pertaining to the specific communities they want to work with before engaging with any members of these communities directly.

Conclusion

All but one student identified themselves as some form of activist in my post-survey. Some of them commented on the shift they experienced: "If you would have asked me back in August if I considered myself an activist, I would've hesitated. Even now I still question my activism. However, after experiencing this course along with implementing my own activism, I see myself as an activist 'in training' so to speak;" and "I consider myself more of an activist now because not only do I stand up for injustices and work to help implement the changes I want to see but I am also more aware of the other aspects that are involved with activism, such as the political awareness and how that affects my issue." Yet, their activist mindsets were not impetus enough to help them overcome a number of hurdles, which trapped them in similar situations to those of full-time diversity workers. Students had creative and intellectually challenging ideas for their projects but did not feel that they had the time and resources to implement them. To counteract these limitations, they latched onto a reduction of the complexity of their activism projects and fixated on the pervasive belief that education and awareness alone can change oppressive systems. It is on WGS instructors to prepare students more realistically and adequately for the challenges that social justice activism can create and to talk them through the experiences of diversity workers, in an effort to embolden them in the face of pushback and energetic (both emotional and physical) drainage.

I firmly believe that activism-based courses can make an important contribution to the WGS curriculum and feminist pedagogy more broadly. Perhaps more than ever, it is essential right now that we take a close look at our approaches to "teach[ing] students political strategy" and giving them the feeling of social "efficacy" (Rose, 1989, p. 489). As E. writes after multiple attempts at keeping a lawn sign upright during a storm failed, "[H]ey, nobody ever said that activism was easy or not frustrating," but it has the potential to show our students the power they do have as informed social change agents working in collaborative contexts.

Acknowledgements

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Teaching and Learning Social Change

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Abstract   How can social work courses prepare students to be scholars of social movements, and *also* to act in solidarity with movements for social justice? How can graduate programs reimagine the professional socialization of social work students from aspiring for expertise toward a stance of life-long learning? How can instructors more deeply leverage our teaching practice to advance justice in our communities? This paper traces one attempt to answer these questions through a three-quarter graduate social work course designed to deepen students' skills and knowledge in practices for social transformation, while amplifying existing social justice movements. Drawing on reflections from the instructor and five students, course artifacts, and insights from other students and community partners, this case study offers a model of community-engaged teaching that centers solidarity, reciprocity, and justice.

KeyWords   Social work education, community-engaged learning, social justice, community practice

Social work has long been implicated in the 'states of exception' that authorities manufacture to legitimize oppression and violence that would otherwise be considered illegal, unethical, and/or immoral (Gray & Webb, 2014). In this version of the adage, *desperate times call for desperate measures*, those with the power to do so claim exigent circumstances as the cause to render some people and places dispensable, undeserving of protection, and/or unworthy of basic rights or decency. And it is often in these everyday zones of exception that social workers are employed.

As Gray and Webb (2014) note, "the practice of social work inevitably operates within a 'grand tension' of refusing the dominant order, while at the same time being contaminated by and maintaining this order" (p. 336). Where do future practitioners learn not simply to grapple with this tension, but to actively resist oppression and injustice? Though the field of Social Work has long-held values of social justice and social change, as noted by Reisch (2013), "the emphasis of neo-liberalism on individual rather than structural transformation has shifted the focus of social work practice away from resistance and change to adaptation, resiliency and compliance" (p. 718). Social work education mirrors this shift, as does field education, which has long served as the discipline's 'signature pedagogy' (Wayne et al., 2010). Given that many social work organizations operate from a charity or medical model (Finn, 2016; Mehrotra et al., 2018), students are more likely to be prepared to serve/surveil those deemed undeserving

of a full host of rights and privileges than to transform societal inequities (Kivel, 2005). While this gap certainly has implications for social work's model of field education—and many are taking up this charge (see George et al., 2013; Levine & Murray-Lictman, 2018)—we draw another conclusion: if we want to prepare social work students to both provide social services and to engage in social change then we need to reimagine educational settings that make that learning possible.

In their call for a 'New Left' within social work education, Gray and Webb (2014) write, "Importantly, for social work students, inculcating a critical approach to politics means *becoming involved* in public controversies around issues of local and regional significance that can take on global proportions" [emphasis added] (p. 330). This suggests the need for a model of community-engaged teaching that attends to the limitations of traditional 'service learning' (for discussion, see Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Sheridan & Jacobi, 2015) and directly involves students in local change efforts as part of the coursework. Feminist principles of community engagement can inform the development of such courses. In their introduction to *Feminist Community Engagement: Achieving Praxis*, editors Iverson and James (2014) identify the following themes, echoed across critical feminisms and community engaged scholarship:

- Relationality: Feminist community engagement seeks reciprocity of teaching, learning, caring, and doing among students, instructors, and community members.
- Border-crossing: In resisting false binaries such as campus/community and expert/novice, feminist community engagement reimagines where or with whom engagement occurs, as well as how and to what ends engagement takes place.
- Reflexivity: Feminist community engagement emphasizes a commitment to ongoing critical examination of how one's interests, assumptions, and perspectives inform the approach to and experience of engagement, and particular attention to power and authority (Gringeri et al., 2010).
- Disruptive pedagogy: Feminist community engagement is explicitly political and activist in orientation, equipping students with knowledge and skills to participate in movements for collective liberation.

Drawing on these principles, it is possible to imagine community-engaged coursework that deepens social work students' ability to contest states of exception through involvement in grassroots transformative change efforts. To consider the possibilities afforded by such an approach, this paper offers an in-depth case study of a graduate social work course sequence. While broadly directed towards educators seeking to build more meaningful solidarities between their classrooms and social movements, we hope this paper has particular value within schools of social work.

Study Context and Methods

The Portland State University Master of Social Work (MSW) Program admits an average of 300 students each year. Students select a concentration area and complete a specialized three-course sequence related to their concentration. This paper focuses on the course sequence for the Practice and Leadership with Communities and Organizations (PLCO) concentration. Whereas the clinical concentration option equips students for direct practice with individuals and families, this concentration attracts students who seek to participate in community responses to social problems, policy practice, and organizational leadership.

In fall 2019, I (Amie) became the lead instructor for the PLCO concentration and piloted a new course structure with the 21 enrolled students. A key change was the development of a team-based *Social Justice Movement Project* where students engage with a local justice-oriented campaign over nine months in order to develop increased knowledge in social movements while amplifying the efforts of a local campaign.

Early in the first quarter, students were introduced to the Just Practice Framework, a social work practice model rooted in feminist and critical social theories (Finn, 2016). The Just Practice Framework integrates thematic areas of inquiry with social work processes. The five areas of inquiry—history, context, meaning, power and possibility— provide "a foundation for posing critical questions and for imagining other possible realities and pathways for practice" (Finn, 2003, p. 72). The Just Practice Framework encourages social workers to engage these areas of inquiry iteratively, and reimagines social work practice from a medical approach (i.e. diagnosis and treatment) to an ongoing processes of engagement; teaching and learning; action and accompaniment; and reflection, evaluation and celebration (Finn, 2016). Twenty-one students applied the Just Practice Framework to the *Social Justice Movement Project* (syllabus available upon request).

In the second week of the fall quarter, students broke into four self-selected social movement groups: Immigrant Justice, Mass Incarceration, Foster Care Reform, and Climate Justice. In the subsequent weeks of the term, each team studied its topic through the lenses of history, context, meaning, power, and possibility. They developed a partnership with a local campaign or community group, and closed the quarter with an assessment of their topic and a proposal to assist their partner. Given that students were taking classes and completing a 500-hour internship while in many cases also balancing other work and care responsibilities, teams were encouraged to propose a modest yet meaningful scope of work, which was grounded in the capacity of each particular team. After soliciting partner feedback, in winter, students revised and began implementing their plans. The start of spring quarter coincided with the onset of Covid-19, which required reimagining the class and projects within new constraints. Throughout the year, teams evaluated, documented, and shared their work through group reflections, progress reports, end of quarter papers and presentations, and culminating in an evaluation with their community partner.

The following is a collaborative account of the *Social Justice Movement Project.* The purpose of this qualitative case study (Simons, 2014) is to explore the learning that was made possible, foreclosed, and troubled by the project. Representatives from each student team participated as

collaborating authors and member checked their work with their peers. The writing group met during the academic year and deepened analysis through conversation and independent writing over the year following the class. Authors drew from course artifacts (such as the syllabus and assignments), their individual assignments from the course, and their reflections over time. Nine other team members offered additional quotes and reflections (used here with permission). The writing team collaboratively analyzed each author's written accounts to understand through-lines and distinctions in their experiences. Drafts of each student's work were circulated with their team members and their community partners for review. Seven additional students and all community partners offered feedback thereby increasing the accuracy of these reflections. Though 14 of 21 students contributed insight to this paper, we assume that other students would have invariably emphasized different aspects of their experience.

Student Reflections

Following the Just Practice processes (Finn, 2016), this section begins with students' *engagement* with one another and their social movement, then explores the *teaching and learning* processes that informed their assessment process. Next, students examine the *action and accompaniment* phase of their work, and close with a discussion of their team's *reflections, evaluation, and celebration*. In each phase of work, we endeavor to make visible how we grappled with feminist principles of community engagement—*relationality*, *border crossing, reflexivity*, and *disruptive pedagogy* (Iverson & James, 2014). By tracing student's experiences chronologically across the three-course sequence, we hope to make salient the core aspects of the course design that may assist readers in discerning aspects of transferability to other community-engaged courses.

Engagement

Relationality is the essence of engagement. As described by Janet Finn (2016), "engagement is the process through which the social worker enters the world of the participant(s) in the change process and begins to develop a working relationship. It entails entry into both context and relationship" (p. 181). Course activities to support engagement included discussion of what members brought to and hoped to gain from each group; the creation of accountability commitments within each team; and the requirement that each team member conduct a stakeholder interview to gain insight into the history and context of their social movement.

Immigrant Justice (Stacey). When our group first formed, we discovered that some members were already heavily engaged with immigrant justice, while others—like me—were very new to the topic. Three members are Latinx women with direct immigration experiences: one member immigrated to the United States without documentation and is temporarily protected from deportation through a policy called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and two have undocumented family members. The remaining three members included one Latino heritage man, and two white women whose families immigrated to the U.S. four or more generations ago. We were collectively outraged by the increased xenophobia of the Trump administration and shared a passion to combat the oppression and criminalization of

immigrants and refugees. For the white members, we were also mindful that we were novices in the area of immigrant justice and had a lot to learn. As a team, we committed to work with and alongside those with direct immigration experiences and to honor the expertise of those already doing immigrant justice work.

To begin, we interviewed people with different connections to immigration. One member, Vania, interviewed a fellow DACA recipient, a champion for immigration rights who organizes in her community in spite of uncertainty over her immigration status. As Vania noted, "my interview was very emotional to me because of my personal connection to the DACA community. That being said, it felt great to learn more in depth about what people are doing locally." In all the stories, interviewees expressed fear and uncertainty as well as strength and determination. Many recounted the challenge of navigating the immigration system. An attorney we interviewed explained that the starting cost of legal representation in a deportation removal case—$12,000—is a significant barrier for folks facing deportation. The attorney suggested that as a next step we go to immigration court to better understand the process.

Mass Incarceration (Helen). We were the last group to quiet down before responding to our instructor's introductory prompt: Why did we choose this topic? One by one, the other four members recounted their immense work experience in juvenile justice, child welfare, and a women's prison. As they spoke, I kept repeating in my head: "Say it, say it: 'I am formerly incarcerated.' Don't let them know how hard it has been to release the shame and regret in order to say this with strength and purpose." After all, it was the most important contribution I had to offer.

From the get go, it was apparent we shared a deep commitment toward interrupting the institutional and systemic racism, which has fueled the exponential growth of the U.S. prison population. Our team found common ground in the heartfelt frustrations of having to work within these unjust, overtly racist systems, and having to suffer patiently while the communities we belong to are disproportionately impacted and, in my case, to have experienced the hardship firsthand. But we had conflicting orientations toward solutions, with some of us oriented toward reform and others firmly committed to abolition.

I can only assume that the fierce conviction expressed by each member reflected their lived experience, but we passed over our personal stories. I shared very little about my experiences in jail and my group members did not ask. I noticed that the only two Black students in class chose this group, as did the only veteran, but I did not ask how their respective experiences with racism or the military informed their commitment to end mass incarceration. In retrospect, I have grieved the loss of these stories, which barely surfaced during our nine months working together.

We did, however, seek stories from others. To understand how criminal justice affects youth, one member interviewed a juvenile court counselor who shared, "the criminal justice system is quicksand—the system…has its own innate ability to trap young people." Other members interviewed a city employee, people working in abolitionist movements, and a person who registered voters in jails. As members were selecting their interviewees, my instructor

encouraged me to share if I was also willing to be interviewed. My team member Amelia interviewed me, and later reflected, "I knew Helen was formerly incarcerated, and the thought did not enter my mind to interview her until she gently reminded me."

Ultimately, the collection of interviews deepened our understanding of how the national crisis of mass incarceration was unfolding in our own community, and led us to partner with Oregon District Attorney (DA) for the People (https://www.oregondaforthepeople.com/), a coalition-led campaign that "aims to decrease the everyday impact that the criminal legal system has on communities of color, while building community power to self-determine what safety and healing look like."

Foster Care (Darrylann & Rebecca). Our group connected almost immediately. Four members were employed as child welfare caseworkers/supervisors, and the rest worked in organizations that served children and families impacted by the foster care system. Additionally, one member was also a foster parent for her grandson. Each of us had witnessed the devastating effects of a child welfare system that fails many children and families, and we spent much of our early sessions sharing our outrage alongside our belief that the whole system needed to change. Figuring out where to start in a nine-month project was challenging.

Interviews were a key part of our discernment process. We heard many stories of young people's resilience and also of the unique challenges foster youth face, particularly the abrupt end to mental health and other support services for youth who age out of foster care at age 18. Our team member Elisha interviewed the program director of Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC), a statewide advocacy program led by youth 14-25 who are currently or formerly in foster care. Over the last two years, OFYC has been working through the Oregon Legislature to increase funding for Independent Living Programs (ILPs), which provide some foster youth with the knowledge and skills to assist in the transition out of foster care. However, the program is woefully underfunded, and OFYC youth are committed to expanding these resources. Although Elisha had worked with OFYC for years, she was still impressed to learn more about their work: "the youth as a collaborative make the decisions about what they want to collectively change in policy, so this group is genuinely a representation of the youth voice… This is brilliant on the part of the OFYC." We decided to partner with OFYC's upcoming legislative agenda.

Climate Justice Team (Jordenn). When I joined the climate justice team I was a little apprehensive as I had zero experience with the topic and did not have strong relationships with the other group members. I quickly learned that we shared a lack of experience with climate justice, but also a sense that this is a pressing issue. In that first meeting we identified the strengths of each group member and committed to being accountable to one another, practicing excellent communication, and remembering we are all learners in this field.

To generate a foundational understanding within our group, we interviewed a climate scientist, an environmental attorney, and several people involved in local community organizing. A key takeaway was the gaps in our knowledge. My team member Olive observed, "before

my interview, I was using terms like *environmental justice* or *environmentalism* without really understanding the very different meanings these terms hold." Olive's interviewee explained, "What climate justice is trying to do that environmentalism does not [is to] argue that the connection between the changing earth and our systems of oppression are intimately related." Clarifying our definition of climate justice was essential to the development of our team, yet it also surfaced new tensions for us related to our identities and potential roles in the movement. As Olive wrote in an end-of-quarter reflection: "as a group comprised of 80% white women, I found myself wondering where to best 'plug in' to this current work in a way that is actually meaningful, and does not repeat the same history of erasure of the work people of color have done in Portland." With this in mind, we began searching for a way to partner with local climate justice efforts.

Teaching and Learning
In the Just Practice Framework, "teaching-learning is a participatory process of discovery and critical inquiry. In part, it entails data collection, assessment, and interpretation and reframes them as collaborative activities. Teaching-learning connotes a two-way street" (Finn, 2016, p. 181). In this way, teaching and learning always involves *border crossing*. In addition to teaching-learning efforts that each team undertook independently, this phase of the project was supported by in-class media analysis and timeline activities, as well as power- and systems-mapping activities designed to deepen students' analysis of their respective social issues. Each team concluded the first quarter with the development of a proposed action plan.

Immigrant Justice (Stacey). Following the recommendation of one of our stakeholder interviews, our team spent a day in immigration court. We were shocked that asylum seekers were asked to retell traumatic stories of the circumstances that forced them to flee their country, yet were not provided any resources (such as access to a victim advocate, as is provided in criminal court). We watched, stunned, as the judge addressed Spanish-speaking immigrants in English after the translator had left, demanded that all evidence be presented to the court in English, and chastised a mother and son for not printing evidence on the "right" kind of paper. In only one of the observed cases did an asylum seeker have an attorney present. Shockingly, it appeared perfectly acceptable to hold immigration court in which those detained were unable to understand the proceedings and lacked legal representation. As we witnessed, those without representation had no power in the courtroom, and were treated without regard for basic standards of human decency and respect.

As we huddled outside the courthouse that afternoon, we determined to focus our efforts on increasing access to legal representation for immigrants facing deportation. We soon discovered Pueblo Unido, a Latinx-led organization that provides legal services navigation to immigrants. After researching the organization, our team met with the co-founder and executive director, Cameron Coval. Cameron reiterated that cost was often the most significant barrier to representation, and thus one of the organization's greatest needs. We were disappointed to learn that one of the few legal translation services—offered by fellow social workers—charged

fees that made these services inaccessible to many. At Cameron's encouragement, we decided to organize a fundraiser for Pueblo Unido. Though we had spent the first quarter learning about the experiences of immigrants, now we had to learn about fundraising: where and when to host events, how to recruit attendees, and how to inspire people to support financially an issue they may not have thought much about. Our hope was to raise money while also engaging more people in our community in local immigrant justice efforts.

Mass Incarceration (Helen). Oregon DA for the People was extremely welcoming to our efforts to join their campaign. We continued our research, attended organizing meetings and candidate forums, and quickly learned that the District Attorney has significant decision-making power to shape plea bargains, police and prosecutorial practices, jail and bail amounts, sentencing, and more. It was shocking to realize how little we knew, as social workers, about the power this one person has on the entire system of justice and punishment. Oregon DA for the People challenged all candidates for the upcoming District Attorney race to agree to a six-point platform to increase justice for Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Immigrant communities, individuals with mental health conditions, youth, people experiencing houselessness, and those engaged in sex work or drug use. By promoting a platform rather than a candidate, the coalition hoped to shape the public conversation surrounding the campaign and force commitments from each candidate that they could later leverage with whomever was elected. Oregon DA for the People asked us to create educational materials detailing the powers of the District Attorney and to get more people involved in the campaign.

Foster Care (Darrylann & Rebecca). We had a lot of work to do to educate ourselves about OFYC's history and current legislative work. Since 2009, the group has helped to introduce and pass seven bills that have improved the lives of foster youth throughout the state. This year, OFYC was reintroducing a bill to add $2 million in funding for ILPs via HB 4120. OFYC hoped to stabilize the lives of youth aging out of the foster care system through increased access to services that help them transition into adulthood.

OFYC is committed to amplifying the voices of youth with lived experience in foster care, and as adults and professionals we were still figuring out how to best support these efforts. We proposed a number of action steps to educate and engage those within our sphere of influence about the campaign, and to provide OFYC's youth with tools to assist in their advocacy efforts. OFYC welcomed our proposal, so we got to work.

Climate Justice (Jordenn). We quickly found 350PDX—a local climate justice volunteer-led organization—and learned that its Fossil Fuel Resistance Team was in the midst of a campaign to halt the expansion of Portland's largest crude oil storage and export facility (owned by Zenith Energy Management), with a long-term goal to dismantle the corporation (Center for Sustainable Economy, 2019). An estimated 1.1 million barrels of crude oil pass through this facility annually, the majority of which come from the Canadian tar sands and the Bakken Formation (Center for Sustainable Economy, 2019). Zenith is located in Portland's Northwest

Industrial district, making it an environmental justice concern for low-income communities and communities of color in North Portland, as well as Indigenous communities who continue to be exploited by the extraction of fossil fuels (Center for Sustainable Economy, 2019). We were struck by how accepted it has become for low-income and BIPOC communities to be dumped on, to suffer pollution and significant health biohazard risk, or to be completely eradicated.

We committed to educating ourselves, being transparent about what we could offer, and prioritizing tangible contributions to 350PDX's campaign. We analyzed background reports and began attending meetings and events with 350PDX. While our goal was to learn how we could support the campaign, we also learned a good deal about effective organizing. As team member Katie noted, "I have not had a lot of experience with [community organizing] in the past, so I am very grateful to have had an opportunity to link with an organization that values its members, recognizes oppression and privilege, and disrupts systems to create positive change." After getting involved, 350PDX provided access to a spreadsheet detailing campaign tasks. We identified those that aligned with the strengths and capacity of our group, and developed a concrete proposal of action items to support the Fossil Fuel Resistance Team.

Action and Accompaniment

Finn (2016) describes action as "the process of carrying out plans and sustaining the momentum" and accompaniment as "the actual people-to-people partnerships through which action is realized" (p. 182). While some course content supported students' efforts (such as readings related to legislative advocacy and strategic communication), by the time teams reached this stage, their work was highly tailored to their particular projects. Supported by a *disruptive pedagogy* that prioritized community needs, each team set their own goals, determined the strategies and tactics to achieve them, and navigated unexpected challenges that complicated their efforts.

Immigrant Justice (Stacy). Our initial goal was to raise $2,000 at an in-person fundraising event. We created timelines, explored venues, and assigned each team member tasks that aligned with their skills and interests. We quickly learned that fundraising events often require a budget—which we did not have—and faced difficulty finding a venue that would feel welcoming to immigrant communities, BIPOC folks, and LGBTQIA+ people. And then, just when we had finalized the logistics, the COVID-19 pandemic reached our state and the Governor issued a stay-at-home order. In addition to throwing our personal lives into turmoil, we needed to quickly re-strategize. We lowered our fundraising goal to $1,000 and worked with Pueblo Unido to develop a week-long online fundraiser.

Each group member was responsible for creating social media content for one day of the week. We distributed the posts on social media and encouraged Pueblo Unido and others in our networks to repost the campaign. Much to our surprise, by the end of the week we raised $3,330 and generated a number of new monthly donors for Pueblo Unido. We were also inspired by the reach of the campaign: Rosa's video post reached 3,000 people on Facebook alone, and several donors started their own fundraising efforts for Pueblo Unido, further expanding our effort.

Mass Incarceration (Helen). We decided to focus on increasing awareness of the Oregon DA for the People campaign on our campus. The goals of our project were to inform students of the candidates, to encourage voting, and to help students understand the power of voters to reduce mass incarceration. We developed a curriculum and a facilitator's guide for an experiential learning module that included a mock trial where students would experience the power of the district attorney and the role of implicit bias in the legal system. We planned to lead workshops the following quarter, prior to the election. Instructors began signing up for sessions, and we capped off winter term by testing out our curriculum with our peers.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and we were thrust into remote learning and had to reconceptualize our curriculum in a digital format. With input from Oregon DA for the People, we created a Prezi presentation with a voiceover recording that could be easily distributed online. We shared the link with instructors and offered to facilitate a class discussion during their remote course. One instructor took us up on this offer. Additionally, we posted a link to the video on a twitter thread that garnered national recognition. However, we were disappointed by the shifts caused by the pandemic and also distracted. Some of our team members were furloughed, one expected to work overtime, and my household struggled through illness, job losses, and threats of eviction. All of this tested our team's cohesion and resilience, and limited our ability to stay engaged with each other and Oregon DA for the People.

Foster Care (Darrylann & Rebecca). Our actions were focused on amplifying OFYC's efforts to pass HB 4120. We wrote and distributed an op-ed letter to educate the general public about the need for additional funding for youth aging out of foster care, created and posted an infographic about HB 4120 on social media, and mobilized fellow students, colleagues, and friends to advocate for passage of HB 4120. We sent drafts of our materials to OFYC, which they reviewed for accuracy before dissemination. We also developed an advocacy template for OFYC youth to use as they contacted their legislators and attended OFYC's lobby day at the capitol.

As a bipartisan bill, HB 4120 received considerable support from both parties. However, near the end of the session, the Republicans in both the House and the Senate staged a walkout in protest of an unrelated environmental bill, and HB 4120 (along with many other bills) died. We felt an overwhelming sense of loss: for OFYC, the youth that had such a personal investment in the bill, and for ourselves. The walkout underscored the systemic abandonment of youth in foster care by the state's policy-makers. We wondered about the impact of the walkout on the youth. Had the youth been prepared to have elected officials turn their backs on them? Was this retraumatizing for youth that have already experienced trauma? Were we complicit in that? The electric momentum we felt entering the new term and the new year were gone in an instant.

Climate Justice (Jordenn). Our action projects included creating a social media campaign aimed at increasing awareness both about 350PDX and the Zenith Energy Terminal, and organizing a walking tour of the Zenith Energy Terminal. Each member of our team invited others to join the tour, and Melanie, our mentor at 350PDX, hosted. Melanie began with an acknowledgement that the land we were on was stolen from the Multnomah, Kathlament,

Clackamas, Cowtliz band of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla, and many other tribes. She explained how Zenith Energy Terminal stores crude oil and the risks the facility poses to area residents. Getting to experience Zenith through sight, smell, and sound—and in community with colleagues, friends, and our mentor—was intense and solemn. Seeing how close Zenith was to my neighborhood, and understanding the scope of harm that would result from an earthquake or a crude oil spillage was both heartbreaking and activating. One teammate's husband filmed the tour and created a brief educational video for 350PDX to use. The tour also provided additional context needed to produce quality print and online tools to help amplify the Fossil Fuel Resistance Team's campaign. As the pandemic forced both our class and our work with 350PDX to move online, we missed the opportunity to spend time in physical-community with 350PDX, reflecting on the year and sharing in our new formed friendships.

Reflection, Evaluation, and Celebration
In the Just Practice Framework, reflection is understood as the process of "learning together from our experiences," evaluation is an ongoing process of "assessing the effectiveness of our efforts," and celebration entails "commemorating the successes, big and small, in the process of change" (Finn, 2016, pp.182-183). These processes were supported by quarterly reflections on the group-work process, team outcomes and learning edges, and the expectation that teams seek feedback from their community partner. While the course design encouraged *reflexivity* throughout the process, it was particularly evident in this phase.

Immigrant Justice (Stacey). After we completed the fundraiser, we asked Pueblo Unido's Executive Director, Cameron, for feedback about our collaboration. He expressed gratitude for our clear communication throughout the project, how we had listened to the needs of the organization, and how our campaign strongly aligned with Pueblo Unido's mission. He appreciated that we were respectful of the organization's constrained resources, and made a meaningful contribution to their work while requiring a minimal investment of their time. He also offered recommendations to improve any future online fundraising. We valued both his appreciation and suggestions, and were grateful that our work was beneficial to Pueblo Unido.

As the year ended, our group came together over a final Zoom call to reflect on the nine months we spent together. We expressed pride in our individual and collective work, and recalled the initial tension between those group members with lived experience with immigration and those who were learners. We recognized that the differences in social location impacted the group in a variety of ways. Although all members were impacted by the inhumanity of the immigration system, the emotional impacts of the project were compounded for members that were also navigating those systems themselves. As Vania noted:

> I persevered despite facing this pandemic with my family as undocumented and often thinking about dropping out to figure out how to best support them…Despite being emotionally drained most of the time, I supported my team members in pulling off an amazing fundraiser for Pueblo Unido.

We appreciated the way we had grown together—through shared experiences at the courthouse, practicing vulnerability with one another, and actively encouraging one another—and also honored the different lessons we were taking from the project. For the Latinx members of the group, the project offered an important affirmation of members existing knowledge and expertise. Rosa shared:

> Who knew that I would know more of what it means to be a macro practitioner than what I thought? I may not have the paper trail experience of an Executive Director, but I do have community leadership and fund development experience that reflects my passion and strengths.

For the white members of the group, the project modeled a way to join in solidarity. At the start of the year, I was curious, excited, and felt like I wanted to *lead* social movements. I now truly value being a novice in a movement and learning with a community, following the lead of organizations doing the work, and educating myself and others on valuable ways to contribute.

Mass Incarceration (Helen). The final phase of our project required us to complete a comprehensive paper and present an overview of our project to our peers. Our group struggled through decision-making and in engaging with one another during this time. In truth, this had been challenging all along. Our group was passionate, yet we often discussed the issues of mass incarceration abstractly rather than what it meant to us personally. We rushed to make decisions quickly rather than slowing down to understand each member's perspectives.

Two weeks before our final class presentation, George Floyd was murdered. In the days that followed, members of our group spent nights in the streets protesting as racialized police violence became the center of a national conversation. And while our group's passion around this topic was shared, the trauma of the moment landed differently for the two Black members of our team, Danielle and LeMont, who seemed to withdraw from our team. Even when physically present, they had limited energy to engage with our remaining tasks. The white members of the group—myself included—did not initially grasp the severe impact that George Floyd's murder had on our Black peers. As our awareness of their emotional load grew, we did what we could to complete the final paper and prepare our team presentation. When we showed up for the final presentation online, none of us fully knew what others on our team would share. In the end, each member of the group was able to give voice to their experience to the larger class, even though we had not been able to do so with one another.

LeMont reflected on the difficulty of being fully present and in the moment, and the struggle to find words to describe his attachment to George Floyd and so many countless others killed by police violence. Danielle noted that her MSW experience had been "bookended by police murders of Black men," reminding peers that on the first day of the program two years prior there had been a walk-out to honor Jason Washington, a Black man killed by Portland State campus police, and now she was grieving the murder of George Floyd upon graduation. It struck

me as the first time that we had collectively engaged with the focus of our nine-month project—eradicating systems that lead to mass incarceration—in personal rather than abstract terms.

We were proud of the curriculum we created and pleased that we were able to educate some students (though not as many as we had hoped) on the importance of voting and the role that the district attorney plays. In the end, my greatest learning came from the process of struggling together. I learned—through trial and error—to draw power from our minds and our hearts, to develop patience with each other and with the process, and to find ways to show up for my peers, even when I too feel stretched to my emotional limit. I remembered the power of my own story and the importance of seeking and honoring others.

Foster Care (Darrylann & Rebecca). After the Republican walk out brought our work with OFYC to an abrupt close, we took greater time to consider what our work had and had not accomplished, and our areas of growth. We did not achieve our primary goal to support OFYC in achieving the passage of HB 4120. However, we did develop materials that could be easily modified to promote a subsequent bill (introduced in 2021). In accompanying OFYC youth members at their lobby day, we affirmed their wants and needs. Our community partner expressed appreciation for these contributions, sharing, "supporting youth to be in OFYC was amazing! The Op Ed was great. Thank you for letting us review for accuracy and then doing the work of sending it off." However modest, these seemed to be meaningful additions to OFYC's campaign.

We are taking from this experience increased knowledge and abilities in legislative advocacy, and greater insight about the micro-skills involved in sustained, collaborative, community-led work. We came into this project knowing each other and our community partner, and feeling some degree of expertise in our field. In part, because of this familiarity and confidence in our skills, we jumped over important steps of formalizing our communication and accountability practices, and at times found ourselves scrambling to complete tasks at the last minute. Our community partner noted this as well, observing: "overall, it would have been great to have more clarity, earlier, about what youth needed as support and what you were able to do when" and "be sure to engage who you are supporting more in your work, getting reflections or feedback along the way." It was critical for us to remember that *professional experience* in child welfare is not equivalent to *lived experience* in foster care. To be good partners in ongoing efforts to reform or transform foster care, we must center the needs and desires of current and former youth, show up organized, and clearly communicate our capacity. We came to deeply appreciate both the competence of our team members and the support we offered one another as we processed our disappointments. Together, we are carrying forward greater perseverance, sense of community, and dedication to serving foster youth.

Climate Justice (Jordenn). Although we had to rethink the final aspects of this project, we were still immensely proud of the work we put out and the ways we all grew individually and as a team. We started out as novices in the area of climate justice, and all felt that we learned a great deal. As reflected by my team member Norzom that learning expanded far beyond Zenith: "It made me much more aware of decisions I make that affect climate justice, such

as things that I purchase." Most prominently, we were struck by the *absence* of attention to climate justice in our social work education. It is not an accident what neighborhoods and communities are stripped, dumped on, and/or exposed to toxins. If we are not learning about this as social workers, we are less likely to be paying attention to the disparities occurring around us and risk being complicit in ongoing environmental injustice.

The experience of working together over nine months deepened our experience in applied collaborative work. The pandemic accelerated this growth, as we needed each other in different ways. Our team member Katie struggled to attend to her school, work, and family responsibilities and as the team was facing a deadline:

> I was honest about my capacity and the team fully supported me... Learning to recognize and be honest about my capacity is something that I want to carry into my career. It requires transparency and trust of those around me. If I can continue to grow in this area, I believe it will help keep me in this field for the long term.

350PDX provided positive feedback regarding our deliverables, and continues to use the documentary, infographics, and brochure that we created. We invited our community partner and mentor Melanie to our final online-class, where we would be presenting our work to our classmates. When the day came, we were delighted to see that a number of 350PDX members logged in; a testament to the relationships we had built.

At the beginning of this project, our professor shared an image from her first sweet potato harvest, and described her delight at discovering the abundance below the soil after months of tending above ground. She encouraged us to imagine ourselves as gardeners, and this analogy helped us conceptualize engaging in community practice. We planted the slips, which involved doing the research and engaging in a process of self-education. We tended the soil by building sincere relationships with our community partners, attending meetings, and working within our own constraints. We also had to care for the spreading vines and follow through on our action projects, making sure our deliverables were helpful to our partner agency. Once the work was done, we got to dig in and harvest, evaluating our work with our partner agency and reflecting on all the skills we learned and relationships we nurtured. Having done this project, I now know that engaging in community work does not just grow overnight; like any good gardener, you have to invest for the long-term and trust the process.

Through-Lines, Lessons Learned, and Limitations
Each of the four social movement projects confronted zones of exception: the structures and processes that lead to the dehumanization of undocumented immigrants, the cruel quicksand of the criminal justice system, the abandonment of youth in foster care, and the intersecting violence against land and people by crude oil extraction. Students were charged with entering these zones, knowing that the challenges predate and would outlast their efforts, and yet finding ways to join with others in striving for change. Along the way, they confronted ways that social

work is often complicit, for example by creating barriers to accessing needed services, and through omissions in the education of future practitioners.

The student reflections above suggest that this community-engaged project successfully achieved the twin goals of helping students to deepen their knowledge and experience in advancing social justice movements while meaningfully contributing to a local campaign. The reflections offer rich evidence of learning, scaffolded by the integration of the Just Practice Framework and feminist principles of community engagement into the course design. Emphasizing *relationality* and a purposeful period of engagement and learning prior to social action helped students experience the value of slowing down their practice and assessing the needs and desires of the community and their team. Students demonstrated a shift from a politics of location (as reflected in the common practice of offering positionality statements) to a politics of relation (Rowe, 2005). As described by feminist theorist Aimee Carillo Rowe (2005):

> I am advocating a shift from a notion of identity that begins with "I"—as does the inscription "I-dentity," which announces "I am..."—to a sense of "self" that is radically inclined toward others, toward the communities to which we belong, with whom we long to be, and to whom we feel accountable. (p. 18)

This deepening relationality was supported by the intentional *border-crossings* integrated into the class. Students' peers, community partners, and community engagement experiences became critical sources of learning alongside course materials. Students built their capacity for social action through developing educational, fundraising, and advocacy tools for and with their movement partners, and also learned—through legislative walk-outs and the onset of the pandemic—that the best laid plans can quickly be upended.

The frequent opportunities for students to reflect on how their lived and professional experiences impacted their engagement with one another and their community partners integrated *reflexivity* into the course. As students grappled with the ways they were differentially situated in their chosen social movements, their awareness of their own learning edges sharpened, and their appreciation of one another deepened.

The depth of student learning was enabled by the overall design of the course: a rare three-quarter sequence with the same student cohort that is undeniably unique in many educational settings. Yet this too is an important insight: teaching and learning social change takes time. It is not possible to research a social justice issue, assess local resources and needs, develop a community partnership, and implement and evaluate a community-engaged action plan in a 10-week course, but it may be possible in 30 weeks. With a commitment to *disruptive pedagogy*, we can prioritize a feminist praxis that is "openly political, connected, and involved in liberatory actions" (Gringeri et al., 2010, p. 393), and create multi-course sequences that enable this kind of robust community engagement.

As the instructor, the course required me to carefully curate the curriculum and activities that supported student learning. I relinquished a significant portion of course time to group-work, and offered myself more often as consultant than instructor. I suspended attachment to

fully-formed, predetermined learning outcomes and trusted in the emergent nature of learning-through-doing. The team- and community-directed nature of the projects meant that students learned different things; some gained more experience in policy practice, others in popular education, for example. Indeed, students saw themselves change, although, as illuminated by Rosa's growing recognition of her expertise and Stacey's increased comfort at being a learner rather than an expert, they changed in different ways. While their individual learnings varied, all students gained experience engaging deeply with and following the leadership of grassroots community groups.

While designed to be pedagogically disruptive, we are mindful of the norms that were not disrupted within this class. In particular, despite building in activities that attend to relationality and group process, students have been socialized within academia and the profession to prioritize deadlines and deliverables in ways we had trouble shaking loose. We wonder if this contributed to some of what students recognized as missteps along the way, such as Helen's reflection on the consequence of having "passed over our personal stories" in her team's formation, and Rebecca and Darrylann's recognition that they had, at times, equated their professional expertise with lived experience. In reflection, Helen wondered if the instructor could have more explicitly communicated the expectation that teams balance their emphasis on deliverables with investments in co-learning. Somewhat paradoxically, leveraging greater instructor authority in setting this expectation might have more effectively disrupted professional norms than the gentle encouragement provided did.

A community-engaged course such as this one does not resolve the fundamental tensions in social work nor is it designed to. Social work students are working themselves into—not out of—jobs, many of which remain firmly embedded in systems that both harm and help. Yet this case study offers one way to live into a model of social work education that prepares students to both provide social services and engage in social change while equipping them with tools and experiences that center solidarity, reciprocity, and movements to advance social justice.

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Decolonizing or Doing the Best with What We have? Feminist University-Community Engagement Outside Women's, Gender, and Sexualities Studies Programs

Nafisa Tanjeem & Michael J. Illuzzi

ABSTRACT   Feminist scholars and activists have a long history of integrating feminist praxis in the curriculum through community engagement initiatives. Using feminist critiques, they have investigated possibilities as well as limitations of these initiatives in neoliberal universities (Boyd & Sandell, 2012; Costa & Leong, 2012; Dean et al., 2019; Johnson & Luhmann, 2016; Kwon & Nguyen, 2016). Nevertheless, most of the existing studies focus on feminist community engagement within institutionalized Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) departments, programs, and courses. This article demonstrates how feminist community engagement can expand its scope outside the institutional boundaries of WGSS programs. It contributes to the existing feminist literature in several ways. First, it explores how feminist and decolonial praxis can manifest in a non-WGSS setting and the resulting challenges and possibilities that arise. Second, it argues that the transition from traditional service learning to feminist and decolonial community engagement is a complex, contentious, and iterative process rather than an end goal. Lastly, it elaborates on how faculty can not only avoid the tendency of "learning elsewhere" and framing the community as "unprivileged Other" but also build and organize with community through creative subversion of various structures of the neoliberal university.

KeyWords   Feminist community engagement, neoliberal university, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, service-learning, decolonizing

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) programs in North American universities have a long history of integrating feminist praxis in the curriculum through various forms of community engagement initiatives. On the one hand, these initiatives develop a critical consciousness among students about the neoliberal structures within which universities, nonprofits, and communities operate and interact with each other. On the other hand, feminist community engagement often risks framing the community as an unprivileged "Other" (Dean, 2019) and complying with neoliberal forces of the nonprofit industrial complex (Kwon & Nguyen, 2016). Scholars and practitioners have explored how to make the most productive and egalitarian use of feminist praxis in university-community engagement and address the limitations of exceptionalist institutionalized service learning approaches (Boyd & Sandell, 2012; Costa & Leong, 2012; Dean et al., 2019; Johnson & Luhmann, 2016; Kwon & Nguyen,

2016). Nevertheless, most of these studies focus on feminist community engagement within institutionalized WGSS departments, programs, and courses.

Feminist community engagement does not happen only within the institutionalized boundaries of WGSS. Non-WGSS programs can also benefit from utilizing feminist philosophies, pedagogies, and practices in their community engagement initiatives in creative ways. In fact, in a world struck by a global pandemic and coronavirus capitalism (Klein, 2020), and in the face of drastic budget cuts in neoliberal universities, it is necessary to consider how feminist community engagement can expand its scope outside the institutional boundaries of WGSS programs. Against this backdrop, this article contributes to the existing feminist literature of university-community engagement in several ways. First, it explores how feminist and decolonial praxis can manifest in a non-WGSS setting, alongside the challenges and possibilities that arise. Second, based on our experience of navigating bureaucratic hierarchies and organizing faculty, staff, and students in a neoliberal university, we argue that the transition from traditional service-learning to feminist and decolonial community engagement is a complex, contentious, and iterative process rather than an end goal. While it might be impossible to entirely decolonize community engagement practices within imperialist universities, which hold a long and violent history of exploiting communities, it is worth engaging in the struggle and doing the best we can with what we have. Lastly, our experience and analysis responds to scholarly critiques of the homogenous, simplistic formation of the "university" and "community," particularly in exceptionalist institutionalized service learning literatures and practices (Dean, 2019; Stoecker, 2016). We demonstrate ways to not only avoid the tendency of "learning elsewhere" and framing the community as "unprivileged Other," but also to build and organize *with* community through the creative subversion of various structures of the neoliberal university.

Feminist and Decolonial Critiques of Exceptionalist University-Community Engagement
Many feminist and decolonial scholars and activists have conceptualized the ways North American universities have established imperial, neoliberal, and corporate cartographies, the ways these institutions now comply with militarism and the academic-prison-industrial complex, and normalize state power (Chatterjee & Maira, 2014). University-community engagement in the forms of institutionalized community-engaged research, practica, internships, community placements, or experiential learning—all of which may fall under the broad umbrella of "service learning" or "civic engagement"—often transform into further mechanisms through which to implement the imperial and neoliberal philosophies and practices of North American universities. Many North American universities promote institutionalized engagement programs to offer professional skills and "real-world" exposure for their students, as well as to bolster the brand images of the institutions by demonstrating that they "do good" for surrounding communities (Dean, 2019; Luhmann et al., 2019). The mainstream community engagement literature and practices rarely address the problematic dynamics of these increasingly popular university-community engagement initiatives. For example, they seldom reveal how these initiatives focus extensively on developing quantifiable

assessments of the way proposed curricular programs affect the civic knowledge, skills, and values of students.

Service learning, in its institutionalized form, relies on the philosophy of "giving back" with an assumed universal privilege of all students regardless of their background and without asking what has been "taken from" the communities. It does not provide a grounded critique of the political and economic structures that sustain violent institutions and discriminatory practices. The romanticized notion of "giving back" in the institutionalized service learning literature perpetuates an exceptionalist illusion of "reciprocity" and "mutual benefit" between universities and communities when, in fact, universities are universally constructed as a site of privilege separate from the community and are seen as performing their civic responsibilities. Communities—which are often assumed to be represented through nonprofit organizations—are homogenously constructed as "unprivileged Others." Exceptionalist constructions of service learning rarely question who the "we" is within the university and community relationships, or the power hierarchies that undergird relationships between various "we's." For example, in the exceptionalist framing of service learning, students are represented through powerful, imperial universities that often hold the upper hand in determining the terms and contracts of service-learning projects. And yet, the students—especially Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), working class, and other minoritized students—who are expected to "give back" through service learning—do not enjoy the same levels of privilege. As a result, the question of who is working toward the "we" means within the university remains unresolved (Dean, 2019; Stoecker, 2016, pp. 46–62). Similarly, the "we" within the community also remains unaddressed because of the widespread tendency to perceive non-profit organizations as equivalent to the "community," without recognizing that non-profits do not always have egalitarian, organic connections with the communities they work with (Kwon & Nguyen, 2016).

Emerging feminist, decolonial, and Indigenous theorizing of university-community engagement literatures recognize the imperial-capitalist-racist-sexist assumptions that undergird exceptionalist institutionalized community engagement. It demonstrates how a quantifiable, outcome-oriented, and best-practice-focused approach does not challenge the growing corporatization of higher education as it trains model neoliberal citizens through a benevolent model of "doing good" through charity work (Dean, 2019). The emerging literature also reveals that institutionalized community engagement is often based on collaboration with apolitical service-oriented non-profit organizations that typically provide services to individual clients and are barred from spending more than a fraction of their resources on political lobbying to push for structural changes. In many cases, institutionalized community engagement is based on a short-term "hours model" where students tend to complete the required hours without contributing meaningfully and thereby drain limited resources from the community organizations. Their hours often serve as a "resume booster" and "poverty tourism" for students, most of whom are white and privileged, thereby alienating BIPOC and working-class students (Stoecker, 2016). In this way, feminist, decolonial and Indigenous critiques go a long way in challenging the exceptionalist imaginaries created and circulated by institutionalized service learning. They play a significant role in disrupting the hegemonic practice of promoting

"neoliberal governmentality," which Dean (2019) describes as the disproportionate emphasis on individual responsibility and agency in community service, without a desire to dive deeper into a systemic analysis of intersecting modes of oppression. These critiques also contest the binary and homogenous constructions of "the university" and "the community," recognizing that universities are not necessarily separate from nor superior to a community that is often assumed to be the poor, racialized, feminized, and marginalized "Other" (Dean, 2019).

University-Community Engagement within Institutionalized Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) Programs and Beyond

Despite these critiques of community engagement initiatives, such initiatives serve WGSS programs in myriad ways. University-community engagement opens up possibilities for WGSS programs to challenge the dichotomies of individually/collaboratively produced knowledge, academia/activism, and theory/method, as a necessary step towards accomplishing the radical goals of feminist praxis as defined by Richa Nagar and Amanda Swarr (2010).[1] From a more material point of view, adopting a "praxis"[2] component offers many WGSS programs a means to survive and justify their existence in neoliberal universities (Johnson & Luhmann, 2016). University-community engagement can create opportunities to collaborate with feminist and social justice-oriented nonprofit organizations, thereby offering students a deeper understanding of the nonprofit industrial complex,[3] which shapes the politics of funding, governance, and advocacy work (or lack thereof) and the restrictions that these organizations face in relation to being able to mobilize grassroots collective struggles. It can, therefore, nurture an empathetic understanding among students about the work of feminist practitioners and feminist nonprofits that must constantly fight against and negotiate with neoliberal structures in creative ways (Muzak, 2019; Taylor, 2019). The embodied encounters in community engagement initiatives can also help students understand their positionalities and power dynamics in relation to those they work with, providing valuable lessons that can translate into their future professional and activist commitments (Himley, 2004). Nevertheless, Amber Dean (2019) provides a cautionary note that the transformative potential of university-community engagement initiatives can only be achieved when they can avoid fetishizing the marginalized, least privileged "Others" on the receiving end of project outcomes, when they question their inherent biases and conformities

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1 Amanda Swarr and Richa Nagar (2010) note that academic spaces of producing knowledge, such as classrooms, seminars, conferences, workshops, and research sites, should be recognized as collaborative spaces because they create knowledge in cooperation with various academic and non-academic communities. Nevertheless, the academic structure ignores the collaborative mode of knowledge production and nurtures a celebrity culture where individual academicians perform as academic stars. As a result, the notion of the individual knowledge producer creates dichotomies such as "individually/collaboratively produced knowledge, academia/activism, and theory/method" (pp. 1-2).

2 In this article, we adopt Luhmann et. al.'s (2019) definition of praxis that refers to various ways through which social justice programs seek "to integrate a variety of different opportunities for experiential, community-based learning into degree program" (p. 1).

3 Dylan Rodriguez defines nonprofit industrial complex as "the set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political intercourse, including and specially emergent progressive and leftist social movements, since about the mid-1970s" (Rodriguez, 2016).

to neoliberal governmentality[4] and the nonprofit industrial complex, and when they strive to challenge colonial logics and implications within their delivery. Dean also points out that feminist, postcolonial, and Indigenous critiques should be put forward with caution so that they are not appropriated by neoliberal institutions that might use them as an excuse for not doing anything or for promoting collaboration with profit-driven businesses and industries instead of social justice-oriented nonprofit organizations (Dean, 2019).

In most cases, feminist critiques of university-community engagements stem from the experience of feminist community engagement-focused curriculums and practices within institutionalized WGSS programs. Therefore, the existing literature overwhelmingly focuses on WGSS programs and WGSS curriculums and how these programs and curriculums aspire (or do not/cannot aspire) to bridge the gap between theories and praxis through community-based learning (Boyd & Sandell, 2012; Costa & Leong, 2012; Dean et al., 2019; Kwon & Nguyen, 2016). This dominant trend makes sense, given that WGSS programs in North America have a long history of incorporating pedagogical praxis, which follows Paulo Freire in calling for "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire 1970/2000 cited in Luhmann et al. 2019, pp. 1). In Canada, for example, nearly half of the WGSS programs have some form of mandatory or elective internship, practicum, community placement, or co-operative education component (Dean et al., 2019, pp. 1). However, WGSS programs are not the only spaces that can benefit from the transformative potentials of feminist and decolonial community engagement pedagogies and practices, and such engagement does not happen only in WGSS spaces. Our study addresses a significant gap in the existing feminist literature on community engagement by looking beyond the institutional boundaries of WGSS programs and curriculums in the United States. We examine how non-WGSS social-justice-oriented programs—the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Honors Program of Lesley University in this case—can (or cannot) creatively nurture feminist and decolonial praxis. Specifically, we explore how these programs navigate institutional resources and negotiate with neoliberal bureaucracies in service of the long-term goal of using institutionalized university-community engagement to support radical grassroots political organizing.

Demystifying the "We": Conceptualizing Our Positionalities within the Neoliberal University

One of the core contributions of feminist, postcolonial, and Indigenous theorizing of community engagement is a call for working towards demystifying the "we" of any community (Dean, 2019, pp. 34). We acknowledge that it is important to critically investigate how we conceptualize ourselves and the "university" we operate within. Exploring our personal positionalities, privileges, and vulnerabilities before we elaborate on our experiences of collaboration on feminist and decolonial community engagement at a neoliberal university can reveal who we are and how we occupy various complex and contradicting spaces.

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4 Dean uses the phrase "neoliberal governmentality" to describe the ways conventional community engagement practices nurture a sense of individual responsibility and agency among students who are trained to become "model neoliberal citizens" and engage with communities to increase the value of their degrees instead of expressing solidarity with collective struggles of the communities (Dean 2019, p. 24).

Nafisa Tanjeem is an immigrant, Muslim, woman of color and identifies as a transnational teacher-scholar-activist who has lived, studied, worked, taught, and organized in Bangladesh, Canada, and the United States. She passionately incorporates her scholarly research, public scholarships, and community organizing experiences into teaching, university "service," and mentoring minoritized students. Her activist background as an organizer of *United Students Against Sweatshops* and *Service Employees International Union (SEIU)* in the USA, *Council of Agencies Serving South Asians* in Canada, and *Bangladesh Garment Sromik Sanghati* (Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity) and *Meye* (Women) network in Bangladesh inspires her to recognize the power of decolonial and feminist critical community engagement, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, and bridging the gap between the "global" and the "local" in feminist classrooms. Tanjeem is an Associate Professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Worcester State University in Massachusetts, United States. She served as an Assistant Professor of the Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies and the Global Studies programs and as the Assistant Director of the Honors program of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) at Lesley University until June 2022. Her teaching and research interests include transnational, postcolonial, and decolonial feminisms; critical race theory; feminist globalization studies; critical university studies; and transnational social movements with a specific focus on the United States and Bangladesh.

Michael Illuzzi is a first-generation college student whose parents were first- and second-generation immigrants from Italy. He grew up in a middle-class suburb of New Jersey, with the privileges of being white, male, cisgender, and Christian. He is trained in the history of political thought with a focus on American race, class, and gender inequities. He has passionately pursued pedagogical innovations that give students space to learn through hands-on projects and applications to contemporary life, including integrating activist campaign projects, podcasting, and new technology assignments, frequent role playing, adopting "Reacting to the Past" simulations, and teaching about race and gender inequities through the application of the scholarship to popular TV shows in his classes. He currently serves as an Associate Professor of Political Science and as the Director of the CLAS Honors Program of Lesley University.

Michael Illuzzi joined Lesley University in Fall 2012 and Nafisa Tanjeem joined in Fall 2017. We shared an office starting in Fall 2017 for two years. During our overlapping office hours, we used to exchange thoughts on our pedagogical philosophies, practices, and politics. Conversations between a woman of color transnational feminist scholar from the Global South and a U.S.-based white male political theorist were interesting, enriching, and often contentious, but both of us learned a lot through our transdisciplinary and cross-border exchanges. We started co-teaching in Fall 2019 and running the CLAS Honors program of Lesley University in the capacity of the Director and the Assistant Director. We also began to organize with the Lesley University Core Faculty union as stewards, participated in the negotiation of our collective bargaining agreement with the university, hosted a series of social justice events on campus, and mobilized campaigns with faculty, staff, and students to address working and learning conditions on campus on many occasions, most recently COVID-19-induced austerity and budget cuts. Along the way, we—two coworkers and co-organizers with very different scholarly

training and lived experiences—engaged in scholarly, pedagogical, and activist solidarity that eventually turned into a deep sense of what feminist scholars have described as "dissident friendship" (Chowdhury & Philipose, 2016; Gandhi, 2006). We consciously attempted to learn from each other's stories and politics, unlearn our biases and stereotypes about each other, and acknowledge the different power positions we occupied (or did not occupy). Our dissident friendship went beyond our individual interactions and relationships and was built on a transformative vision of nurturing feminist and decolonial solidarity and praxis on campus. It motivated us to continue to organize with our faculty, staff, and student allies to unsettle the structural power of the imperial and neoliberal university within which we were situated. We acknowledge that as part of a unionized core faculty body with relatively secured contracts, we were also actors of the neoliberal university. There is no way to establish ourselves as separate from the imperial university since we reaped the benefits of our affiliation. Yet, we continued to critically reflect on our power, privileges, and positionalities and work within the system and used our privileges to challenge hierarchies and bring structural changes.

Doing Feminist Community Engagement Outside of WGSS Programs

Our desire to push for a critical version of community-engaged learning at Lesley was aimed at countering the curricular shift towards professional skill development and away from teaching students to be "catalysts shaping a more just, humane, and sustainable world," as mentioned in Lesley's mission statement (Lesley University, n.d.). We were both faculty members in what Lesley calls the "Social Sciences Department" and as of Spring 2021, the Political Science major had nineteen, and the Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies minor had ten enrolled students. While our status as core faculty in small programs gave us a great deal of autonomy to create and shape and teach new curriculum, we found the Honors program to be a better fit for pursuing what we called "critical community engagement" initiatives. As the Director and the Assistant Director, we had more control over the policy-making and budget distribution of the Honors program. Moreover, compared to our smaller affiliated programs, Lesley's CLAS Honors program enrolled 151 students from a wide range of majors and minors as of Spring 2021. Therefore, we decided to pursue critical community engagement not as part of our affiliated programs but as part of the Honors first year, sophomore, and senior capstone seminars in a scaffolded framework.

Our experience of implementing feminist principles, practices, and theories within the neoliberal university mirrors larger debates within WGSS programs. In the early 1990s, feminist scholars debated whether the newly emerging field of Women's Studies should be institutionalized as an autonomous unit or whether the focus should be on transforming liberal arts landscapes by integrating feminist perspectives in the wider curriculum (Howe, 1975, pp. 159–160). The historical autonomy/integration debate still persists today alongside questions of whether a department or an interdisciplinary program can transform institutions of higher learning (Froines, 2004, pp. 10–12). This debate can guide us in thinking about how we practice feminist community engagement in North American universities. Does it make the most sense to pursue feminist community engagement solely as part of WGSS programs? Or

is it also productive to design feminist community engagement initiatives outside of WGSS programs, integrating into the broader community engagement or so-called "service-learning" initiatives on campus? The way we pursued feminist community engagement at Lesley University demonstrates that the "autonomy" vs. "integration" debate does not need to be an either/or outcome. Our experience and analysis reveal that feminist scholars and practitioners can pursue autonomous community engagement initiatives in WGSS departments and/or integrate feminist community engagement initiatives in non-WGSS platforms depending on the availability of resources and what works best for individual situations. In our case, the Honors program of Lesley University offered us a much more feasible and effective platform to integrate feminist community engagement in the broader Honors curriculum. Instead of limiting feminist community engagement within the Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies minor of Lesley University, pursuing it as part of the larger Honors program put us in direct conversation with the Office of Community Service, Office of Internships and Field Placement, and other actors and bodies that pursue "service-learning" or "community engagement" on campus. As a result, we were able to push them to think differently and to integrate feminist and decolonial practices to some extent in the ways they designed their programs. Students who took our critical community engagement focused Honors seminars also demonstrated a trend of becoming interested in feminist perspectives and enrolling in Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies courses in the following years.

Framing our ideas for the university's higher administration required some strategy. Our choice of the phrase "critical community engagement" was inspired by Randy Stoecker's (2016) framing of critical service-learning, which he describes as the "the most conscious response to the creeping influence of neoliberalism in institutionalized service learning" (p. 60). We also drew on the literature on critical community service learning (CCSL) that recognizes power, privilege, oppression, and systemic inequities in traditional institutionalized service-learning, incorporates critical pedagogies in the classroom, questions the complicity of the "learning" part

Figure 1. Lesley Honors interacting with Robin Wall Kimmerer – the author of *Braiding Sweetgrass* in 2019

of service-learning with structural oppression, and is shaped by insights from feminist theories (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019). We consciously avoided using the phrase "feminist community engagement" so that the university administration did not limit us within the institutional structure of the resource-deprived Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies minor. Also, the phrase "critical community engagement" instead of "feminist community engagement" offered us the opportunity to reach out to a broader group of Honors students majoring in sciences, humanities, social sciences, psychology, and education programs and did not restrict us to the tiny number of WGSS minors. Even though we did not use the phrase "feminist community

engagement" in our official documents, our pedagogical strategies and curriculum were deeply inspired by feminist and decolonial theorizing of community engagement. We assigned many feminist texts and designed assignments and feminist community engagement strategies to address power, privilege, and positionality while working *with* as opposed to working *for* communities (Froines, 2004, pp. 10–12; Howe, 1975, pp. 159–160; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019; Stoecker, 2016, p. 60).

Our (Failed) Attempt to Navigate the Neoliberal Bureaucracy and Bring University-wide Transformation

Initially, we had broad plans for transforming the way Lesley University ran "service-learning" and incorporating feminist and decolonial perspectives in university-wide community engagement initiatives. We came up with a proposal for instituting a Bonner program[5] that would offer low-income, first-generation college students a pathway to college education and engage them in grassroots community organizing. We also wrote a plan, which faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences unanimously approved, to develop a campus-wide civic action plan that would help various community engagement bodies decolonize service-learning on campus and train students in feminist community mobilizing. After two years of writing proposals, one-pagers for potential donors and trustees, and unsuccessful internal and external grant applications, we realized that trying to make a university-wide transformation in community engagement initiatives was not feasible without meaningful endorsement from the various Presidents, Provosts, Vice Presidents, and other powerful decision-making bodies or in the absence of a strong faculty- or student-led movement. Therefore, we decided to pull back and figure out where we had the power to introduce transformative changes and to start working at a smaller level with the Honors program that we directed together.

Looking back on our work since 2018, it is striking how many institutional nudges *not* to prioritize feminist and decolonial critiques of power, privileges, and inequities we experienced. Social scientists have used the concept of "nudges" in health policy in the U.S. and the U.K. as a way to promote change by embracing a logic comfortable within neoliberal discourse and institutions (Sunstein & Thaler, 2003). A nudge has been described as an approach focusing on:

> 'choice architecture' – the ways in which individuals' behaviors are inescapably nudged in particular directions by their social and physical environment, and how these features of everyday life (such as the layout of food in a supermarket or school canteen) might be harnessed to 'move people in'[different directions]. (Brown, 2012, p. 306)

We were struck by the neoliberal university's efficacy in creating choice architecture that discourages feminist and decolonial praxis. The university was designed like a supermarket

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5 The Bonner program was initiated by the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner foundation in 1990 to create a consortium of diverse, multi-state colleges and universities to "transform students, communities, and campuses through service" (The Corella & Bertram F. Bonner Foundation, n.d.).

funneling all the actors—students, staff, and faculty—down the aisles of programs that could be advertised as leading directly to jobs. The neoliberal university set up incentive systems that nourished and supported practices and curriculum like professionalizing internships and resume padding experiences and discouraged and starved practices and curriculum like sustained activism that aimed to disrupt structures of oppression.

The Beginning of Our Work and Playing with "Institutional Nudges"

Our work of integrating feminist and decolonial community engagement in the Honors program started with designing a unique Honors first-year seminar. We began to look for community partners willing to work with our students and align with our course objectives. The first hidden nudge we found was that the infrastructure at the university was constructed to emphasize "service," "charity," and/or professionalization experiences but not the grassroots political organizing we wanted to support. When we reached out to the Office of Community Service, the coordinator pointed us in the direction of the Internships Office since her office was mostly focused on arranging short-term volunteer projects that could be fit into students' free time as well as events, such as MLK Day of Service and Alternative Spring Break. We discovered that most of the community partnerships the university had forged in the Cambridge area were through the well-established undergraduate Internship Office. As a result, there was no infrastructure to support what we were most interested in—grassroots political activism and organizing. Therefore, in the first year of designing and offering our community engagement-focused Honors seminar, we ended up doing what seemed most feasible: we built upon connections made through the internship programs and collaborated primarily with apolitical service-providing 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations—something that has been criticized by many scholars and practitioners of critical and feminist community engagement (Kwon & Nguyen, 2016; Muzak, 2019; Stoecker, 2016).

Figure 2. Honors Students participating in "Mapping Feminist Cambridge" – a historic tour focused on the feminist movement in Cambridge, MA from the 1970s-1990s, organized by the City of Cambridge in 2019

The other significant nudge that impacted us was the semester model of the neoliberal university and its emphasis on a problematic "hours model" (Stoecker, 2016, pp. 53–54). Both of these timelines made addressing questions of sustainability very challenging. We decided that a four-credit class, instead of a conventional three-credit one, would give us additional time to work with students and give students credit for the additional work that community engagement projects would entail. Unlike some other universities, there was no office that could support community-engaged partnerships as part of the coursework, so the fourth

credit would also potentially provide some compensation to the faculty for the extra work of coordinating the projects. While we were aware of the feminist critique of "learning elsewhere" outside of feminist classrooms and the innovative potentials of student-led classroom-based projects in place of placements arranged by the Internship or the Community Service Offices (Francis, 2019; Srivasta, 2019), we also felt the institutional pressure to quantify and justify the additional credit hour so that it met the NECHE (New England Commission of Higher Education) accreditation standards. All the internship courses had specific hours requirements, and the systems created for supervising those internships included hour logs, so this was the model expected by the curriculum committee, supervisors, and administrators, as well as our community partners who already had experience with the Internship Office.

In the first iteration of the course in Fall 2019, we chose to set a minimum of twenty hours of community engagement and pledged to try to figure out how to move away from the hours model in our next iteration. The relatively small engagement commitment increased our concerns about superficial projects and overburdening supervisors—specifically those at smaller community-based organizations. We feared that by trying to meet bureaucratic requirements, we would reproduce the problem of putting too much focus on the learning and development of student capacities, rather than on increasing the capacity of community groups to effect social change at the individual and collective levels (Stoecker, 2016). Furthermore, the semester model necessitated a relatively short-term commitment that would end with the semester and worked against building a sustainable model of collaboration. While all the students in the class had chosen to enter the CLAS Honors program with its declared focus on critical community engagement, the semester model made it harder to escape the "required" nature of community engagement. Furthermore, with a student body focused on mostly non-WGSS professional majors, we needed to adjust the experience for the students we had, which in some cases diverted us away from our feminist and decolonial goals.

We managed to navigate the institutional nudges in a way that brought about two fortunate changes. First, when the previous coordinator of our Office of Community Service stepped down, we were able to petition for a change in the job description that led to hiring a coordinator with experience facilitating institutional change around decolonial community engagement as well as training and supporting faculty in community-engaged learning. This alteration eventually created a great deal more capacity for faculty support. Second, when the VP of Enrollment was re-assigned, we were able to redesign the Honors application process to target students invested in social justice causes who were passionate about social change. Nevertheless, the constant pressure from the admission authorities to hit the university's enrollment and revenue targets continued to work against a more thoughtful selection process for our program.

Our First Iteration of the Feminist Community Engagement-Focused First-Year Seminar and the Challenges We Faced

The Fall 2019 course was called: "Doing Good or Looking Good: The Ethics and Politics of Community Engagement." Our choice of the phrase "Doing Good or Looking Good" was

inspired by Margot Francis's (2019) critique of the way Canadian imperialist and colonialist projects are shaped by benevolence and an intention to "do good." Dean (2019) utilizes Francis's framing of "doing good" to reflect on how exceptionalist community engagement projects run by academic institutions entail "a colonial and imperialist logic of benevolence" (p. 23). The title also indicated our intention to break free of the colonial and imperial community engagement models and center our work around feminist and decolonial critiques of institutionalized service learning. In the class, our major themes included addressing the political economy of community engagement, exploring intersecting systems of oppression, and investigating the politics of funding and the nonprofit industrial complex. In the first few weeks, we discussed with students the concepts of positionality and reflexivity, and specifically assigned articles written by Stoeker (2016) and Dean (2019) that provided our theoretical grounding for critical, feminist, and decolonial community engagement. We also combined texts incorporating an American anti-racist organizing context with transnational feminist analyses of how the nonprofit industrial complex hurts marginalized communities not just in the United States but around the world and specifically in the Global South. Our academic training in the history and politics of institutionalized racism in the United States, which is Michael Illuzzi's specialization, and transnational social justice movements, which is Nafisa Tanjeem's area of expertise, equipped us to highlight the co-constitutive and co-existing nature of the "local" and the "global" in our classes.

As expected, we encountered some challenges while running this new model for the first time. Our assigned readings and theories taught our students about the criticisms of "service," "charity," and "giving back." Nevertheless, many of our partner organizations were uncritically reproducing these concepts and were bereft of an understanding of how gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality or other differences and power relationships shaped their top-down involvement with various communities. Furthermore, having started the semester with Dean and Stoeker's analyses criticizing the committed hours model, some of our students felt there was no point in the 20-hour requirement. In addition, among some students in the class—primarily white students from middle- or upper-class backgrounds—there was a lack of recognition of privilege and positionality, despite the relevant readings and a series of classroom conversations and assignments. Finally, we realized that the model we had chosen had real drawbacks for BIPOC, working-class, and other minoritized students. Though we had offered free transportation cards for students who requested them, students who needed them did not request them, perhaps because they did not want to stand out or be stigmatized. We had a couple of working-class commuter students who lived far away, so having to come in to do extra community engagement work in the Cambridge area was much more burdensome for them than for students who lived on campus. BIPOC students who had really tight school and work schedules, due to paying their way through college, were disproportionately impacted by the community engagement requirement. Dean (2019) urges us to question the framing of "we" in university-community partnerships and to recognize the dangers of an imagined "shared struggle" (pp. 34–35). Our effort to involve minorized students in feminist community engagement reiterated the futility of assuming a universal "we." Working towards meaningful,

transformative feminist community engagement, we cannot expect students to have certain privileges by default—a factor not often explored in mainstream or feminist community engagement literature.

An Imperfect Transition from "Ethics and Politics" to "Decolonizing"

In our second iteration of the course in Fall 2020, we moved away from the focus on "ethics and politics" and changed the title to "Doing Good or Looking Good: Decolonizing Community Engagement." Based on our experiences and the challenges we faced in our first iteration, we realized that a focus on "ethics and politics"—which we initially adopted to indicate our motto of critical community engagement—is not enough to achieve feminist and decolonial goals of transforming community engagement in neoliberal universities. Our turn towards "decolonizing" was inspired by a feminist and ethnic studies conceptualization of community engagement. Yep and Mitchell (2017) summarize the ethnic studies' decolonizing approach to community engagement as:

> [R]ecognizing education as part of the settler colonial state; centering indigenous knowledges, cosmologies, epistemologies, and methodologies; exploring the intersections of many axes of stratification; and empowering marginalized communities to destabilize technologies of colonialism. (p. 295)

Although we continued to use the phrase "critical community engagement" in the official documents of the Honors program for strategic purposes, in our second (Fall 2020) and third (Fall 2021) iterations of the course, we tried to move beyond just incorporating a critical lens around power, privilege, and oppression to deal with various aspects of gender, race, class, and other identities in the curriculum. We attempted to practice what Santidago-Ortiz (2019) calls "epistemic disobedience," acknowledging that our very own critical community engagement initiatives perpetuated colonial matrices of power. This meant working to decenter Western, Eurocentric production and circulation of knowledge, and bringing about material changes through solidarity building among students and with communities as anti-colonial praxis (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019, pp. 48–51). We do not claim that we were able to decolonize exceptionalist institutionalized service-learning in our community engagement endeavors, but our initiatives demonstrate that decolonizing community engagement is a process and not necessarily a finished product with specific end goals. It involves long, contentious, and frustrating struggles that incessantly challenge the colonialist nature of service-learning in neoliberal universities. Consequently, we aspired to go beyond a metaphorical use of "decolonization" (Tuck & Yang, 2012) in the title of our course by striving to build decolonial praxis between the Office of Community Service, faculty staff, students, and community partners interested in critical aspects of community engagement. Through our collaboration we sought out creative ways of challenging the colonial matrices of power, pedagogy, and epistemology. Our attempts were shaped by anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic, and anti-sexist values and informed by postcolonial, transnational, and decolonial feminist insights.

In our second iteration in Fall 2020, we moved away from collaborating with apolitical service provider 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and partnered with smaller advocacy-based and grassroots activist organizations. Although we could not entirely avoid problematic alliances with the nonprofit industrial complex, we recognized that many of our initial nonprofit partners were operating in a depoliticized landscape and complicit in the neoliberal project of governing "problematic" populations aiming to transform their behavior and activities through services. Our partners for the second iteration included Uprooted and Rising (https://www.uprootedandrising.org)—a food sovereignty movement for ending higher education's support for big food corporations and white supremacy in the food system; New England United for Justice (https://neu4j.org)—a community organization fighting for social, economic, and racial justice in the greater Boston area; Matahari (https://www.solidaritymass.com/matahari-women-s-worker-project)—which works to secure legal rights for domestic workers in Massachusetts; Sunrise Movement (https://www.sunrisemovement.org)—an environmental advocacy organization which describes itself as "the climate revolution"; and Lesley Votes (https://lesley.edu/life-at-lesley/student-activities-support/lesleyvotes-2020)—a Lesley student-led voter campaign. Although these organizations operated within the nonprofit industrial complex, they also diverged from it in creative ways. Sunrise Movement, for example, is registered as a 501(c)(4) instead of 501(c)(3) organization, which allows them to engage actively in political organizing and advocacy, unlike 501(c)(3) organizations that are "absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaigns" by IRS regulations (IRS, n.d.). Uprooted and Rising is a campaign of Real Food Challenge (https://www.realfoodchallenge.org/) that is a "committed group of student activists, national food movement leaders, and higher education sustainability experts" (Real Food Challenge, n.d.). Real Food Challenge is a self-funded, fiscally sponsored project of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit called "Third Sector New England (TSNE) MissionWorks." Since Real Food Challenge itself is not a 501(c)(3) organization, it does not have any restriction on political organizing. Lesley Votes is a student-led voter campaign that started as a project of the Office of Community Service of Lesley University. These creative ways of avoiding restrictions imposed by the 501(c)(3) status enabled these organizations to engage in grassroots anti-capitalist and decolonial organizing. Our collaboration with these organizations supported the possibility of reviving the political mobilization which, as Kwon and Nguyen (2016) argue, gets lost in contemporary university-community engagement.

In our first two iterations, we struggled with how to address the hierarchy between the university and smaller grassroots community partners, including how not to put the burden of training and supervising our students on organizations already overburdened and understaffed. We recruited five students who took previous iterations of our course as course assistants (CAs), who were also able to register in the Fall 2021 class for credit. Each led a project or projects on one of five topics: food justice, educational equity, housing justice, climate justice, or voter engagement and electoral justice. These changes in the third iteration strove to work against the nudges of the neoliberal university. In order to partially address the problematic dynamics of "learning elsewhere" (Luhmann et al., 2019, p. 2) and framing the community

as an underprivileged "Other" (Dean, 2019, p. 29), the CAs worked with students to develop projects that engaged with some part or parts of the Lesley University community. Mostly the student-led groups decided how to work with other undergraduate students within the community who were already mobilizing around different social justice issues. The food justice group, for instance, met, coordinated, and arranged actions with a couple of other groups who were revamping the community garden on campus and working on campus-based food insecurity issues. The education reform group connected with the Urban Scholars Initiative[6] and other campus groups to help create an affinity group to reflect upon how power inequities had affected students' lived experiences and their ability to navigate injustice in educational policies. We departed from the hours model by making the community engagement project-based. We reserved class time five times during the semester for each group to meet, strategize, plan, and act so that commuter students and students holding multiple jobs did not have to spend out-of-class time on their unpaid community engagement projects.

The semester long course also operated as an incubator for increasing student activism on campus. This included encouraging students to collaborate with existing activist groups on campus and working against the limitations of the semester-based model so projects could extend beyond the short span of the semester. The changes helped blur the boundary between classroom and community, transforming the academic space into a community where students turned into community organizers and ran activist campaigns of their choice. CAs, first-year students, and the Community Engagement Coordinator from the Office of Community Service—who helped with coordination and communication between CAs and student groups—became the main actors carrying out and planning the projects within a semi-horizontal space. Nonetheless, students reported that the high level of group autonomy sometimes left them feeling like they were not sufficiently supported and wanting more guidance to create projects as thoughtful and effective as they had desired. Multiple students also mentioned that the course would be better as a two-semester sequence that extended to the spring semester (an option that had been considered but was resisted by the Deans and Provost in the past). We also observed that many of our students from present and past iterations of the course became very active in various activist initiatives on campus. A number of students who took our course joined the leadership of Lesley Housing Justice and Outreach Collective, and others joined the Community Engagement Summer Fellows Program and the Community Leadership Education & Action Program (L.E.A.P), thereby increasing the critical mass of students engaging in social justice organizing on campus.

Conclusion

In a world struck by coronavirus capitalism and deeply impacted by the police killing of George Floyd in May 2020 and local and global protests resisting the continuing police brutality against Black people, neoliberal universities in North America have started to pay renewed attention

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6   Lesley University's Urban Scholars Initiative (USI) assists first-generation and low-income college students through financial, academic, and emotional supports. For more information, please see https://lesley.edu/about/diversity-inclusion/urban-scholars-initiative.

to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. While many university-community engagement initiatives face drastic budget cuts due to the pandemic-induced financial crisis, these initiatives are also being used to showcase university commitments towards achieving social justice in a world that demands more from institutions of higher learning. As a result, faculty and staff committed to critical feminist and decolonial community engagement are expected to do more with fewer resources. Therefore, at this crucial juncture, it is essential to figure out how to resist the tendency of locating racial differences in "diverse bodies" (Hundle, 2019, p. 290)—a popular easy fix for neoliberal universities—and how to work towards decolonization within institutional restrictions that prefer professionalization and resume-building over challenging intersecting systems of oppression. Within the specific context of WGSS, it is even more critical since many WGSS programs are currently under attack because of neoliberal forces within and outside the university system at a time of COVID-induced austerity. Stoecker (2016) points out that the critics of institutionalized service learning offer useful critical analysis but do not provide insights on what to do instead. Some steps involved asking students to reproduce critical reflections and focused on proposing pedagogical practices inside the classroom, but the community engagement itself did not focus enough on social change (Stoecker, 2016, pp. 60–61). Feminist scholars and activists responded to this critique and demonstrated various ways of addressing the social change aspect of community engagement (Dean et al., 2019). This article offers ways to think about expanding feminist pedagogies and feminist community engagement practices beyond the institutional confines of WGSS programs and addressing the challenges and possibilities that arise from attempts to do so. Along the way, we make a case for a wide adoption of feminist community engagement regardless of departmental and disciplinary gatekeeping, which can be instrumental in disrupting exceptionalist imaginaries of institutionalized service learning and transforming hierarchical power relationships between the "university" and the "community."

Subverting the neoliberal university, apolitical community partners, and the nonprofit industrial complex while working within the system is not an easy task. Our experience and analysis demonstrate that the transition from service-learning, to critical community engagement, to feminist and decolonial community engagement, is an imperfect and iterative process. In our case, it involved adopting strategic phrases, such as "critical community engagement" instead of "feminist community engagement," to appease the university's neoliberal governance teams and funders, making use of the existing limited resources, and reaching out to a larger student group beyond the small, resource-strapped Gender, Race, and Sexuality Studies minor as we continued to work towards achieving feminist and decolonial goals. It involved a learning curve and continuous struggles.

Our first iteration of the "Doing Good or Looking Good" seminar incorporated feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial theories and analyses in the curriculum, but we had to work within the confines of the nonprofit industrial complex and a strict hours- and semester-based model. Being able to establish partnerships with nonprofits and teach the class was the most significant achievement of our first iteration, since the course was one of the very few attempts at Lesley that brought meaningful critical and self-reflexive conversations about the institution's

community engagement practices into the classroom. Although we were far from decolonizing community engagement in our first iteration, it paved the way for achieving feminist and decolonial goals in our subsequent iterations. In our second iteration, we used our community partnerships as a space for building solidarity with smaller activist and advocacy-based organizations and engaging our students in grassroots political action. In our third iteration, we implemented a creative collaboration model where student course assistants, who took our class in previous years, worked with current students to determine the extent and nature of their activist campaigns. The Honors program of Lesley University continues to learn from the achievements and failures of various iterations of the "Doing Good or Looking Good" seminar with the long-term goal of developing a scaffolded program that uses community engagement as a political tool for challenging intersecting systems of oppression.

The transformation of our pedagogical choices and community engagement strategies over the last three years signifies the limits of rigid, and often romanticized, binaries between the "university" and "community." Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) problematizes the notion of "community" as characterized by sameness, overlaps, comfort, and familiarity. She does not reject the notion of "community" and identity categories but rather invites us to engage with contradictions and to build political coalitions across differences. She challenges the utopia of unity, yet calls for a more nuanced understanding of belongingness (Anzaldúa, 1987). Inspired by Anzaldúa's framing, we have demonstrated that the homogeneity of the "university" and the "community" cannot be assumed. The neoliberal university is run by powerful, top-down, corporate-capitalist decision-making bodies, yet there are possibilities for nurturing spaces of resistance within the system where faculty, staff, and students can engage in solidarity and dissident friendships. Our work, especially the third iteration of our course, illustrates ways to avoid the tendency of "learning elsewhere" and the framing of the "community" as the unprivileged "Other," as well as to build community within the neoliberal university and to engage students in grassroots political action. Through our work, we also demonstrate how feminist and decolonial community engagement can offer creative avenues to merge the binaries of between theory vs. praxis and academia vs. activism. The neoliberal requirements for teaching, service, and research that puts faculty in siloes, disconnected from each other, can also be reckoned with as a result of our pedagogical, scholarly, and activist overlaps and commitments.

We have yet to decolonize our institution's community engagement practices. It is perhaps impossible to achieve this goal since university-community engagement practices are situated within and surveilled by violent, colonial, and neoliberal institutions of higher learning that have a long history of exploiting Indigenous lands, knowledges, resources, and communities. Nevertheless, our experience and analyses illustrate the challenges that emerge while working towards achieving a decolonial future and the creative ways through which a feminist community engagement initiative within a small liberal arts college can navigate them.

Acknowledgements

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On Being the 'Fat Person': Possibilities and Pitfalls for Fat Activist Engagement in Academic Institutions

Calla Evans, May Friedman

ABSTRACT   This article addresses the possibilities and pitfalls for fat activist engagement in academic institutions through the framework of the 'fat person.' Drawing from Emily Henderson's (2019) 'gender person' in academia framework, we connect our own experiences as fat studies scholars, teachers, and activists with the experiences of other scholars in our field to construct a framework of understanding the role of the fat studies expert, or the 'fat person,' in the academy. The raw material for this article was written over the course of two extended online chat sessions between the authors, which took place during the summer of 2020. Our conversations were seeded by our prior histories as fat people and fat academics, and by our pre-existing collaborations: as supervisor and graduate student, co-researchers, and through teaching together in a fat studies course. Throughout this article we draw on scholars in our field who have explored their experiences as fat academics, fat researchers, fat students, and fat teachers. We argue that this framework is a useful step in furthering understanding of what it means to be positioned as the 'fat person' within an academic institution. We are embedded in the strength of our communal and embodied experiences, and at the same time, we are also aware of the potential ethical challenges of working from a place that is firmly grounded in community knowledge. Our hope is that other scholars, particularly fat studies scholars, will build from the framework we are suggesting here to further understandings of how the 'fat person' is constructed—and resisted—within the academy.

KEYWORDS   Fat studies, the "fat person", epistemological justice, fat phobia, emotional labour, microagressions

This article addresses the possibilities and pitfalls for fat activist engagement in academic institutions through the framework of the 'fat person.' Drawing from Emily Henderson's (2019) 'gender person' in academia framework, we connect our own experiences as fat studies scholars, teachers, and activists with the experiences of other scholars in our field to construct a framework of understanding the role of the fat studies expert, or the 'fat person,' in the academy. We argue that this framework is a useful step in furthering understanding of what it means to be positioned as the 'fat person' within an academic institution, especially at a moment where some social justice struggles are foregrounded while others are sidelined. We are embedded in the strength of our communal and embodied experiences, and at the same time, we are also aware of the potential ethical challenges of working from a place that is firmly

grounded in community knowledge. Our hope is that other scholars, particularly fat studies scholars, will build from the framework we are suggesting here to further understandings of how the 'fat person' is constructed, and resisted, within the academy.

Context and Methods

This article was inspired by Emily Henderson's 2019 article titled "On being the 'gender person' in an academic department: Constructions, configurations and implications" that was published in the *Journal of Gender Studies*. Drawing from Lucy Ferguson's (2015) original framework of the 'gender person' within international development organizations, Henderson applies this framework to understand the messy and often contradictory position of 'gender people' within academia. Henderson's unpacking of the role of the 'gender person', that is a person who researches and/or teaches about gender but who is not working within a gender studies department at their academic institution, mirrors many of the thoughts that we have had about being the 'fat person': that is, a person who publicly engages in fat studies and is known as the go-to fat studies expert within our non-fat studies departments and positions within our academic institution. As we will explore throughout this article, many of Henderson's findings about the contradictory nature of the 'gender person' position can be mapped onto our own experiences as the 'fat person.' Henderson's (2019) key frameworks for understanding the role of the 'gender person' within academia are:

- The 'gender person' is a broker of gender knowledge;
- The 'gender person' participates in and is subjected to the devaluation and simplification of gender knowledge;
- The 'gender person' faces the political question of whether they should do gender work even if it is unpaid or unrecognized; and
- The 'gender person' engages in an ongoing process of compromise and negotiation over the status of gender knowledge. (p. 735)

Many aspects of this framework are deeply familiar to us as singular brokers of scholarly and embodied expertise in varied academic settings. Some of the tensions are borne of being scholars of a field that is still indeterminate and unrecognized; in order to situate ourselves, then, we must first situate the growing field of fat studies.

Fat studies, briefly, is a nascent field built upon a foundation of fat liberation and fat activism (Cooper, 2016; Farrell, 2019; Pausé & Taylor, 2021). Fat studies lives in contrast to academic fields which pathologize fatness and frame fat as an "epidemic" that must be "eradicated," instead focusing on fat as a culturally produced and variable category and experience. One of the key objectives of the field is epistemological justice: a rejection of empirical and positivist orientations in favour of a reframing of who is able to claim knowledge and expertise about the lived fat experience (Cooper, 2016; Stoll & Thoune, 2019). This objective puts those of us who identify as fat studies scholars at an interesting and important juncture: as embodied fat people and fat scholars, what is our role as the 'fat person' in our academic institutions? Does

that academic role operate in service of, or in opposition to, the overall goals of fat activism as a movement and fat studies as a field? Here, we begin by situating ourselves and our own orientations to being "the fat person".

Situating Ourselves

It is impossible for us to do this work without situating ourselves, including our embodied realities. The core of our research is informed by our bodies; at the same time, our bodies sometimes speak more loudly than our research, which requires that we identify both how we see and how we are seen.

I (Calla) am a queer, white, cisgender woman. I am a settler on this land. I have recently returned to academia as a "mature" graduate student after a 15 year-long career as a lifestyle photographer. My experiences in academia and as a photographer are always informed by living in a fat body that is often larger and louder than those around me. It was only upon my return to academia that I began to call myself a fat activist and even then, it was with initial reluctance. I also live in a largely able body and madness weaves its way through many of my experiences in the world.

I (May) am a cisgender, racialized (Arab) woman. My experiences in academia are always informed by living in a fat brown body with immigrant working class origins; my embodiment is also mediated through my experiences of parenting young people while moving through the academic world. I live in a largely able body and have ambiguous relationships to queerness, mental health, and madness. I am a mid-career academic with tenure, which supports my capacity to reach into fat studies in my scholarship and teaching.

The raw material, or data, for this article was written over the course of two extended online chat sessions between the authors, which took place during the summer of 2020. While almost the entirety of our text exchange is included in this article, it has been reorganized for clarity. Our design of this collaboration draws loosely from life writing research methods. Critical approaches to life writing consider the ways that writing texts such as letters, blogs, memoirs, autobiographies, and other artefacts help construct a sense of self (Kadar, 2005). We follow other fat studies scholars who have engaged with similar life writing methods such as Cooper and Murray's (2012) reflection on fat activism, and Burford and Orchard's (2016) email exchange turned dialogic text on issues surrounding fat trans* embodiment and cultural work. Lee and McAvan (2021) position auto-ethnographic methods such as those mentioned above as conscious political acts that directly challenge who speaks for fat people. Our (May and Calla's) conversations were seeded by our prior histories as fat people and fat academics, and by our pre-existing collaborations: as supervisor and graduate student, co-researchers, and through teaching together in a fat studies course. Throughout this article we draw on others in our field who have explored their experiences as fat academics, fat researchers, fat students, and fat teachers.

While we are not the first fat studies scholars to write about the experience of being fat studies academics (Senyonga, 2020), nor are we the first to write about these experiences in dialogue with others (see McPhail et al., 2017), we felt an urgency to consider our specific

orientation to the topic. In particular, we sought to use the lens of our prior relationships and conversations to consider the ways we have experienced this scholarship in spaces that are not explicitly oriented toward fat work. It is our hope that this article draws those experiences together and offers a productive framework for beginning to understand the 'fat person.' We do not intend this concept to be limiting or reductionist but instead aim to open up possibilities for theorizing around what it means to be fat studies scholars and activists and how those positions operate within academic institutions. Our intentions are especially important as there is currently no academic "home" for fat studies and those of us who practice in this field are spread across various disciplines and institutions.

In Dialogue

We found many points of resonance as well as differences in our shared experiences as fat studies scholars as well as simply as academics in fat bodies across a range of intersections and experiences. Here, we consider our orientation to being the "fat person" across several axes: as members and activists in our fat communities, as scholars, and as teachers. We decided that dialogue best allowed us to explore these consonances and bifurcations and to view the truths that emerged in the in-between space of our experiences. We offer our conversation here in hopes of initiating further dialogue between us and with others to bolster and challenge fat research and activist spaces.

On Activism

Calla: Do you consider yourself an activist? Do you consider your scholarly work to be activism?

May: I do. I talk to my students about the "big broad tent of activism" (Ross, 2017) and how we need to have a range of strategies and tactics. And I always say that we're better off if we use tactics that we love. My primary tools right now are parenting, teaching, and writing; and I do see these as activist spaces, albeit imperfect ones.

Obviously, academia is far from an innocent space—though I'd argue there are no innocent spaces.

Calla: I have two questions/thoughts: 1) Do you sometimes feel that you have less credibility in fat studies by not necessarily coming from an activist background first? and 2) do you feel a part of a broader fat activist community?

May: That's interesting.

There's a certain kind of activism that feels very... raced and classed to me... that I've always been an uneasy participant in, even before kids took over my life. While I have considered myself an activist for a long time (albeit not necessarily a fat activist till more recently), I also want to interrogate what we mean by activism.

I think that the work I do to change attitudes in a range of settings is activist work. It's me using the privilege and gross coloniality of my academic position to interrogate taken-for-granted knowledge and potential to make change—that's activism to me.

Calla: Yes, I agree 100%. In many ways I've felt a pressure to be more public about my fat activism since coming into this work, but for me, amplifying other voices in academic contexts, like Ash and the infinifat project [Calla's MA research project which focused on those at the largest end of the fat spectrum] feels... more productive.

May: Well again big broad tent. I am too shy to be a "traditional" activist.

Calla: I do find myself seeking out fat friends and fat community more now though. I think about [Charlotte] Cooper's concept of micro-fat-activism and consider how I shape my community and friend groups as a type of micro-activism.

We are not the only fat studies scholars who found their fat activist voices through engagement with fat studies academic literature and scholarly work, nor are we the only ones to consider their teaching and academic practices as fat activism. Indeed, for many fat scholars, particularly those who are engaged in social justice aligned work, once they discover the field of fat studies it can be impossible to ignore the importance of such work. Stoll and Thoune (2020) describe their own experience as:

> The further down the proverbial rabbit hole we went, the more convinced we were that we could no longer do research on social inequalities while ignoring the salience of fatphobia, and we could no longer engage in social justice activism that did not also include fat bodies because, to be clear, fat is a social justice issue, too. (para. 2)

However, there are several factors that complicate the conceptualization of fat studies-aligned academic work *as* fat activism, some of which we mention in our exchange above. According to Cooper (2016) one of the main objectives of fat activism, particularly as it intersects with and manifests in the academy, is a reframing of who is able to claim knowledge and expertise about the lived fat experience. Historically, knowledge around fatness has been constructed by "obesity" experts and that knowledge was and continues to be weaponized against fat people. Fat activism, and the field of fat studies, positions the fat person as the knowledge expert at the center of a new fat epistemology. Yet there remains the looming question of whether or not this reframing or recentering of fat knowledge is even possible within neoliberal, colonial institutions such as universities and other academic spaces? Which fat bodies assume primacy, and which stories are subsumed? While on the surface there is the appearance of possibilities for change (the increase in demand for our fat studies course, for example) many fat activists would challenge our view of teaching *as* activism as they consider academic spaces with well-

justified suspicion or even rejection (Read, 2021). We see our academic practices as integral to our fat activism because we are, in many ways, non-traditional academics and we approach our academic practices differently than others in the academy. Specifically: people like us did not used to be here, and so the presence of our intersectional fat bodies in academic spaces does feel radical. Yet it can often feel as though the activist potential of our positions within the academy is limited through the historical structures that underpin universities such as ours. In other words: we want to honour the work we are doing as important but also be clear-sighted about its very real limitations.

May: What would the world look like if we were less obliged and apologetic? If we just assumed people need to do their OWN work on confronting fat stigma instead of being so grateful for anyone who will listen? Because I feel like I'm starting with "I'm sorry" so much of the time, which is not how I feel about race, for example.

Calla: I think this loops back to what we saw in class earlier this year. I'm hopeful that with the current climate of "body positivity" and other conversations maybe we will be able to be less apologetic soon.

I also think back to our first meeting and how much I stumbled over even using the word fat and THANK YOU for being kind and patient with me but also telling me to just use the damn word.

May: I don't feel like we've arrived at a point where we're allowed to be indignant. But maybe that's because I don't do the same kind of activism as other, more indignant fat folks.

Calla: Yes, but I wonder who gets to be indignant and who doesn't and does that really shift? I am becoming more and more aware of how my ability to perform as the "good" grad student means that I'm able to push the fat studies agenda. But what would happen if I wasn't doing everything as prescribed? Yet this feels like the only way I know how to do this? I "can" be the good grad student and therefore talk about fat work in more spaces and hopefully that opens the door for more grad students to come and do this but maybe I am just playing the good fatty.

May: Yup. I am deeply, deeply obedient in many areas so I can be disruptive here (within certain constraints). Which may answer the activism question again: that we are using our own tools and tactics and doing our best to make them effective within our own constraints and limitations. But when does speaking from the middle open space for the margins and when does it foreclose that space? We will never be able to answer that—all we can do is keep asking.

If I think I know the answer, I am the problem.

Our experiences both inside and outside of the academy as described in the exchange at the opening of this section connect with Henderson's (2019) first gender person framework: "The 'gender person' is a broker of gender knowledge" (p. 732). We both describe experiences where we have been approached as brokers of fat knowledge and fat activism because of our positioning as the 'fat person' or fat expert. Sometimes we are approached formally (we have been invited countless times, together and separately, to speak about fat studies and fat activism within our university) and other times informally, as May discusses below. Yet being the broker of fat knowledge in both personal and formal settings comes with unique sets of limitations that are important to acknowledge:

Calla: Do you find that people seek you out now? Both academically and activism-wise? Or, I should say, both within the academy and outside?

May: Yes to both? I'm the go to person for fat talk in a weird way. I'm on a zillion PhD committees because so few of us do this work (and maybe also because this is another way to perform "good academic" so I can gain "permission" to study something counter cultural).

And any mom of a fat kid, or person who is finally confronting their eating disorder or teacher who realizes that fat talk has colonized their classroom I'm the person now. Sometimes I love that and sometimes I feel like the Mammy for everyone's BS.

Calla: YES.

May: But I also feel this obligation—when a parent emails me and asks how to support their fat kid—I am tired at the thought of replying but also feel a deep sense of responsibility to help that person make different choices.

Calla: On a personal level, being brokers of fat knowledge can be viewed as a fulfilling part of our fat activism practice. I actively engage in a public fat activism practice on social media and experience personal satisfaction when friends or others tell me that they have been inspired by my work, either by questioning their own anti-fat bias or engaging in fat activism themselves. Yet my own fat activism and the fat communities I engage with on a daily basis will always be informed and, therefore limited, by my own positionality and positions of privilege. I sometimes shy away from amplifying fat activist voices that refuse to fit the narrow confines of what an "acceptable" or palatable fat activist practice looks like, particularly on limited and limiting spaces such as social media platforms. These "less acceptable" voices represent important and often ignored aspects of fat knowledge. Neither myself and my experience as a fat person, nor the activist communities that I engage with and their experiences, should be held up as wholly representative of fat activism and the possibilities fat activism offers us.

There are similar limitations operating on the 'fat person' as fat knowledge broker within academic institutional contexts. As mentioned above, we have been invited to give presentations

and talks about fat studies, fat issues, weight stigma, and fat activism in a variety of academic settings. These opportunities offer the possibility of critical conversations that work towards many fat activist goals: challenging anti-fat biases, encouraging fat acceptance in the classroom, engaging with fat epistemologies, etc. However, we are mindful that these seemingly progressive events often put us, as the 'fat persons', in the position of having to convince our audience of the validity of our arguments in the face of pervasive anti-fat and fat-phobic attitudes. Similar to our experience in the classroom, we often rely on kid gloves to navigate these hostile receptions, reducing our fat knowledge down to the most palatable chunks and leaving behind community-based knowledge, which may be viewed as too radical or oppositional. This reduction does a disservice to our contention that our teaching and academic practices can be activism: when we elevate only the most acceptable forms of fat activism it is at the expense of the individuals who are most in need of fat liberation. At the same time, in our experience, fatness and body size are often left out of or given only cursory attention in many institutional conversations around equity, diversity, and inclusion (colloquially known as EDI), which leaves both of us understandably dubious of any meaningful attention towards the oppression of fat people within the academy in general and our institution specifically.

Leaving fat studies outside of institutional conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion is deeply troubling. When we give talks or teach, we find that the impact of weight stigma has an enormous effect on fat people; side-stepping fat results in enormous self-regulation, eating distress, and health anxiety for people of all sizes. In the intersections, these impacts are more dire: we argue that to sidestep analyses of weight and the "obesity epidemic" in conversations about white supremacy, colonization, and capitalism is to miss the very real connections between these oppressive institutions and their impacts on all of us (Harrison, 2021; Strings, 2019). We find ourselves increasingly insisting that conversations about anti-Black racism, anti-Indigeneity, ableism and other indignities attend to connections between and experiences with fat hatred. Yet all of this work is exhausting to both body and mind.

The position of the 'fat person' as fat knowledge broker is also, in many ways, an unsustainable one. As May mentioned above, she is "the go to person for fat talk" and serves on a large number of PhD committees "because so few of us do this work." The pressures of being one of a seemingly few people engaging in the work of fat activism come from many angles. As body positivity and other fat positive aligned social movements gain popularity, more members from our personal communities feel they can approach us as knowledge brokers, increasing our emotional labour (Friedman & Poole, 2016; Graham, 2013). Within our academic institution the same increase in opportunities for engagement exist, as evidenced by the increasing number of speaking engagements for May and myself, however there seems to be little support for hiring or attracting more than the current number of 'fat people.' This lack of support is similar to Henderson's findings around the 'gender person' and their institution's apparent satisfaction at checking the diversity box with no or little meaningful engagement with increasing opportunities for others in the field. While we are far from alone as the only 'fat people' at our academic institution, we are still few, and those who also engage in fat-studies-oriented work are spread across different departments feeding feelings of loneliness as well as resulting in us, as

fat people, being spread ironically thin. Without meaningful institutional support, the position of the 'fat person' can be unsustainable. Finally, our role as public intellectuals may reify the same type of ivory tower elitism that we seek to dismantle—the "master's tools" of academia may be too blunt for the type of radical social change that we seek.

On Being 'Fat Scholars'

Calla: I want to start by considering our different orientations—me as a grad student and you as an established researcher—and asking about how your fat-focused work has been received at our institution. Or in institutions more generally, not just ours.

Do you find it challenging to communicate the value of this work to funders/partners? Especially as it pushes back against dominant views which pathologize fatness?

May: Yes to all of it.

Quite honestly, I don't think I would have become a fat scholar before I had this job [tenured professor in the School of Social Work], and if I had to do this work in a more visible way. It's so clearly swimming upstream, at least in social work. But when I was early into my tenure-track job, I decided that the gap in knowledge between fat studies and social work needed to be filled, and that I was the fool that was going to fill it.

Then, and now, I've been less invested in grants than publications—I like to write and I do a lot of discourse analysis which is financially a pretty unconstrained method, so I just ran with it. But I did run into roadblocks in terms of publications and certainly in terms of institutional respect.

These are porous fields that threaten established identity scholarship and there are complaints and critiques lobbed from both directions ... conservatives think we're trying to justify ill health and progressive folks who are otherwise allies often think we're trying to side step analyses of race.

Calla: And if we look at the history of fat studies that critique from the left certainly lands.

May: Absolutely! But that's also why I want to do it—because I think fat studies has an obligation to meet that critique, not to vanish. I don't buy that thinking about fat occludes thinking about race—as Strings (2019) shows, they're entangled and a strong analysis of Indigeneity and colonization that ignores the impact of size policing and healthism is missing an important piece as well (Robinson, 2020). I want to thicken fat studies (Friedman et al., 2020), not erase it.

At the same time that we are considering the ways that we want to radicalize our academic and activist practices, we're also mindful of the constraints under which we perform, the ways that

we are still "making nice" in order to function within the constraints of both the institution and the broader politic:

> **May:** I'm mindful that it's impossible to please everyone, but sometimes it feels like doing fat studies work makes it impossible to please anyone, that we're always reacting and defending. At the same time—isn't the whole academic pursuit about putting on intellectual spanx? About contorting ourselves to be what funders/supervisors/colleagues/journals need us to be? And then letting the bulges show once we're in? But then—that's the problem with "passing." If some of us pass, we actually strengthen the gate against folks who don't.

> **Calla:** I think that's an important consideration as well, about strengthening the gate, when we think about being invited in as the "fat expert."

> **May:** So the question is always: when is it fair for me to play the game in order to put important knowledge into the world, and when am I complicit with upholding systems of normativity by trying to just fit within existing systems?

> And the answer, of course, is that we're always doing both—if we're working within academia (the canonical example of the master's tools) then we're always complicit. And yet—I still think we're doing something radical and important, somehow.

The ongoing struggle to advocate for the legitimacy of fat work and academic work aligned with the goals of fat studies has been addressed by many scholars in our field. Taking off those spanx and "coming out" publicly as a fat studies scholar is a particularly fraught position due to systematically entrenched, pervasive, and ever-present fatphobia both inside and outside the academy. In the field of fat studies, the act of "coming out" as fat or reclaiming one's fat identity is often framed as a transformational practice of reclamation and resistance that can serve as a "first step" into fat activism (LeBesco, 2004; Murray, 2005). According to Murray (2005), however, the transformational process is one of ongoing negotiation that can be fraught with risk. As she states:

> Fat politics talks about the fat body in terms of its possibility for resistance and the political implications of changing one's attitude. But even for the activist, this moment of resistance is an ongoing internal conflict rather than a moment of discursive rupture. (Murray, 2005, p. 159)

Murray is focused primarily on the ways in which "coming out" as fat, as constructed by many mainstream fat activist movements, leave little room for ambiguity or diversity of fat experiences. As such, it reinforces the very dominant narratives and expectations it proposes to resist, so we can extend her line of thinking to the often fraught process of "coming out" as

the "fat person." Doing fat work is profoundly counter-cultural, which makes us vulnerable, perhaps especially if we aim to do intersectional and accountable research. Our advocacy for a deeply intersectional approach may thus be motived by two competing desires: first, a need to understand fat in all its complex manifestations, and second, a desire to somehow legitimize the need for fat equality by acknowledging the ways fat life is tangled into other more "legitimate" justice fights such as anti-racist activism and scholarship.

Laurie Stoll and Darci Thoune (2020) discuss the public reaction to their fat studies scholarship in their *Inside Higher Ed* article titled "Building a Bridge to Hate? When Fat Studies Goes Public." Reflecting on the negative public attention their work has received, particularly in right-wing online spaces from which they have received death threats, Stoll and Thoune state that they often feel reluctant to discuss the harassment they receive due to the emotional toll it takes to publicly present themselves and their work, once again, for scrutiny. Indeed, a quick perusal of the comment section of their article overwhelmingly evidences their argument, to an almost comical degree. However, similarly to May's reflection above, both Stoll and Thoune state that they feel they cannot *not* do this work. They recognize the privileged positions they occupy in the "coming out" process as tenured faculty members and view this privilege as imbued with responsibility, especially since they also recognize that this privilege is not often afforded to precariously positioned graduate students. Bobbi Reidinger (2020) exemplifies the vulnerability of junior academics in her *Inside Higher Ed* article, "The Elephant in the Room: A Fat Woman in Academe." Reidinger reflects on her personal strategies to negotiate weight stigma and anti-fat bias within her academic institution; strategies which mainly focus on methods with which to establish her scholarly competency and naming the 'elephant in the room' by coming out as fat to her academic audiences. Reidinger reports her strategies have been "generally successful" and Calla, as a graduate student, has also found relative success with the strategies she employs to navigate similar challenges. However, Calla remains aware of what can be lost through employing such strategies, as she reflects below.

On Being a 'Fat Studies Grad Student': Calla.
Reidinger's (2020) experience of being acutely aware of how her fat studies work and herself as a fat scholar are perceived in the academy closely mirrors my own. At a later point in my conversation with May, I reflect on fat studies scholar Charlotte Cooper (2016) and her experience with securing funding for her PhD based on a proposal that more closely aligned with expected fat-discrimination scholarship. Once she secured her funding she was able to design and complete an arguably more radical research project that built on her experience as a fat activist and tapped into the vast knowledge of her fat activism communities. To quote from May above, she put on her "academic spanx" in order to rearrange herself and her work, making it more palatable to conventional academic funders. As a graduate student who has publicly "outed" myself as a fat studies scholar, I struggle with reconciling two very disparate aspects of my experience. While I am often afforded valuable opportunities such as lecturer and consulting positions as the 'fat person' within my institution, an institution which espouses their commitment to diversity and inclusion and within which I have been able to carefully

cultivate an accepting and validating academic bubble, I face numerous challenges in securing funding and support for my work outside of my academic home. I often wish I could put the (fat) genie back in the bottle, so to speak, and I feel an ever-present pressure to position myself as something other than the 'fat person.' At the same time, as a literal fat person in the world and as a fat activist, it is impossible for me to divorce myself from my desire to contribute, loudly and often, to the field of fat studies.

Fat Scholarship

In this way we can connect the experiences described above (both our own and those of other scholars) to two specific aspects of Henderson's (2019) 'gender person' framework:

> The 'gender person' participates in and is subjected to the devaluation and simplification of gender knowledge.
> The 'gender person' faces the political question of whether they should do gender work even if it is unpaid or unrecognized (p. 732).

While Henderson discusses the devaluation of knowledge and lack of recognition that the 'gender person' experiences within their academic institutions, something which we reflect on in our exchange above, we would like to suggest that the 'fat person' faces additional risk in navigating their position and the reception of their scholarly work. Fat studies work is still not well established and holds positions contrary to all the positivist trends that guide funding and publishing decisions; we are also suspicious of the ways that the roots of fat activism in Black feminist thought (Strings, 2019) may also contribute to this scholarship being particularly maligned or undervalued. This is not to say that the 'gender person' may not also face similarly hostile and abusive receptions of their work as Stoll and Thoune (2020) reflect above. Key to Henderson's understanding of the 'gender person' in academia is the tension between an institution which on the surface espouses the value of "gender work" and yet does not meaningfully engage with or support this work, nor the person doing it. However, it is important to acknowledge that the additional risk taken by the countercultural position of fat studies work can result in scholars concealing such work until they are in a position of relative privilege, such as tenure, and can discourage graduate students and emerging scholars from engaging in fat studies or from publicly "outing" themselves as a scholar who does this work. Reflecting on May's comment about how our techniques for "passing" within the academy can often strengthen the gate, we can see how even coming out as the 'fat person' within an academic institution can reinforce the very narrow boundaries around who is a respectable fat person and who is not, ideas which we explore further in relation to fat activism, below.

Fat academics, whether their work aligns with fat studies or not, face discrimination and discreditation within academic institutions (and these vulnerabilities only become more acute at the intersections of race and other maligned identities—see Senyonga, 2017). According to Reidinger (2020), "they become perceived as an insincere communicator and therefore less credible" (para. 8). Kelsey Ioannoni (2020) employs Gailey's concept of the hyper(in)visible fat

woman when reflecting on her own experience as a fat academic researching experiences of fat-based discrimination in health care spaces. While Ioannoni's fatness extends and strengthens her credibility towards the fat participants she is working with in her project, oftentimes her fat body serves to discredit her work when it is received by health care professionals. Natalie Ingraham and Natalie Boero (2020) reflect on similar experiences in both gathering data in locations hostile to fat bodies as well as presenting that research in similarly hostile environments. As with Ioannoni, Ingraham and Boero recognize the embodied value their fatness holds when working with fat participants while simultaneously reflecting on the "thick skins" they have had to develop in order to push ahead with their work in the face of personal and academic attacks. Christina Fisanick (2007) posits that fatness serves to intensify and amplify the gender-based discrimination faced by female academics and as a result, fat women academics feel the need to overperform when compared to their thin counterparts. Elena Andrea Escalera (2009) found that students experience an increased level of anxiety when faced with a fat professor in the classroom and as such, fat teachers may espouse mainstream rhetorics around fatness to mitigate student stress and increase the likelihood of students perceiving them as credible instructors. All of these findings resonate for us in our experiences in the classroom, especially in context of an undergraduate fat studies elective which we co-taught in winter 2020.

On Being 'Fat Teachers'

Following our experiences as research collaborators and as supervisor and graduate student, we had the opportunity in winter 2020 to work together teaching a fat studies elective course. May had taught the course once before and was excited by Calla's contributions to developing the class, which reached the maximum capacity for enrollment with fifty students. While we thought we had some sense of what to expect, we were continuously surprised by the reactions of students and the deep emotional pitch that the class kept reaching. We also noted the increasing number of graduate students contacting May for potential supervision.

Calla: It was incredibly heartening to see how many students enrolled in the fat studies class this past Winter term.

May: And how few of them were the students we maybe think are going to be in a fat studies class—so many of them had what I would consider normatively sized bodies.

Calla: I think that's tied to the rise in visibility and awareness of mainstream body positivity movements (BOPO), but I'm okay with that if we can just get their butts in seats (more about seats in a second!) and introduce a more critical framework to their understanding of fatness.

We opened the class by asking students about their relationship to fat:

Figure 1. Word cloud from the first week of our fat studies undergraduate course.

May: I found that both heartening and heartbreaking—that so, so many of them are fighting with their bodies or have harrowing stories of fat stigma being deployed against them or the people they love.

Calla: I've often thought about the tension between the students bringing those experiences into the classroom (and needing the space to work through them) and my desire, as a fat person with lived experience of fat discrimination, to want to push things further, faster.

May: So body positivity is interesting—again, how co-opted and commodified does something need to be before we decide it's too corrupt to be of use? I don't know the answer—some days I feel like BOPO is like PrideTM—total rainbow consumerism with no substance—but I also do feel like the proliferation of rainbows has made the world safer for (some) queer folks and I think that BOPO gets some folks in the door. But who does it leave in the gutter?

Calla: How can we ensure that the class is critical and academically rigorous (re: "valuable") but also supports these very real experiences? I feel like the rise in BOPO means people think they understand my work, when really, they are applying a very thin, weak proxy to my work.

May: There's also the tension between not wanting this to be therapy but also teaching in a space that is so silenced in mainstream thought that students are confronted with something that many have never had space to discuss, or even think about until now.

Lotta tears in fat class.

We seek to acknowledge the labour that comes from making space for students to engage with hard ideas. Patti Lou Watkins, Amy E. Farrell, and Andrea Doyle Hugmeyer (2012) explore the ways in which fat studies teachers navigate these and other challenges, particularly when structuring their fat studies courses within a variety of institutional homes. May names the ways that being a safe fat supervisor may result in increased academic and emotional labour; similarly, in the classroom, both Calla and May grappled with how to safely support students through the perils of their own internalized and external experiences of fat phobia:

May: I once had a student come up to me bawling—not in our class—and say "I have been informed about how to deal with racism—to acknowledge myself as a Black woman my whole life—but I've NEVER been allowed to consider the ways that my weight has led to oppression."

Calla: That's a really powerful statement. And I think it speaks to how pervasive and internalized fatphobia and anti-fat bias is. In many ways it feels permissible to discriminate against fat people openly, even when you are hating on yourself. This was especially evident when we asked them what they'd change if they weren't worried about their body's size and shape:

What would you do differently if you believed that your decisions would have no effect on your size?

Figure 2. Word cloud from the second week of our fat studies undergraduate course

May: Oh hell yeah. It's an internalized garbage fire.
Every time I think I understand how powerful fatphobia is in taking people's attention and forcing them to self-regulate, I am surprised again.
Like—I think I get it and it's ALWAYS more than I think.

Calla: What was the most surprising thing for you with the final assignments in our class? Or heartening?

May: I felt really proud that we had created space for folks to confront this in themselves. Especially since all students were in either social work or a related human service field—their confrontation may lead to different practices both privately and professionally.

I was also heartbroken because the level of suffering was so much greater and more pervasive than I could ever have imagined. And it all becoming disembodied by Covid made it even harder—I just wanted to hug them all very much.

In the midst of this distress and high emotional pitch, we wanted to honour student truths but also grappled with our own roles as educators and purported experts at the front of the class. As touched on in the prior discussion of the fat researcher position, the fat teacher is often faced with unique fat-based discriminations when they stand in front of a classroom. They receive worse student evaluations than their thin counterparts (Reidinger, 2020), experience fat-oriented microaggressions from colleagues (Hunt & Rhodes, 2018) and have similar challenges as fat students when accessing physically constraining academic spaces such as desks and chairs (Brown, 2018; Hetrick & Attig, 2009). These challenges are compounded for researchers living with other intersections, as Senyonga (2017) articulates in considering the experiences of fat Black and queer academics. We are viscerally aware of these hostilities, so to frame ourselves as not only fat scholars, but also fat studies scholars, was simultaneously exhilarating and terrifying.

Calla: How does this connect with our experiences being brought in as "experts."
What are the things that are really obviously missing from that conversation? On the one hand, it benefits me greatly as a grad student to have these opportunities but they often feel shallow.

I have to admit, I feel sometimes like a bit of a zoo animal, brought in for the sensationalism of "fat" work. I am far more conscious of how my fat body is read at the front of the classroom in those settings.

May: Yup! I think there's a sense that this can be done in a pat way—like thinking about racism for white folks.

Calla: And that you and I are both "acceptable" fat people, right?

May: For sure. It's hard because there is always so much unacknowledged pain in the room. If they acknowledge fat is OK, their own practices become suspect in terms of how they treat others or do their professional work, but also in how they live their own lives in their own bodies, so this is very dangerous work for people to accept.

So yes, we're the friendly, small enough, white (or white-passing) enough fatties that they can nod at, but...

Calla: I feel like we often have to start at a different point when talking in those spaces as opposed to with students, in some cases the traditional power dynamics in the student/teacher relationship work to our advantage in these situations.

May: For sure. Established scholars may understand our compassion as patronizing.

Calla: I feel that in those spaces, the "expert" spaces, we need to do more work to humanize fat people, which is extra painful as a fat person our/myself.

According to Watkins and colleagues (2012), fat studies syllabi are often structured in a way that anticipates and attempts to compensate for the expected negative reception of fat-positive materials which challenge dominant narratives of fatness as unhealthy, fat people as lazy, etc. These anticipatory techniques connect directly to the fourth aspect of Henderson's (2019) 'gender person' framework: "the 'gender person' engages in an ongoing process of compromise and negotiation over the status of gender knowledge" (p. 732). Fat teachers, particularly those who teach fat studies aligned courses, are constantly engaged in this process of negotiation and compromise around their knowledge of fatness and then tension between wanting to amplify fat knowledge while being acutely aware of how their fat bodies undermine the credibility of said knowledge in academic contexts. As a result, such faculty lean into legitimacy in other respects—overperforming or being exceedingly flexible with students, for example, in order to smooth the bulges of fat existence.

This process of compromise and negotiation is reflected in the conversation above. While we experienced joy and, arguably, relief in the quality and level of critical thinking demonstrated by our fat studies students at the end of the course, many of our conversations prior to the start of class surrounded troubleshooting ways to negotiate the anticipated challenges to the seemingly radical ideas that underpin the field of fat studies. At a later point in our conversation, we asked:

> **Calla:** What do you think they [students in our fat studies class] struggled with the most in terms of frameworks of understanding? Where is there the most work left to be done?
>
> **May:** 1) they are still absolutely convinced that fat will kill you. And I get it—many days I have a hard time shaking that understanding myself, it's so pervasive.
> 2) they are still not convinced (some of them, I should say) that this is intersectional and omnipresent, that it's entangled with all of the other shit and oppression and garbage that is all around us. So fat liberation stays personal/private while other fights are not.

In many ways, the process of compromise and negotiation feels particularly urgent because of how fat bodies, especially when teaching fat pedagogy, are received in the classroom. In their 2017 article, "Exposed social flesh: Toward an embodied fat pedagogy," Deborah McPhail, Jennifer Brady, and Jacqui Gingras discuss the "corporeal risks" fat teachers face and reflect on their own embodied experiences navigating these risks as teachers at their respective institutions. According to McPhail et al. (2017), it is necessary to consider a "theory of fat pedagogy that truly incorporates fat in all of its embodiedness" and that addresses "the ways in which the body constitutes and is constituted by the teaching and learning of critical weight and fat studies" (p. 18). Similar to McPhail et al., May and Calla reflect on how many of our methods of negotiating the risks that come with being a fat teacher teaching a fat studies course operate in service of the "good fatty"/"bad fatty" dichotomy (Bias, 2016). As May states:

> **May:** How important was it that we were nice nice profs who were so flexible and compassionate while teaching about something hard to swallow?
>
> **Calla:** YES!
>
> **May:** If we were righteous or "difficult" would that class have been as transformative? What do we gain by making fat studies palatable? What do we lose? "Spoonful of sugar", indeed.

Our students are often already dubious of many of the claims we are making in our fat studies classes. Not only are fat scholars and teachers considered less credible than their thin counterparts in general (Reidinger, 2020), a fat teacher espousing lessons such as the ones May mentioned above (fat won't kill you; fat flesh isn't related to specific habits; fat oppression is intersectional) are often seen as untrustworthy and self-serving. Our attempt to make fat studies more "palatable," by being the kind and compassionate "good fatty" may protect us individually and personally from the emotional toll of confronting fatphobia and anti-fat bias directly in the classroom but does it do our students any favours? While they may find the May-and-Calla flavour of fat easy to digest, what happens when they confront those who are less able, or less willing, to perform the good fatty dance? McPhail et al. grapple with a similar tension. As Deborah McPhail states in her personal reflection after choosing not to confront her students who laughed at a video of a fat person of colour but do not laugh at her:

> While I think that this type of honesty in the classroom might really be at the heart of truly unlearning fatphobia, which rests on racism and classism in particular, I don't know if I can afford the many hours of therapy that I would require after that discussion. I don't know if I could ever bring my body into that great a focus. (McPhail et al., 2017, p. 23)

And yet, while there is embodied riskiness in being a fat teacher, there are also exciting possibilities for disruption. As May reflects at a later point in our conversation:

> **May:** I have a lot of internalized shame about not being the type of person who is usually a prof—as a side note: when I was hired, I had to get headshots and it was a terrifying experience for a wide range of reasons, but in no small part because I realized that I don't think profs should look like me—something in the intersection of race and fat makes me want to hide from the lens.
>
> So if I'm a weird choice to be here, then I'm going to use this platform to try to disrupt. Like—lean into the imposter syndrome and ask hard questions.
>
> **Calla:** As an older graduate student, who returned to academia at the midpoint in my non-academic career, I have felt similarly: while I may not be the "typical" graduate student, and I experience all of the accompanying imposter syndrome symptoms, I simultaneously feel as though I have less to lose than many of my younger colleagues and am therefore am in a more stable position to ask the "hard questions" and take greater academic risks.

Just as it may feel risky to teach openly as the 'fat person' it can also feel equally risky not to. There is a materiality to fatness, felt more acutely by some fat bodies than others, that is, at times, impossible to divorce oneself from. This is similar to, yet also different from, Henderson's 'gender person.' As Clare Hemmings (2011, as cited in Henderson, 2019) states in relation to gender studies, "gender tends to (re)attach to women whether we like it or not" (p. 733). As Calla considers:

> While there is no hard or fast rule that the 'fat person' is a fat person, and there are many prominent fat studies scholars doing necessary work who would not be considered fat, would a fat teacher, teaching a fat studies or critical weight-focused course, be taken more seriously if they ignored their fat body? I would argue, probably not. As a fat teacher, I must address the ways in which my fat body is received by my students, particularly when I am teaching fat studies aligned concepts and materials. My fat body, and my comfort with discussing its experiences and reception in the world, presents an opportunity to confront fatphobia and anti-fat bias in the classroom that I cannot ignore, despite the risks. For me, this connects directly with my fat activism practice. For others, however, this teaching/activism connection is more complicated.

Conclusions: What Could We Do Instead?
Calla: In some situations I am okay with the role of knowledge broker, especially as my friends and family, broadly defined, grow and learn, but at conferences and other academic situations it can feel especially tokenizing and exhausting. But what could we do instead?

May: Well… if I'm being perfectly honest, I just want to bake for everyone and use a lot of butter.

Cake Activism.

Calla: The other day my neighbour almost said that she's going to get "so fat" from all my baking but then stopped herself. She's like 80. Hurray! Small victories!

May: We are pushing our AGENDA THROUGH CAKE.

Calla: I honestly wish everyone would just get fat and then we could all live in peace

May: (But seriously? actively enjoying cake as an activist practice? I actually think I do that, self-consciously sometimes.)

Through the process of collaborating on the writing of this paper, we have reflected on what the next steps may be for not only furthering the 'fat person' framework but also our roles as fat teachers, scholars, and activists particularly during the globally disruptive Covid-pandemic times we are living through. In many ways the shift to education delivery through primarily online platforms means that our fat bodies have become less "present" in front of the classroom or at faculty meetings and gatherings. In other ways the frightening increase in anti-fat rhetoric in consideration of whose bodies are deemed worthy of treatment and access to health care during these times makes our work feel all that more urgent and necessary. While we have laid the foundation for the 'fat person' framework our hope is that others in our field will build from this and continue to reimagine what the possibilities are for the 'fat person' as well as work through the pitfalls. Perhaps we need a radical reframing of what it means to be the fat studies expert—the 'fat person' within an inherently colonial and fatphobic institution. One of the tensions, among many, that we continue to grapple with is the question of the role of the 'fat person' in upholding the very institutions that we seek to critique and dismantle through our positions as activist-academics, researchers, and teachers. This is a question that Henderson (2019) also grapples with in her 'gender person' article, although in arguably more understated terms. She argues for a 'both/and strategy' where "both integration and autonomy approaches are practiced" (Henderson, 2019, p. 740) in service of mainstreaming gender knowledge within academic institutions. At many points when analyzing our dialogue for this article, May would often say "it's a case of 'yes, but'" when reflecting on whether mainstreaming fat knowledge is possible or even desirable within academia. Fundamentally, we stand behind the radical potential and enormous necessity of the work we do at the same time we sit with a deep uneasiness. This position is consistent with fat studies, a field that holds inconsistency and mess, forcing us to endlessly grapple with the spaces beyond and between.

About the Authors

Calla Evans (*corresponding author*) is a PhD student in Communication and Culture. Her research explores fat identity construction and performance, with particular attention to the ways in which fat activist practices enforce boundaries around acceptable expressions of fatness. Calla is a research associate at the Center for Fashion & Systemic Change and the Creative Communities in Collaboration research lab. She also works with Re•Vision: The Centre for Art and Social Justice at the University of Guelph as a digital storytelling facilitator. Email: c2evans@ryerson.ca[1]

May Friedman is a faculty member in downtown Toronto. Most recently much of May's research has focused on intersectional approaches to fat studies considering the multiple and fluid experiences of both fat oppression and fat activism. Drawing on a range of arts-based methods, including digital storytelling as well as analyses of treasured garments, May has explored meaning making and representation in relation to embodiment and experience.

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Collaborative Movement: What Queering Dance Makes Possible

Claire Carter

ABSTRACT   Collaborative Movement focuses on an ongoing research collaboration centred on supporting trans/genderqueer/non-binary/queer community dance/movement programming and mentorship in Regina, Treaty 4 territory. Incorporating queer feminist community research methods, this article demonstrates that collaborations between community organizations and academia can be productive in their grounding of ideas (about gender and bodies) in everyday complexities and specificities of place in ways that hold potential for new forms of interaction, new ways of relating to each other, and new possibilities for action.

KEYWORDS   Queer and trans dance, feminist community research, queer methods

> *"If anything, the unmet challenge for queer theory and queer dance might be an opening of access for anyone who wants to think-move queer."*
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> *-   DeFrantz, 2017, p. 179*

Queering Dance is a collaborative community project that began in the fall of 2018 as a pilot study that offered three dance workshops to trans/genderqueer/queer/body diverse individuals. In our first workshop, I remember sitting on the floor in the FadaDance Studio, feeling uneasy about the idea of moving my body in any sort of coordinated or stylistic way in front of people. I love being active and in my body, but have always been uncomfortable with impulsive or creative social play. As we were led through warm-up exercises—walking assertively around the room, making eye contact as we passed each other, using our bodies to carve out space around us—I began to feel the joy and power of moving with others. While we did not know each other, there was a growing familiarity accruing to our bodies as we were moving around each other, taking up space, and building a sense of intimacy and connection. This experience demonstrated for me not only the dance instructor's expertise and craft in making this dynamic come into being but also, as an academic, what becomes possible when you are vulnerable and step outside of the comfortable and familiar ways of doing research.

Feminist and social justice research has an explicit commitment to work and learn in support of social change, to address structural and systemic inequalities, and to centre experiences and

voices that have been marginalized or denied within dominant narratives (Kirby et al., 2006; Moss, 2002; Reinharz, 1992). Both community engaged and participatory action research use collaborative approaches to research, where decision-making is shared at every stage, including the issue to focus on and/or the action that is needed, the processes for carrying out the project, analysing the impacts, and next steps (for example, Reid et al., 2006). As such, these approaches to research are grounded in and accountable to community identified objectives and needs as well as to community members themselves. Collaborations between community organizations and academics can be productive in their grounding of ideas (about gender and bodies) in the everyday complexities and specificities of place in ways that hold potential for new forms of interaction, new ways of connecting with each other, and new possibilities for action. The focus here is on a specific community-academic partnership that endeavours to 'open access' to practices that encourage participants to think-move queerly. I would argue that these forms of collaboration matter—for trans and queer dancers and research collaborators, but also for what they make possible—openings to rethink ways we can move collaboratively together (DeFrantz, 2017).

This paper explores the relational possibilities for learning together that emerge when intentional commitments to collaboration are fostered at the level of access to embodied movement. Based on the community partnership between Claire Carter with the University of Regina, Common Weal Community Arts organization, and instructors with FadaDance Troupe, the analysis provided involves two projects: the first, a pilot study entitled *Queering Dance*, which involved three dance workshops in 2018, and the second, a current SSHRC Connections Grant project, called *Queering Dance, Moving Communities,* which builds on the pilot to offer training and mentorship in trans/non-binary/genderqueer dance and choreography as well as community workshops led by local, national, and international trans/non-binary/genderqueer experts. Previous research on the relationship between queer exercise spaces and gender, body image, and community reveals that trans/genderqueer/queer individuals experience exclusion, discrimination, and discomfort in community leisure spaces as well as a desire to be more grounded in their bodies (Carter, 2021; Caudwell, 2020; Sykes, 2010). Our collaboration endeavours to provide a space for participating individuals to be in and with their bodies in new and creative ways, to embody gender/queerness, meet other gender/queer individuals, and enhance community building.

Central to the pair of sequential projects discussed here, has been a focus on establishing programming and space in support of trans and queer community well-being in Regina, sustained by community engagement and consultation, research team reflexivity and training, and relationship building between artists, community organizations, and the university. I begin with some background on the two projects, and then provide a brief discussion of the racial and class dynamics of conventional European dance, which inform, in part, the openness of space and form within queer dance. This moves into a discussion of why these types of collaborations matter, notably through their potential to make possible—even if temporarily—new ways of relating, moving together in space, and doing better research. The discussion is divided into two sections: New Ways of Relating and What is Made Possible.

Community Kinaesthetics: How *Queering Dance* Came to Be

Queering Dance grew out of a coffee between new friends; as is often the case within feminist and queer research, intimacy and community frequently serve as motivators for our work. Talking about our lives—the interweaving of work, community connections, and our everyday routines—led to a shared interest and focus. Nearing the end of a project on queer community sports and excited about what is possible within community movement spaces among diverse bodies, abilities, and genders, I reflected that there was not any exclusive queer or trans leisure programming in Regina that I knew of. Risa Payant, the Executive Director of Common Weal Community Arts (at the time), talked about her experiences with FadaDance—about finding a space to move her body that felt collegial, accepting of diverse bodies, fun, and one that fostered a plutonic intimacy (her words). Our conversation centered around the connection and expressive power of community movement opportunities—such as queer sports leagues or FadaDance classes—that resist and reflect shifts away from exceptionalist practices.

As a Saskatchewan-based arts organization, Common Weal Community Arts (https://commonweal.ca) supports creative partnerships between artists and communities that are rooted in social justice. Risa noted that they currently did not have any focused 2SLGBTQIAP+ programming, and so the idea of a collaboration emerged. We reached out to Frank Gilboy, a mutual friend who teaches dance/movement and has a long-time involvement with FadaDance Troupe. Frank is a respected community builder through her efforts and actions to create a queer and gender affirming space and in bringing people together. In our many conversations, Frank has spoken about her desire to learn about how movement can support different bodies and more recently offering classes to people living with Parkinson's disease. Frank recommended that we connect with Heather Cameron, who is also a dance instructor with FadaDance Troupe. Frank and Heather have co-taught on several occasions, and compliment and trust in each other's practice and abilities.

The four of us agreed to collaborate on the pilot project with the objectives of providing a sample of prospective leisure programming and to determine whether there was interest and/or need in programming for 2SLGBTQIAP+ on a longer-term basis, in particular for trans and genderqueer community members. Based upon feedback we received from the pilot, specifically, the need for programming led by trans and non-binary instructors, we submitted and were successful in securing a SSHRC Connections Grant. This Connections project has two parts: training for the research team by well-known international and national trans and queer choreographers and dancers; and community workshops and mentorship opportunities within Regina led by the same experts for trans, non-binary, and genderqueer community members as well as the queer community more broadly. This latter project was funded during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, there have been many pauses and re-imaginings. Therefore, the bulk of discussion here focuses on the pilot workshops, what we learned from that experience, how we are collaboratively moving forward with the SSHRC project, and implications for finding new models of inclusive collaboration in community-university research that challenge structural exceptionalisms at the level of embodied subject formation in community spaces.

Learning from community sports leagues in my previous research, I felt inspired to support programming and community building locally. Regina is a small conservative city, with a trans and queer community whose members face varying levels of discrimination and acceptance tied to the intersections of their identities (race, class, ability with sex, gender, and sexuality). There are very few spaces and/or community programs that are queer exclusive and/or publicly queer positive, let alone trans and genderqueer affirming. There are many factors that inform the lack of engagement in leisure programming and spaces by 2SLGBTQIAP+ community members that range from change-rooms politics and heightened bodily visibility, to issues of accessibility informed by transphobia, colonialism, ableism, racism, homophobia, and fatphobia (Brackenridge et al., 2007). Specifically, Caudwell (2020) found that "transgender and non-binary people face a set of inequalities when it comes to physical activity participation…[and] these inequalities impact on participation rates" (p. 3).

Leisure and sports spaces, in particular dance, have emerged out of Euro-Western colonial discourses and practices around race, sex, sexuality, and health that continue to inform programming offerings and priorities, and experiences of leisure environments, as well as forms of creative resistance and the formation of community-based movement spaces (e.g., Sykes, 2016; McDonald, 2009). Lavallée and Lévesque (2012) speak of the dual impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples' experiences of physical activity and sport. Colonialism, through the Indian Act, residential school system, and other correlated policies and practices, enacted a direct attack on Indigenous cultural practices and traditions. Notably, potlach and pow-wow ceremonies "that involved the coming together of Aboriginal people to celebrate, dance, and play sports" were outlawed (Potlach Law of 1884 Indian Act) and forbidden within residential schools (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2012, p. 209). Alongside these actions, the federal government enforced assimilationist strategies, in which physical activity and sport were central. These initiatives continue to this day and privilege European based sports and the "values taught through that system over Indigenous sports and the values embraced in those contexts" (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2012, p. 210).

Sport and physical activity have also been used as strategies for development and assimilation globally in ways that reinforce colonial-imperial dynamics, notably with respect to the Olympics and major international sporting events (Sykes, 2017). Sykes (2017) notes how the inclusion of gay athletes has been held up by some as an indicator of modernity and progress, when in actuality, this inclusion only "promised new forms of belonging to white, body-normative gay, lesbian and trans folx," while racialized trans and queer athletes continue to experience racism at all levels of their participation in sport (p. 141). Dominant constructions of the ideal 'athlete' (white, able-bodied, thin, often cis-male, and heterosexual) limit which bodies are imagined, encouraged, and supported to engage in physical activity. Physical activity is often coded as something only an athlete (or dancer) does and, as a result, when diversely identified fat people "move their bodies, fatphobic discourses code these forms of physicality as a remedy or solution for 'obesity'" (Cameron & Oliver, 2021, p. 283). Fatphobic discourses informing physical activity "foreclose the possibility of fat subjectivity," leaving many to feel unwelcome

and that there is little possibility that their fat bodies will be legitimized or validated within sports and dance spaces (Sykes & McPhail, 2011, p. 49).

Within dance specifically, the European-colonial history and embodied norms are well-documented. Carter (2017) for example, notes that the history of dance within the Paris Opera Ballet—the oldest national ballet in the world—is rooted in "institutional hierarchy and the way it materializes and aestheticizes a deep cultural tradition of social inequality" (p. 114). In her critical essay on whiteness and leisure, McDonald (2009) presents a case study of ballroom dance in a small Midwestern US town and finds that "forms such as modern ballroom dance with roots in European aristocracy typically have served as the aesthetic standard in contrast to other presumably less sophisticated forms" (p. 13). Further, McDonald (2009) argues that the normative power of this aesthetic was evident in the way dancers and dance instructors of diverse racial backgrounds spoke of ballroom dance; as "rational, refined, and beautiful in contrast to the seemingly more physically primitive, carnal, and exoticness of Latin dance" (p. 13).

This set of differential attributions speaks to the division and segregation within the historical development of dance and dancing forms "in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the mobilization and justification of racist stereotypes" of Black dancers as "extraordinary performers" but lacking in "Euro-American dance techniques" (Chaleff, 2018, p. 71). The Euro-western tradition of dance has been "structured by the exclusionary mindset that projects a very narrow vision of a dancer; as a white, female, thin, long-limbed, flexible, heterosexual, and able-bodied" (Cooper-Albright, 2001, cited in Green, 2021). The spaces of dance "are shaped by the enduring legacies of choreographers' and performers' race," body size, and gender binaries (Chaleff, 2018, p. 71), and these legacies are illustrative of the extent to which systemic discrimination forms "the constitutive ground of a great deal of what we know as the 'canon' of dance history" (Desmond, 2001, p. 4). *Queering Dance* is rooted in these intersectional histories and structures of oppression that have and continue to privilege some bodies and forms of movement over others.

Body movement/dance is recognized as a unique and valuable form to explore gendered embodiment and connection to community, offering nonverbal expression of experiences of oppression and trauma, individually and potentially collectively (Cantrick et al., 2018). Queer dance, according to Croft (2017), has the "potential to teach us new ways of looking, to help us see beyond the ruts in which we ride," (p. 16) in relation to intersectional experiences of gender and sexuality and assumed connections with bodies, desires, and sex (see also Desmond, 2001). Queer dance can thus function like pedagogy, "teaching someone what it might look like or feel to refuse norms" (Croft 2017, 16-7). The predominance of Eurocentric and colonial, fat phobic, cissexist, and heteronormative traditions within dance, supported by the policing of alternative interpretations or forms of gendered movement (for example, see Broomfield, 2011), reinforces and upholds the normative form as *the* form within mainstream media and many dance schools. As a result, many have sought to leave conventional dance due to experiences of segregation or exclusion within dance practice, as the restrictions and limitations did not allow for a varied range of embodiments and stories to take shape. After having been told as a young dancer that their body was unacceptable, Katy Pyle, the lead choreographer for *Ballez*,

came to question if it was their body that was a failure or the way they moved within ballet? How could ballet be re-imagined and their body seen as success? And what were other ways of moving and receiving others to explore outside of conventional ballet? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zp5UdjPOwE) To dance queerly is not like an elective class or special "queer" performance within a conventional dance program, something different, a one-off that does not disrupt the normative frame.

Queer dance has a rich history, emerging out of queer activism and various forms of using bodies to forge connection "in actions, in protests, and on stages," (Croft, 2017, 13) challenging "us to document the role of these physical actions in our pasts, recognizing what people have been able to do with their bodies" (Croft, 2017, 14). Queer dance presents a challenge to dance traditions "to overcome unimaginative categorizations" that are based in essentialized notions of physical difference (Croft, 2017, p. 6). Similarly, queer dance draws upon expanded notions of what might constitute spaces of performances, such that "the stage for instance, is not confined solely to the theatre, the dance club, or concert hall" (Johnson, 2005, p. 140; see also Desmond, 2001, p. 5). Everyday spaces and interactions inform and are a part of Black queer performance practices, from the "street, social services, in picket lines, loan offices, and emergency rooms among others" (Johnson, 2005, p. 140). For DeFrantz (2017), there is an inherent interconnection and relation between dance and queerness, such that "queer holds urgent currency in dance, and dance provides a measure of solace and refuge for queer being" (p. 172). Within all forms of dance, DeFrantz (2017) argues he is "comforted by an assumption of sexual diversity seldom experienced otherwise" (p. 172). Thus, dance provides a medium to resist and rearticulate dominant and intersectional scripts about bodies and their power in moving together. As Muñoz (2001) articulates, after the live performance, queer dance "does not just expire;" rather, it is about "understanding what matters" and "it matters to get lost in dance or to use dance to get lost. Lost from the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality" (p. 441).

As my previous research shows, queer community sport powerfully demonstrates how everyday spaces inform our movements—individual and collective, and how our bodily movements shape the everyday spaces we inhabit (Carter, 2021). They are grounded in principles of collegiality, fun, and inclusivity over winning and competition at all costs (Caudwell, 2007; Lenskyj, 2003). This grounding sets the stage for leagues to undertake continual reflexive work with respect to more effective inclusivity, given the predominance of normative discourses informing the construction of "athlete" within leisure spaces (whiteness, able-bodiedness, cissexism, and thin). In my recent research, leagues were actively putting into play new policies around accessibility and inclusion, including: different forms of scoring, cheering that is visual rather than sound based, and having someone run for you when you go up to bat; reserving registration spots for queer and trans people of colour and Indigenous queers; changing language to be trans and non-binary inclusive (website and in-play) and initiating pronoun rounds; and supporting fat identified teams and individual players.

These actions, along with others, challenged dominant assumptions about what bodies are expected within sports (and in what roles/positions) and queer spaces and how they can open up new ways of moving and relating with each other. For example, as I have discussed elsewhere

(Carter, 2021), the shift to become more trans-inclusive challenged players' assumptions about what bodies were expected in play and what moving, playing bodies should look like. As one participant shared:

> So it's an expectation now of each individual not to assume somebody else's gender identity. But with that, also comes, more comfortability with bodies. Because now bodies can be any size and shape…anytime there is not one ideal body type, there's more comfort (Carter, 2021, pp. 48-9)

Within a society that is heavily focused on body/fat shaming and disciplining body size and shape in accordance with fat phobia, a normative gender binary, and healthism (Crawford, 2006), to experience moments of 'comfort' is no small thing (see for example, Ellison et al., 2016; Riley et al., 2008). This proactive investment in inclusion reflects the potential of the queer movement spaces that *Queering Dance* supports, and what Pyle says informed the formation of *Ballez*: to "create a space where dancers of any body type could express themselves through movement" (Green, 2021). Social dancing, queer dancing "is a political practice conforming, contravening, or rewriting social relations," and as such, it offers critical space and potential for new ways of recognizing bodies and moving in relation with each other (Desmond, 2001, p. 6). Croft (2017) speaks directly to this potential when she asserts that "queer dances' investment in bodies as sites to imagine, practice, cultivate, and enact social change is not just an aspiration. It is a documented outcome of our queer dancing pasts" (p. 14).

Experiences of transphobia and homophobia within leisure/movement spaces have been well documented (Brackenridge et al., 2007; Caudwell, 2014; Sykes, 2011; Young, 2005). Within these spaces exceptionalist approaches remain ubiquitous and reinforce cissexist and heteronormative ideas of sex/gender, such as use of sexed changerooms and regulation of style of movement and/or participation by sex and gender identities. Therefore, supporting community spaces that are exclusive to trans and queer people holds the potential to explore other ways of moving, being in one's body, and moving with other bodies that push us beyond the limitations and exclusions of mainstream dance. Critically, this is not only of benefit for trans and queer dancing communities, but also opens up possibilities for seeing and thinking about all bodies and collective movement in new ways.

Queer and trans communities are diverse and as such, individuals have different needs and levels of awareness and, within a small city, there are ever present interpersonal dynamics and histories that inform spaces and individuals' embodiment within them. Examining how notions of community and queer politics are made meaningful through collective body movement has been at the fore as we shifted from the pilot project involving three stand-alone workshops to our current project. Ahmed (2006) argues that the "differences in how one directs desire can 'move' us and affect even the most deeply engrained patterns of relating to others" (p. 101); as such queer desire can be rethought as a "space for action, as a way of extending differently into space through tending toward other" queers (p. 102). Can queer leisure spaces "move" us—individually and collectively? What community building is possible and/or can

arise from spaces of collective body movement and from collaborations between community organizations and the university? Can these collaborations and spaces of body movement foster new ways of relating to ourselves and others?

Two guiding questions frame our discussion: what new ways of relating have emerged? and what is made possible through collaborations like *Queering Dance*, especially between community organizations and the university? In speaking to these questions, I draw on notions of queer methods, specifically as discussed by Brim and Ghaziani (2016), and Love (2016), as well as Edward and Greenough's work on queer literacy (2020) and Creese and Frisby's (2012) work on Feminist Community Research.

Queer methods, in similar fashion to feminist methodology, are focused on how one approaches and engages with the processes of research. Brim and Ghaziani (2016) identify two innovations that queer methods offer: first, they "question the origins and effects of concepts and categories" as they do not always "align with lived experiences;" and second, they "reject the fetishizing of the observable" (p. 16). They refer to Nash and Browne's 2010 edited collection as marking a shift within social sciences and humanities research from a focus on '*what* is queer theory?' to '*how* is queer theory done?' (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016, p. 14) Some of the central tenets informing how queer theory is done involve challenging the normal business of academia (Warner, 1993, cited in Love, 2016) and a prioritization of relationships over standard research routines and schedules, including grant and/or reporting deadlines (Edward & Greenough, 2020). Further, a commitment to social justice / social change (which bridges queer methods with feminist community research), requires a more fully reflexive approach to research (Al-Hindi & Kawabata, 1993). This includes taking account of and being accountable to the messiness of doing research as well as recognition of the "violence of *all* scholarly research" (Love, 2016, p. 347). Within the two discussion sections of this paper, New Ways of Relating, and What is Made Possible, I address the practices and approaches our collaborative projects utilized and embraced that reflect queer methods and feminist community research, including researcher vulnerability, and processes of consent, consultation, and reflection, which are informing our collaboratively produced knowledge.

New Ways of Relating

Community engaged queer methods offer a framework for "making space for what is" (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016, p. 18), including the contexts of research, the messiness and complexities of research relationships, and historical and current socio-political dynamics informing research. Further, tied to the desire to support social change and disrupt traditional academic processes, feminist and queer community research "operate[s] largely beyond theory and in the service of 'the fundamental issue of how to…make life livable'" (Butler cited in Brim & Ghaziani 2016, p. 18). As stated, there is a prioritization of relationships over research reporting schedules (Edward & Greenough, 2020, p. 717), while at the same time an acknowledgement that these relationships are often contested. Creese and Frisby (2012) identify that "academic and community partners receive little if any training on how to build trusting and mutually productive relationships that avoid or at least minimize the numerous and serious potential

pitfalls that can arise" (p. 2). Through discussion of examples from our collaboration, I argue that queer feminist community research has enabled new ways of relating within research relationships that also extend into everyday community, academic, and interpersonal interactions, and that illustrate some of the ways queer theory is done.

A primary goal of our collaboration is to provide leisure programming and mentorship for trans, genderqueer, non-binary, queer, and body diverse individuals, based on our awareness that exclusive recreational services do not currently exist and the importance of moving our bodies and being in community for well-being (Carter, 2021, 2017; Caudwell, 2021; Sykes & McPhail, 2010). As white cis-identified queer and straight collaborators, we incorporated two strategies into our project to enhance our knowledge and prioritize current trans and queer community needs. First, the research team undertook positive space training, led by UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Gender Diversity. This training and subsequent conversations about the planning of the workshops offered a space to talk about language and pronouns, issues tied to the studio space (for example, washroom/changeroom access and bodily visibility/mirrors) and specific to the workshop instructors, as well as ideas about how to make dance exercises more inclusive for gender and sexually diverse participants. This process also included reflections on our social locations as white and cis, and acknowledgement that our role as facilitators could serve to reproduce the exclusions we sought to address. To promote participation in the workshops we reached out to community organizations and groups within the city, including Common Weal Community Arts and FadaDance Troupe, the Heritage Community Centre (which supports the neighbourhood the workshops were held in), the Two Spirit Program, and UR Pride Centre for Sexuality and Gender Diversity.

The second strategy we incorporated was a community consent process at the start of each workshop, which was an expansion of the ethics process required by the university ethics board. At the beginning of each workshop, we did introductions, including pronouns, our individual affiliations and connections to the project, and reasons for collaborating around dance. Self-identifications, including pronouns, are a recognized and common practice within trans and queer community spaces that serve as an important self-affirming and inclusive practice (Caudwell, 2020). As part of the introductions, Risa and myself—the two research team members who are not dance instructors—would initiate the community consent process. We explained that we wanted to participate in the dance workshops, to be a part of a developing community of dancers/movement, but recognized that as white cis queers, our presence may hinder or take away from what we hoped to foster in the workshops. We handed out slips of paper and asked people to write an 'N' or a 'Y' to reflect no we could not participate or yes we could, and left the studio. Frank and Heather handed out the slips and then collected them once people had finished. They would then come outside and let us know if there were any 'N' slips. In addition to issues raised earlier, Risa and I were aware of several reasons participants might not want us to participate in the workshops, ranging from interpersonal connections with members of the trans and queer community within Regina, to former or current students and former or current participants in Common Weal programs or events. We wanted this process to be simple and anonymous, and hoped it would reflect the prioritization

of community access over academic or community organization objectives.

We were given consent to participate in all three of the workshops, but I confess that I almost wanted an N slip to be handed out, and to be told that I could not participate, especially at the first workshop. Undoubtedly, this was tied to my insecurity about my (lack of skill at) dancing, as well as the vulnerability I knew I would inevitably feel about moving my body—having my body visible—in front of others. My experiences of having coaches comment on my body size and recommend that I diet, both pride and discomfort in having an active, strong body that quite noticeably sweats (and thus counters the expectation for 'feminine' bodies to glisten), and a general sense that I lacked 'feminine' physicality of grace and shape, have all come to inform my engagement within leisure spaces; notably, preferring individual sports and women's/trans inclusive hours at the gym or pool. I knew I was not alone in this vulnerability and was aware that many people avoid various forms of recreation for this reason, both anecdotally and based on previous research. Our fatphobic, transphobic, racist, homophobic, sexist, and ableist society makes being comfortable in our bodies challenging at the best of times, let alone when having our bodies on display while learning new body skills in a space that may include former lovers, crushes, people we work with, and community members. In addition, leisure spaces are steeped in histories of inequalities that privilege certain bodies (white, thin, heterosexual, cis and able-bodied) and certain conventional forms of movement and movement aesthetics.

Embodied collaboration and physical methodology can draw attention to your "vulnerability and limitation as a researcher," as Seko found working on a collaborative improvisational dance research project (Van Katwyk & Seko 2017). Part of challenging traditional academic ways of knowledge production necessarily involves disrupting the role of the researcher, which in my case involved being a participant, who is new to dance and open to experiences of vulnerability alongside others. The varied roles I play as a white cis queer able-bodied academic—researcher, dance student, community member—speak to the layers of relationships within queer feminist community research (Creese & Frisby, 2011, p. 4). My outsider status and vulnerability as a dancer may go some way in challenging traditional conceptions of 'the researcher,' but other layers of my status speak to "differences in power, access to resources, and control over meaning making" from those I danced with (Creese & Frisby, 2011). Drawing upon vulnerabilities and correcting for privileges are useful strategies in disrupting exceptionalisms.

Edward and Greenough (2017) suggest that "acts of emotional engagement as an enterprise…allows fruitful, co-produced knowledge and understanding" (p. 717). One example of this involves the wall of mirrors within the dance studio. I spoke to my own vulnerability early on in the first workshop, asking for the curtain to be drawn over the front wall mirror; I immediately sensed that the mirror would prove a distraction from my ability to open up and move in the space. This initiated a conversation among the instructors and participants, on co-produced knowledge and understanding about the mirror, diverse moving bodies 'on display,' and forms of bodily oppression that inform dance's history and practice. The instructors suggested having the curtain drawn for warm-up exercises and then, in the latter part of the workshop depending on everyone's comfort, a section of the curtain could be opened for those who wanted to use the mirror while learning choreography. This dialogue

and approach allowed participants time to get comfortable in the space before potentially seeing themselves reflected, and encouraged everyone to speak up about other ways to make the space more comfortable. While this is one example of how vulnerability invited discussion about the space, there were other facets that were not spoken about during the workshops; notably its whiteness. There were very few participants of colour, and while the research team acknowledged our whiteness as part of our introductions, we did not speak in the workshops to the whiteness of leisure spaces nor the Euro-colonial history informing preferred dance forms and bodies. The four of us reflected on this after the pilot and on the necessity of building into the next stage of our collaboration, the invitation to Indigenous, Black, and racialized trans and non-binary choreographers and dancers to lead community workshops in support of mentorship opportunities and to disrupt the whiteness of community leisure spaces. This invitation involves dialogue with Black, Indigenous, and racialized dancers and choreographers about different forms of movement practice and/or modes of instruction as well as desired places to dance and move together, that may be outside of dance studios or typical recreational spaces. An example of this arose in our current project, when we had a productive exchange with the invited choreographers about bridging the types of workshops we were planning (one set of workshops for current movement instructors and one set of workshops for community participants). Rather than offering a strictly 'train the trainer' session and then a community workshop, these invited choreographers endeavoured to blur the division between trainers/instructors and community participants and opted to open up the workshops.

Community consent, positive space training, researcher vulnerability, and critical reflection all contributed to queer feminist ways of doing research and new ways of relating within research processes that prioritized relationships and access to programming. As community collaborators, we each brought expertise and an openness to learn and be moved from, by, and with everyone engaged in the workshops. Central to this commitment was discussion with participants about the limitations of our knowledge individually and collectively (about dance, gender and sexual diversity, bodily abilities, and bridging those in communities) and a desire for their input and feedback, on elements such as language, access, spatial needs, and particular exercises or activities.

Endeavouring to build trust through openness and honest dialogue between us as collaborators as well as with participants has been critical. After each workshop, we invited participants' feedback in two ways: an informal debrief at the end of each workshop and an anonymous survey sent to all participants. Feedback from the first project (the pilot), *Queering Dance*, revealed that there was an interest in exclusive programming for queer dance expression to be led by trans, non-binary, and genderqueer community members. Building upon the pilot workshops, the second project, *Queering Dance, Moving Communities*, which is still underway, has two objectives: first, to support training for the research team in trans/genderqueer/non-binary dance and choreography by leading trans/non-binary/genderqueer dancers and choreographers who reflect diversities with respect to race and body size; and second, to host local community workshops led by the same trans/genderqueer/non-binary experts. As a research team, we see these twin projects as building blocks not a solution or end

to the work. When we applied for funding, we did not know of any trans/genderqueer/non-binary dance instructors locally/in Saskatchewan; therefore we wanted Heather and Frank, as well as other local movement instructors, to receive training in trans choreography to enrich their knowledge and practice with respect to gender and sexual diversity.

Our hope is that community workshops led by experts will support the development of trans/genderqueer/non-binary mentorship opportunities. We are holding in balance the need and request for programming led by trans community members, with our desire to support this development through mentorship and community collaboration. As articulated by Risa, "it's a scary place of tension for me, I believe these are the right people (our current research team). Certainly we have to be very careful about how we approach it" but also feeling "shouldn't we be having trans folx teaching? But maybe they don't exist in SK." Collectively, we have been actively working on how we support changing that. We have since discovered, happily, that there is, indeed, at least one trans dancer and choreographer—Miki Mappin—in our province, who is involved in our second project. We remain committed to resisting the forces that contribute to trans and other erasures, perpetuated through majoritarian practices and lenses within leisure spaces and community/municipal spaces more generally. As Love articulates, academic work "always involves the betrayal of the communities whose experience we claim to represent" (2016, p. 348) and so while we are committed to supporting trans/genderqueer/non-binary mentorship and programming, we acknowledge that we will make mistakes that may cause harm, and that aspects of our work may be experienced as a betrayal or form of violence. We remain open to feedback and to making necessary changes to the project based on community input. We have endeavoured to provide several forms of community outreach (anonymous surveys, having different community groups involved, and on-site support during workshops) so that when an issue or concern is brought forward, we can respond and change it as soon as possible.

Our collaboration as a research team brings together community leaders and experts with an academic researcher, and as such, different roles and expertise that enrich our project. Some of the interactions have been immensely frustrating as navigating academic grant and research ethics applications are challenging, to say the least, and there were moments that nearly led to several computers being hurled out of windows. Some of the issues that came into play had to do with the disbursement of funds, notably the university holding the purse, and the often quite bureaucratic and problematic procedures for providing honourariums and artist fees. For the most part, however, the experience has been just as immensely productive and meaningful; drawing upon our collective expertise, our projects interweave extensive experience working with artists and supporting community programming, years of training and experience teaching different forms of dance to different groups of people, and training and experience researching and teaching about gender and sexual diversity. Our different entry points and lenses meant that our discussions and project planning are dynamic and reflect our diverse skill set; the collaboration pushed us outside of our professional comfort zones and challenged our assumptions about 'normal' ways of doing things.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that we have had to pause and move more slowly

with the second project, *Queering Dance, Moving Communities*, as we were not able to travel for training, and dancers and choreographers were in the midst of navigating their own scheduling, health and safety, and impact on their careers. This extended planning phase has been productive (though also challenging), allowing further consultation with community members, and research into different workshop and training options (virtual, mixed online, and in person) and people/choreographers. In effect, this delay has reinforced our queering methods approach; it has centred the necessity of making space for what is because none of us could have predicted the pandemic, let alone the length and impact of it. How we begin to re-integrate socially and physically will be messy; everyone will have different comfort levels and anxieties in addition to the ones we had originally anticipated about moving in community with others. The sudden move for many to work online/from home during the pandemic, has led to new and creative options for programming—not just solely online/virtual or in person, but new ways of dancing and sharing space (in a Zoom room). This was powerfully demonstrated in my own dance class experience with Heather in 2020, where she played with different ideas from building your living space into your movement, such as a couch or door frame, to close-ups of eyes or hands, all of which reflected the different intimacies of dancing on screen, in each other's homes. Thus, this unanticipated pause has encouraged us to be more creative about the range of options available to support community members' needs and comfort levels, such as the ability to turn our cameras off, and is making possible choices that we could not have imagined before the pandemic. The impact of the COVID pandemic, alongside significant delays in obtaining ethics approval (in part the result of new COVID requirements and a backlog resulting from the impact), as well as organizational changes within Common Weal Community Arts has meant that they have had to shift from being a collaborator to having a consulting role.[1] So this is where our current project, *Queering Dance, Moving Communities*, currently rests; we finally received research ethics approval and have started making formal invitations to choreographers and dancers to lead training sessions and host community workshops in 2022. Inviting discomfort, uncertainty, and vulnerability to inform our work, we build upon feminist queer community research efforts to do research differently, with greater accountabilities, and to contribute, we hope, to meaningful social change.

What is Made Possible

Critical to our collaboration is continual reflection and dialogue about what it means to move together given the interweaving of the layers of our relationships, individual social locations, socio-historical legacies of dance/movement, and our commitments to supporting community programming and mentorship. These ways of relating reflect feminist and queer ways of doing research that remain different to standard approaches within academia, but this difference makes possible new ways of being in space and thinking about bodies that extend beyond our project. Queer dance, as Croft documents, is more than a leisure activity and/or art form

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1 The shift to a consulting role took effect at the start of 2022. Common Weal Community Arts consulted on the ethics application as well as on the list of dancers and choreographers invited to host workshops, and has provided critical support with respect to artists' contracts and sharing information about the workshop events.

(though these are important elements in their own right); it represents forms of physical and political action that empower "sites to imagine, practice, cultivate, and enact social change" (Croft, 2017, p.14). Ahmed (2006) theorises that "spaces and bodies become straight as an effect of repetition" (p. 92). Bodies come to repeat certain movements and gestures, in accordance with compulsory heterosexuality, and thus become orientated in particular ways that put some objects of desire within and others out of reach. Repetitive bodily movements shape the formation of spaces they occupy and limit their ability "for other kinds of actions" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 91). Queer desire "is a way of reorienting one's relation not just towards sexual others but also to a world that has already 'decided' how bodies should be orientated," (Ahmed, 2006, p. 102) affecting how we move through space, what objects are or are not now within reach, how we relate to each other, and what actions we are able to do. The heterosexualisation of space (Valentine, 1993; 2002), and sports and leisure spaces in particular, impact queer movement and engagement in those and other spaces. Brackenridge et al., (2007) argue that "homophobic [and transphobic] bullying is driving down the chances that LGBT athletes will start, stay or succeed" (p. 136) in physical activity or leisure. A participant who shared a previous dance experience confirmed this: "The most recent dance class I took was a weekly introductory Salsa class. I eventually stopped going because of my discomfort each week. EVERYTHING was gendered." The privileging of heteronormative gendered movements and roles within traditional forms of dance intersects with the privileging of Eurocentric and fat phobic bodily ideals, which reinforce historical and ongoing exclusions of many fat, Black, Indigenous, and racialized people from participating.

Informed by feminist and queer community research, we prioritized relationships and worked to support programming that would 'make life livable' for members of the Regina queer and trans communities (Butler cited in Brim & Ghaziani 2016). As referenced earlier, the work queer sports leagues are doing as part of their efforts to be more trans and genderqueer inclusive, through examination of current policies and practices, has had benefits beyond the intended purpose; becoming more trans inclusive opened up what queer sporting bodies look like, which challenged normative sporting/athletic body ideals. We received similar feedback from the *Queering Dance* workshops. For example, one participant spoke directly to our intention of creating a space where gender and sexual diversity was welcomed and supported: "What I have noticed about queer exclusive spaces is the ability to be my entire self without having to worry about how my identity might affect others." The emotional labour of worrying about how their identity will affect others serves not only as a deterrent from participating in recreational programming, but is indicative of the labour required to move through everyday spaces within a cissexist and heterosexist society. This reinforces Caudwell's (2020) articulation with respect to trans and non-binary leisure participation that "compounding structural and ideological inequalities are the unequal social relations of spatial and the embodied" (p. 3); thus not only are there structural and institutional barriers but also "sets of assumptions about who can participate, when and how," that trans and non-binary folx are aware of and have to navigate when they seek out community programming as well as within everyday routine activities (Caudwell, 2020, p. 3).

In addition to the benefit of exclusive spaces for trans, genderqueer, and non-binary participants, participants also shared that the space opened up other possibilities. In response to our question about what was most beneficial about the workshops, one participant shared: "not having pressure for my memory as an acquired brain injury survivor." This comment referred to the choreography section of the workshop, where Frank stood at the front of the class and repeated movements as she added to the steps, ensuring everyone could see and follow along. Designing an introductory workshop for participants with a range of backgrounds in dance—from skilled to no experience at all—had the above stated unanticipated benefit; not being expected to remember steps made possible the ability to relax and enjoy the workshop without having to do memory work. Another response to this question spoke to boundaries around touch and safety: "I need to feel my motion is more than a sexual invitation to men, as an assault survivor I feel very afraid that I may be misinterpreted and not safe if the message of motion is not clearly about dance." Clearly articulating that there would be no physical touching in the workshops and that participants could opt out of any exercises and movements, holding space to talk about boundaries, and incorporating exercises to build comfort moving among other bodies all contributed to the creation of a safer space of dance.

This feedback speaks to what is possible within queer and feminist community research, and specifically what our collaboration enabled. Chaleff (2018) articulates that "artistic spaces are activated by the bodies that inhabit them" (p. 71). Making space for non-traditional approaches to dance specifically around gender prompted other forms of opening, access, and, notably, movement that are tied to body diversity, accessibility, racism within community spaces, and experiences of sexual harassment. The integration of expertise in dance instruction, community arts programming, and research about trans and queer community sports enriched our planning conversations and development of our projects. This work is ongoing in our current project and led to a much more robust ethics application that includes a range of 'consent' cards (developed by our research assistant Caitlin Janzen), including "Taking a break," "I withdraw from the study," "Please check in with me," and "No hands-on assistance" that empower participants by enabling them communicate without disrupting the class or drawing unwanted attention. In addition, our commitments to support community programming needs and social justice more generally necessitate continued reflection and dialogue at each step of the process, openness to feedback by making changes, and a collective awareness of our limitations, including that we will make mistakes and need to be accountable for them, and and a willingness to make improvements as we continue our work.

I have referenced some of what was made possible through the queering dance workshops themselves, but our collaboration has also led to shifts and changes in our individual work and everyday practices. One of these changes was the renaming of one of FadaDance's classes from FadaMan to FadaMasc. Community artist and doctoral student Evie Ruddy (2018) wrote a piece in *Briarpatch* about their experiences with dance, participating in the queering dance workshops, and in the newly named FadaMasc class. As Ruddy describes in the piece, they were interested in taking a dance class with FadaDance and approached Heather and Frank after the *Queering Dance* workshops about available options. After discussion amongst the

artistic leads of FadaDance and in consultation with UR Pride Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity, FadaMan was renamed FadaMasc and promoted to all "who identify with a more masculine way of moving in the world" (Ruddy, 2018). This shift represents a significant programming move, opening up leisure spaces beyond the sex and gender binary and is one powerful example of how university/community collaborations can spark social change.

Frank and Heather have both shared that *Queering Dance* has deepened their thinking about various ways to support diverse bodies in movement. Since our pilot project Frank says that working on this project has led to increased awareness and thoughtfulness about "habitual language and [language] in dance class – [of] having to refine language [and] music choices [that] have 100% carried over into every area of my life." Similarly, Heather reflected that, changes to "that one thing shifts your entire world," such that strategies to make the space and movement more inclusive for gender and sexually diverse participants inform not only her other classes but her life more generally. Previous to being a part of the collaboration, Heather shared that she probably would have thought, "Oh it doesn't matter who I am working with, I don't even think about gender, it's about the body, it's about moving." But now, having worked with queer and trans community members and having sustained conversations about bodies and gender, she feels a greater awareness of and appreciation for the need to "create a space that is gender focused because it doesn't exist…and it does matter, it matters a lot actually." Having academic conversations about gender and sexual diversity and the discrimination and harassment trans and queer people face when trying to access community services are important, but they are made ever more meaningful when they are grounded in everyday actions and reflections on ways we can move together.

Queering Dance is a collaboration that prioritizes trans and queer leisure programming, and consequently, community well-being that has effectively, as comments above reveal, queered dance in many ways in Regina. Our collaboration endeavours to work differently in accordance with core facets of queer feminist community research that prioritizes relationships and acknowledges the challenges and potential violence of doing research. Collaborations like *Queering Dance* are vital because they foster a space to name, be accountable to, and queer conventional, dominant, and normative way of doing things—doing dance, doing community work, doing academic work. In our experience, community/university partnerships have enabled new ways of relating that do not depend on normative binary discourses (of gender and sexuality or community and academia) or exceptionalist practices within leisure programming. They reveal some of what is made possible through collaborative movement.

Acknowledgements

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Reports from the Field

Principles-Based Budgeting: Resources for Revisioning Academic Planning

Dante Carter, Tasnim Jaisee, Lorelei Nickel, Suresh Kalagnanam

ABSTRACT   In working toward a budgeting framework that responds to the often harmful impacts of neoliberal accounting practices on people and places, this research has been guided by deep-rooted principles that were gifted to the University of Saskatchewan, through a rigorous Indigenous-led community consultation process which interpreted institutional strategic principles, using Cree and Michif terms: nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin (sustainability), nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin (creativity), nanātohk pimātisowina | nanaatoohk pimatishoowin (diversity), and āniskōmohcikēwin | Naashkoopitamihk (connectivity). This consultation demonstrated the pressing need to redefine what a successful budgeting framework might mean by looking beyond the role of a financial plan and adopting a more broad-based approach using socially and environmentally responsible lenses that incorporate new directions based on Indigenous knowledges, world views, and values invested in creating a more inclusive and productive campus in targeted, incremental, and structural ways. This exploratory study builds on information gathered internally from the university's student governance structures, broad conversations within an ad hoc advisory group, and relevant literature. An important role of budgeting is that it can guide performance measurement and management; our exploration included looking for ways to identify potentially "new-old" measurements of success as they pertain to the university's stated objectives and aspirational goals. Current challenges of resource allocation faced by the university were reviewed to identify bottlenecks based on funding limitations that cause barriers to accessibility to academic and non-academic supports, and undesirable environmental effects. Our study raises more questions than answers, but provides insight into potential future processes, which we anticipate in this field report.

KEYWORDS   Deep-rooted principles, budgeting, resource allocation, performance measurement

In seeking to develop a budgeting framework that responds to the potentially harmful impacts of neoliberal accounting practices on people and places, this research has been guided by deep-rooted principles that were gifted to the University of Saskatchewan (USask) through a rigorous Indigenous-led community consultation process which interpreted institutional strategic principles using Cree and Michif terms: nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin (sustainability), nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin (creativity), nanātohk pimātisowina | nanaatoohk pimatishoowin (diversity), and āniskōmohcikēwin | naashkoopitamihk (connectivity). These are outlined in Figure 1 below with expanded definitions provided in the Appendix included at the end of our field report.
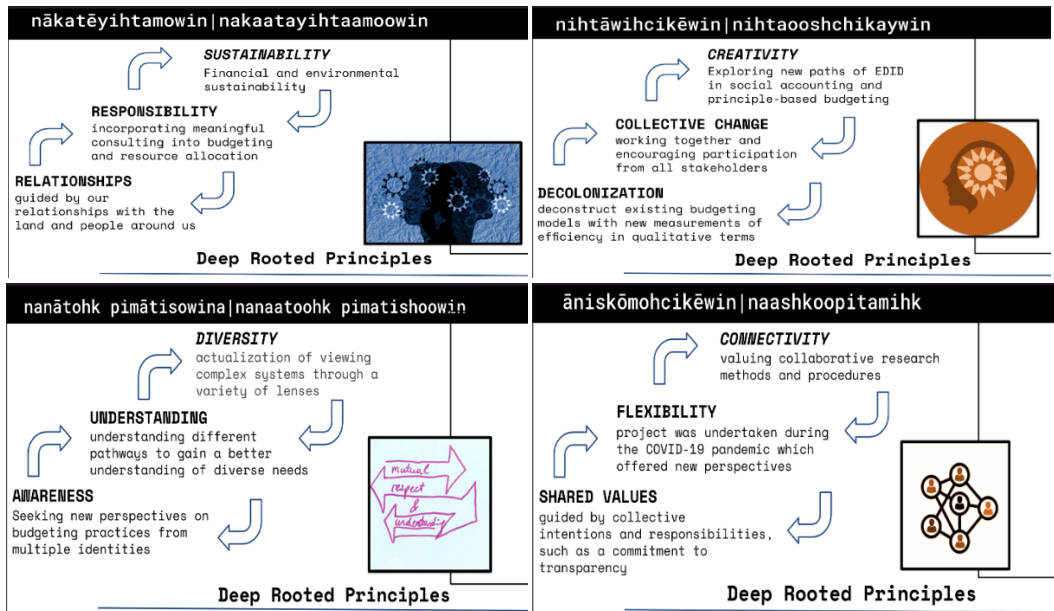
Figure 1. The University of Saskatchewan's Deep-Rooted Principles

Our exploration seeks innovative ways to reconsider measurements of success as they pertain to the university's stated objectives and aspirational goals. One way to demonstrate the living impact of values-based budgeting is to measure their impacts at multiple levels throughout the organization, for example, by reorienting employee evaluations; establishing sustainability-centered budget practices that support emerging scholars; engaging critical minoritized perspectives in curricula; rewarding students who actively seek out pluralistic perspectives; and emphasizing services that reduce disparities. Some of these approaches would be very low cost to to implement, and yet, could produce measurable results in shifted institutional emphases and student employability in labour markets that are increasingly invested in sustainable futures.

However, confining commitments to the deep-rooted principles to low stakes shifts would be a disservice. Deeper structural transformations are required for maximum effect. While, across the nation, barriers to financial stability in higher education are well known, cohesive planning to reshape them in more decolonizing, equitable, inclusive, and pluralizing directions can help correct for the harms caused by standardized practices of externalizing costs. We propose that the challenges that currently face our university may be narrowed down to four bottlenecks, namely: uncertain availability of external resources; incomplete information about accessing internal resources; limits imposed by a provincial Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on higher education funding; and the need for greater attention to resource distribution that provides academic and non-academic supports for diverse campus constituencies who can contribute to more substantive revisioning of planning processes. Our research is a first step in exploring how budgeting can enable the institution: to (1) integrate

the deep-rooted principles in its operational planning; (2) live by the values articulated in related formal statements; and (3) deliver on its stated goals and objectives (Fairbairn, 2017).

Resource allocation is often identified as a reason for organizations struggling to meet their objectives. In April 2021, USask and the provincial government agreed to a four-year MOU with stable base funding and a separate two-year innovation grant of $31 million to initiate vital changes. The provincial performance framework laid out for the university in the memorandum includes five criteria: (1) accessibility; (2) responsiveness; (3) quality; (4) sustainability and (5) accountability. While the MOU aligns university development with the Saskatchewan Growth Plan, it requires tens of millions of dollars in budget cuts in order to address ongoing deficits. Finding ways to enact change while meeting the criteria provided in creative ways is our challenge.

The Research Journey

Early in 2021, the newly appointed Provost decided to seek ways to incorporate the deep-rooted principles into the university's budgeting and resource allocation systems. She authorized the establishment of an ad hoc advisory committee, comprised of a diverse group of individuals from across the university, invited to brainstorm and explore pathways forward. The composition of our research team reflects diversity in terms of role, discipline, research (areas, backgrounds, and methodologies), social location, and experience. Our group proposes that practices of accounting and budgeting could be revised to support meaningful change, in part by challenging how prevailing financial systems often interpret sustainability without substantive accountabilities to lands and peoples. Following the deep-rooted principle of creativity, our research focuses on unexplored areas for purposeful action. COVID-19 has presented its own unique challenges and opportunities to become more flexible. Through the principle of connectivity, our research encourages understanding the needs of the campus community and how our networks—both living and virtual—can aid in allocating resources more effectively.

The journey thus far has raised several critical questions. What does it really mean to say that deep-rooted principles are the foundation for how the university will function, including in its allocation of resources? How do the university's existing structures and processes align (or not) with its aspirational goals? What would an intersectional analysis of current budget practices reveal about the university's commitments to lands and peoples? What, then, would an intentionally principled budget include and who might be invited to contribute to budgeting planning processes with a view to enacting those principles at all levels of the organizations? What are the boundaries that must guide principles-based budgeting in a decolonizing frame? What does success mean and how should it be measured and is quantification always the only or best approach?

Literature Review: Some Promising Practices

"A budget is … a medium to communicate–quantitatively–management's objectives … and the instrument that guides and coordinates … the firm's activities…." (Brewer et al., 2020,

p. 272). According to Merchant and Van der Stede (2007), budgeting typically serves the purposes of planning, coordination, top management oversight, and motivation. An important criticism levelled against traditional hierarchical budgeting approaches is that they encourage 'command and control' mentalities, have no link to organizational objectives and/or strategies, encourage dysfunctional behaviour, and become an end in themselves, rather than a well-articulated, flexible, and evidence-based means to an end (Libby & Lindsay, 2003a, b). Such criticisms led to the development, 25 years ago, of the Beyond Budgeting Roundtable (BBRT) which suggested that traditional budgeting has no creative role in modern organizations (Libby & Lindsay, 2003a, b). Despite such calls, standardized budgeting is very much alive and integral to how organizations are managed (Libby & Lindsay, 2010), and indeed, are part of the provincial MOU. More recent research suggests that budgeting practices and the primary reasons for their deployments vary across Canadian universities (Kenno et al., 2021), with both constructive and infamous examples in recent memory.

That the world's budgeting landscape has changed significantly in recent decades is perhaps an understatement. Achieving the sustainable developmental goals (SDGs), establishing meaningful quality of life measures, and the importance of making substantive investments in Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization simply cannot be ignored. Policies such as the United Nations' 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the Canadian federal government's Quality of Life Strategy (DFC, 2021) show a need to measure more than traditionally understood economic factors, which have too often failed to account for harmful market impacts.

There is growing evidence that the vital factors outlined above are being more frequently incorporated into budgeting and/or performance measurement frameworks. For instance, according to Kavanagh and Kowlaski (2021), "[w]ith equity permeating the national conversation, it's important to understand the concept for budgeting: why it matters, how it might realistically be applied, and practical concerns and challenges" (p. 19). They suggest the use of five guiding principles to help with budgeting for equity: (1) avoid creating zero-sum games; (2) avoid either/or thinking and encourage both/and thinking; (3) create procedural justice; (4) decompose outcomes; and (5) encourage stakeholders to participate in the conversation. Sharp (2003) highlights the importance of gender responsive budgeting and notes that equity should be added as a fourth 'e' in addition to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within frameworks for performance-based budgeting. Frameworks for intersectional budget analysis are emerging to assist with these endeavors (Khosla, 2021).

The OECD's green budgeting framework, developed by the Paris Collaborative on Green Budgeting (OECD, 2017) suggests "using the tools of budgetary policy-making to help achieve environmental and climate goals" (p. 2). The framework proposes that an "… effective approach to green budgeting is underpinned by four key building blocks that are mutually reinforcing: a strong strategic framework, tools for evidence generation and policy coherence, reporting to facilitate accountability and transparency and an enabling budgetary framework" (p. 2). Stronger indicators of biospheric flourishing are needed.

New Zealand's Wellness Budget is not limited to economic data, because success is measured

through the values of fairness, environmental protection, and community strengths (NZG, 2021). This system's resource allocation focus areas include mental wellbeing, challenging poverty, improving incomes, skills development and opportunities, digital advancements, and sustainability. The framework looks beyond fiscal and economic priorities by considering social, environmental, cultural, and intergenerational outcomes (NZG, 2021). It pairs fiscal spending with targeted wellbeing initiatives, where every financial decision incorporates Māori perspectives, input, influence, and information (NZG, 2021). The wellness budget model does not aim for perfection, but rather establishes a program of change through bids for funding that require a wellbeing analysis consistent with stated priorities.

Canada's Alternative Federal Budget (AFB) is another monetary and social accountabilities-based budget framework. It accounts for the social aspects of arts and culture, gender equality, mental health, immigration, post-secondary education, and sustainable development goals (CCPA, 2018). Arts and culture are viewed as a common element that connects humanity, and so this component is evaluated through consideration of social return on investment from increased funding of culture and the arts (CCPA, 2018). Gender inequality is also addressed within the AFB, which further recognizes that the *National Action Plan Against Racism* has not been updated since 2010 and requires more adequate data to better allocate resources to meet current and growing racial inequalities (CCPA, 2018).

A budget that communicates objectives for equity and mutual flourishing of lands and peoples can be enabled using broad-based approaches such as the balanced scorecard (BSC) (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) and social return on investment (SROI Network, 2012) to develop its objectives. Cooper and Ezzamel (2016) integrate technical BSC approaches with a social perspective which attempts to examine how individuals perceive organizations, co-manage them, and understand their implications for society. They further emphasize the importance of using a dialogic process involving all relevant stakeholders, while centering the perspectives of those most affected by decisions. Three key underlying principles that inform the SROI framework are: (1) involve stakeholders; (2) value what matters; and (3) be transparent. Combining insights from these forward-looking frameworks can provide guidance and inspiration in revising academic budgeting and measurement frameworks, establishing consultation with Canada's Indigenous peoples as a foundational practice for measuring both qualitative and quantitative outcomes, responsibly.

Student Governance and Initiatives

Larger institutional change cannot take place without engagement from all levels of governance operating within an institution. Envisioning an inclusive and equitable campus is a critical objective among student groups at USask; therefore, student governance holds a key role in enacting change. 2019 marked the launch of the University of Saskatchewan Student Union's (USSU's) strategic goal, *Path Forward*, with a vision to promote education, revitalize community, decolonize systems, and facilitate leadership. That same year, the USSU embarked on hiring an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper to support student-focused commitments to decolonization, reconciliation, and Indigenization. The following year an MOU was signed

with the university on Anti-Racism, setting out a list of commitments for both parties to follow. These changes carry forward the values of ratified USSU campus groups at USask, including the establishment new resources for campus groups through the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression grant process.

Many ratified groups on campus seek to improve the quality of education and student-life by identifying and responding to gaps in meeting student needs. College-based groups like the Edwards Business Students' Society (EBSS) and the Indigenous Business Students' Society (IBSS) have created an Indigenous Initiatives strategy focused on six areas of improvement, and ways to measure them. The strategy is referred to as CIRCLE, which stands for change, inclusion, recognition, collaboration, learning, and equity. Driven to decolonize their own resource management processes as a student group located on Treaty 6 territory (EBSS) and as an Indigenous student society (IBSS), respectively, both are taking steps to design budgets that allocate resources in responsible, respectful, and transparent ways that support inclusion.

Moving Forward

We believe that it is important to develop a budgeting framework that circles back to the critical questions about accountabilities raised earlier in this report. Initial actions require educating the university community so that all constituencies have a good understanding of the four deep-rooted principles, which extend the meaning of the English words through interventions drawn from the knowledge networks of local Indigenous and Métis peoples. Providing open communication with and teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers on campus and in the community, including in conversations with government, are a key component in building understanding. Newly aligned quantifiable and qualitative goals could aid in establishing design and measurement frameworks for resource allocations driven by the deep-rooted principles, helping to ensure that multiple stakeholder needs are recognized and met.

Frenz & Vega (2010) have identified equity as a measurement of success that requires careful attention to both horizontal and vertical inequalities, which illuminate inefficiencies in the system under review. Horizontal inequalities are differences of access among individuals with different circumstances (differences between groups), which can be rooted in discrimination (Reimer & Pollak, 2010). They often set up unhealthy internal competition for resources that favour the status quo. This type of inequality requires greater connectivity and emphasis on diversity, achieved by assessing relationships between groups and recognizing the distinct paths and interfacing journeys among them to create corrective guidelines when allocating resources to meet diverse needs. Vertical inequalities reflect differences among individuals with similar circumstances (differences within a group) which can be assessed by learning how to improve the creativity and sustainability of resource allocations (Reimer & Pollak, 2010). Resource allocation that prioritizes sustainability can contribute to both financial and ecological sustainability by nurturing relationships that prioritize mutual flourishing through social return on investment (Dei, 2016). Creativity involves recognizing the need for inviting diverse perspectives, based on Indigenous practices of consultation to engage faculty, staff, administrators, investors, the environment, communities, educators, and current and future students.

Factors influencing service coverage depend on the availability of a service to the stakeholders who should benefit from it (Marra & Espinosa, 2020). Understanding service coverage involves assessing a variety of factors, such as availability of resources (commodities, facilities, personnel), people's attitudes to the service (acceptance, social norms, religion), as well as the actual quality/success of the service (Stewart et al., 2009). Measurement of coverage includes several stages. Each service is first identified with an apparent rationale for its provision. A coverage measure is then defined for each stage (usually through a ratio between the number of people for whom the service condition is met and the target population). Evaluation of coverage is based on five measurements that help to mitigate bottlenecks in resource allocation (Marra & Espinosa, 2020). Availability Coverage refers to the amount of service that can be made available to the target group as determined by the bottleneck of essential resources required to provide the service. Accessibility Coverage is the amount of service made accessible to the target group, which mitigates bottlenecks of geographical and financial accessibility (Marra & Espinosa, 2020). Acceptability Coverage refers to acceptance of any service by the target group(s) through reducing barriers of religious, cultural, economic, or other inhibiting factors. Contact Coverage refers to the volume of services accepted by users, which can be limited by the quantity of the actual coverage. Lastly, Effectiveness Coverage measures the quality of the intervention related to users' needs, as limited by the quality of actual coverage.

An equity-based indicators framework can also provide qualitative sources of measurement in both university practices and resource allocation, by expanding the focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and decolonization to incorporate sustainability (Sasakamoose et al., 2020). Adopting an anti-racist methodology allows educational institutions to address current bottlenecks of university supports and services not reaching groups that face disproportionate barriers to resources and opportunities. Colonial influence and precedent are heavily deconstructed through qualitative measurement of resource allocation and educational practices, using four progressive indicators that rank practices and behaviors within institutions. The initial assessment category evaluates processes invested in "maintaining colonial processes and structures" with a view to implementing equitable practices supported by constituencies most affected by "culturally safe/anti-racist/anti-oppressive processes and structures" (Sasakamoose et al., 2020). Actualizing qualitative measurements like these, together with quantitative indicators of services coverage, could help direct both the design of a principles-based budgeting system and the measurement of its success, as aligned with respectful enactment of the four gifted principles.

A multi-dimensional approach is needed to move forward. First, a transparent consultation pathway creates a community sustained by horizontal leadership, which can solidify innovative change (Pape & Lerner, 2016). We must include perspectives that are too often missing, due to structural inequities. It is critical for institutions to find ways to thrive without harming vital services or emergent critical knowledge systems. Secondly, a thorough communications strategy would make budgeting information accessible to staff, students, faculty, and community in information formats that are translatable across diverse levels of understanding. Finally, budgeting must recognize sustainability as a multi-layered concept. Environmental and fiscal sustainability must be intertwined with social inclusion initiatives and sustainable

development goals to build a meaningful principles-based budgeting framework. As just one example, the sciences are more frequently building costs to natural environments into budgeting frameworks.

Figure 2: The Deep-Rooted Principles as Mutually Constituting

To be effective and efficient, it is critical that new strategies, measurable indicators of success, and revised criteria be established to track the implementation of guiding principles. The idea of more sustainable practices, such as establishing a carbon exchange, could model reducing staff and faculty travel and allocating those resources toward student learning experiences. Such approaches could challenge current privileging processes, fostering more inclusive and mutually sustaining ways of thinking. Including minoritized perspectives in the curriculum (e.g., discussing environmental racism as an effect of current economic disparities) could introduce new generations to the importance of sustaining peoples and places, together. Placing the deep-rooted principles on course outlines, so that they are always front-and-centre, also seems a productive intervention. Communicating the principles to all stakeholders is key to developing a university budget framework that is truly rooted in the values it claims to embrace.

This project was designed to gather resources to help orient an ad hoc group of community constituents from a wide range of social and scholarly communities to help establish a framework that allocates resources based on the four deep-rooted principles through a principled budgeting system revisioning process. Participating students explored qualitative and abstract ways to measure the success of a principles-based budget design by considering categories of measurements identified in the literature. Further research and project development can help us determine how to mobilize principles-based allocations that improve higher education and the wellbeing of all stakeholders, including the lands which sustain us.

Acknowledgements

About the Authors

Dante Carter is a proud nêhiyâskwew from Onion Lake Cree Nation. She is fueled by her passion about all things EDID (equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization)! Growing up in rural northern Saskatchewan in Indigenous communities has greatly influenced her world perspective and shaped how she views sustainable development.

Tasnim Jaisee (she/her) is a Desi woman of colour with disabilities. Former USSU President specializing in Political and Gender Studies, as Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Project Specialist with the Provost and Vice-President Academic, she brings an intersectional feminist lens to accessibility, gender, and racial issues in governance, using community-engaged approaches.

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Appendix 1 – Deep Rooted Principles (from strategic planning documents)

Indigenous peoples have shaped the University of Saskatchewan's strategic plan with generous spirit and patient resolve—sustained by faith that things will happen when they're supposed to happen. After generations of forced irrelevance, the Indigenous traditions, languages, and systems of knowledge imbue our university's future in ways that were unimaginable even a few years ago. At last, this plan draws together parallel paths and uplifts all traditions in a space of peace, respect, and friendship. This plan is both a description of our university's future and a framework for mutual learning and reconciliation. And for this, we will all be immeasurably stronger.

nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin

The principle of sustainability ensures that we take care of the relationships with which we've been entrusted—with the land, with the air and water, with our students, colleagues, and neighbours—guided by mindfulness, respect, and reverence. In Cree and Michif, the idea is much bigger, extending to the attention we pay to protecting and honouring the wellness of all humanity and creation, the integrity of our cultural identities, and the stories embedded within language—the baskets of stories—our students, staff, faculty, and partners bring to our community. For the University of Saskatchewan, nākatēyihtamowin | nakaatayihtaamoowin is a cultural and ecological touchstone.

nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin

At its core, our university is a creative organism. **The principle of creativity** testifies that we are curious about the unexplored possibilities for growth, enrichment, and justice around us; attentive to the needs and opportunities for change that inspire imagination, and invention; and intentional about the future to which we aspire to contribute. The creative spirit is experiential; it invites participation in individual and collective journeys to discover truth and seek balance within the chaotic dynamism of the universe. nihtāwihcikēwin | nihtaooshchikaywin requires both discipline and optimism—knowing that our efforts can bring to fruition the possibilities we envision for learning and discovery.

nanātohk pimātisowina | nanaatoohk pimatishoowin

Life is perpetual movement and change—an unscripted journey of expanding awareness, understanding, and "coming to know"—and no two journeys follow quite the same path. Through the **principle of diversity**, our university is a meeting place for diverse journeys. Our strength derives from our respect for and belief in the tapestry of identities, traditions, and ways of knowing and being that enrich our humanity and bring us closer to an enlightened understanding of the world around us.

āniskōmohcikēwin | naashkoopitamihk

The principle of connectivity requires the University of Saskatchewan to be a global village. Our vibrant community is tied together by shared values, shared intentions, and a commitment to sharing our diverse stories in a place of mutual respect and learning. Our connectivity is our source of resilience, and the interactions that bring us closer together are energized by wonder and a playful spirit. Together, we have the flexibility to flourish in the face of change—and the confidence to take our place among leaders, emboldened by the unity of the community we carry with us.

Exchanges

Exchanges

In the *Exchanges* section of our journal, we present conversations with scholars and practitioners of community engagement, responses to previously published material, and other reflections on various aspects of community-engaged scholarship meant to provoke further dialogue and discussion. We invite our readers to offer in this section their own thoughts and ideas on the meanings and understandings of engaged scholarship, as practiced in local or faraway communities, diverse cultural settings, and various disciplinary contexts. We especially welcome community-based scholars' views and opinions on their collaboration with university-based partners in particular and on engaged scholarship in general.

Below profiles the perspectives of Abigail Zita Seshie, a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology at the University of Saskatchewan (USask), and Reggie Nyamekye, a graduate student in Women's and Gender Studies at USask on culture, African women, representations, African feminisms, and resisting exceptionalisms with a focus on Ghanaian and Canadian contexts.

Through the Lenses of Culture: A Diasporic Sisters' Dialogue on Power Struggles Informing African Women's Representations in Ghanaian and Canadian Contexts

Reggie: Thank you, Zita, for creating this space to discuss our respective efforts to contribute to more accurate representations of African women, African feminisms, the operations of culture in women's aspirational movements in Ghana, and the limits of western feminisms, as you have encountered them in your graduate and post-graduate experiences in Canada. To begin, then, can you please tell me about your work, positionalities, social location, and scholarship?

Abigail Zita Seshie

Zita: My positionalities and social location have shaped my work and scholarship. Growing up in Ghana, West Africa, my identity was shaped by gender, ethnic group, and social class. A person's gender, to a large extent, shapes their worldview,

expectations, and opportunities in Ghana. In Ghana, females are expected to aspire to become a wife and mother above other ambitions they may want to accomplish. Ethnic groups are matrilineal or patrilineal in terms of kinship ties. These forms of kinship ties affect how a person performs gender roles and expectations. Also, a person's social class is instrumental in navigating the complexities associated with gender and ethnic culture. As a female belonging to a patrilineal ethnic group, I understood the notion of women being the "subordinate" gender. Among patrilineal ethnic groups in Ghana, kinship ties are traced through the male line. So, children born in patrilineal ethnic groups are considered members of their father's family. Male children have privileges because they continue the family lineage among patrilineal groups. This cultural understanding impacts how I have performed gender. I understood early on that my successes and accomplishments would not be recognized on the same pedestal as those of a male child. However, being raised in an upper-middle-income family in an urban city in Ghana, the severity of the cultural notions associated with gender and patrilineal ethnic ties were minimized. Although I understood the importance of male children in a patrilineal family, the blend of modernity in urban spaces in Ghana protected me against the harsh realities experienced by many girls and women in rural communities, where traditional norms are strict and strongly enforced.

Like many girls raised in urban parts of Ghana, I had the opportunity to attend a private school throughout my formative years. With an excellent educational background, I was able to gain admission to the University of Ghana in 2006, where I studied Sociology, Classical History, and Theatre Arts. In 2010, I completed my undergraduate degree with two majors —Sociology and Theatre Arts. I chose these majors because both focus on society and human subjects, but address social problems differently. Combining these positionalities and social locations inspired me to pursue a master's degree in Social Justice and Equity Studies at Brock University from 2012-2014. The desire to produce a body of work focused on girls' experiences in formal education influenced my doctoral research on the gendered impacts of education policy in Ghana. I centered my doctoral work on girls' education because my own formal education gave me the power to transcend the cultural limitations imposed on me by gender.

Reggie: Thank you. Please tell me also about *Girls Education in Ghana: The Voices from Within,* your award-winning documentary and the inspiration and goals behind that project.

Zita: My documentary film was designed to pay homage to my mother. Like many Ghanaian women born in the 1950s, my mother did not have the opportunity to complete primary school. As a female child in a low-income family, my grandparents believed my mother would become a wife and a mother. Therefore, her formal education was not seen to be as crucial as her brothers'. The documentary film highlighted how culture influences girls' educational attainments in Ghana and validated a theoretical framework I developed, while working on my doctoral research, known as the African Feminist Standpoint.

The scholarly contributions of African American scholars like bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins have emphasized the unique experiences of Black women, which were not well

accounted for in early feminist scholarship. While race, gender, class, and sexuality are critical intersectional identities that further deepen the oppression of Black women, African women experience another layer of oppression that stems from culture. The theoretical framework of the African Feminist Standpoint focuses on culture, a concept not fully articulated in intersectional feminist theory. The theoretical framework I proposed analyzes multiple variables connected to Ghana's ethnic culture. This response will briefly elaborate on lineage systems, family structure, and geographical location to explain why girls tend to have lower formal educational attainments in Ghana.

In Ghana, culture is defined based on an individuals' ethnic group. In the Ghanaian context, ethnic groups are people with a common descent, migration history, similar physical characteristics, and customs, not fully defined or connected by blood relationships. The social position of girls and women is different, depending on the lineage system. I believe women belonging to matrilineal ethnic groups have greater privilege compared to women in patrilineal families. I make this assertion because, in matrilineal ethnic groups, children trace their descent through their mothers. Only females can pass kin membership on to their offspring. Therefore, women in matrilineal ethnic groups tend to receive some protection because kinship ties are traced through female members

Apart from the lineage system, the Ghanaian culture legally recognizes polygamy as a customary form of marriage. Polygamy permits a man to be married to more than one woman at the same time. Therefore, girls and women in polygamous families will have different experiences and educational opportunities. Most often, polygamous families are large, with few resources to provide educational opportunities for all children. Furthermore, polygamy is predominant in rural communities where traditional cultural norms are strict. With preference given to male children, girls and women in polygamous families have limited formal educational opportunities.

Additionally, the bride price payment, part of marriage rites, makes girls and women an economic resource for their families. The bride price is comprised of gift payments offered by a male suitor for marriage based on traditional customs. Thus, the bride's family accepts livestock (as practiced by ethnic groups in northern Ghana) or other moveable property (like local fabrics, drinks, traditional beaded jewelry, and money) as a form of compensation for the loss of their daughter's fertility and labour. This cultural practice can deter low-income families from investing in the formal education of their girl children.

I was born and raised in an urban community in Ghana. Besides attending private school for primary and secondary education, most families in my city were monogamous, and most children, irrespective of gender, benefited from having private school education. My documentary highlights the idea that lineage systems, family structure and size (monogamous or polygamous), and geographical location (urban or rural) construct the unique experiences of girls and women in Ghana. Through the lens of culture, girls' and women's experiences in Ghana can be more adequately articulated, a gap I addressed in feminist scholarship with my proposed theoretical framework.

Zita: Your turn, Reggie. Please tell me about your ongoing thesis project, what inspired you to focus on Asante Queen Mother, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, and how your work explores the strengths and resilience of Ghanaian and African women.

Reggie: In my experiences, stereotypes about African women and stories about their struggles have long permeated western media and many spaces in academia as, seemingly, the only definitive story about us. When there is a positive story about an African woman, it seems as though that is seen as the exception and could not possibly be considered a norm. I believe that such views are deeply problematic, especially as many stories of the strengths and triumphs of African women exist. Focusing on Nana Yaa Asantewaa, who was the *ohemaa* (queen mother) of Ejisu (in the Ashanti region of Ghana) in the 19th and early 20th century, is a way to challenge the notion that "there are only struggle stories of African women." Nana Yaa Asantewaa is recognized in Ghana and in parts of the diaspora for her contributions in fighting the British in the Anglo-Ashanti war of 1900-1901. She was successful in protecting the Golden Stool (a sacred symbol for the Asantes in Ghana) and in pushing for independence. Thus, I am exploring her story as an example of the resilience of African women on the continent. The Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) once said "the single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." I could not agree more about challenging incomplete stories in order to make room for more complete stories.

Reggie: Let us talk, now, about privileges and power dynamics informing your experiences in Ghana.

Zita: Within the context of Western culture, a woman who is highly educated with a PhD is considered empowered and liberated. However, within the African culture, a highly educated woman represents a foreign ideal of womanhood. In the Ghanaian and African cultures, womanhood is defined based on marriage and motherhood (having children and taking care of your family). Women who do not fulfill these cultural markers of womanhood are perceived as going against the collective norm—making a highly educated woman a target of reproach in the African context. There is a difference between how the Western culture views an empowered woman compared to the Ghanaian culture.

African women who have attained a high level of education and career success but are unmarried with no children occupy a unique space and navigate two paradigms. In one paradigm, a well-educated and accomplished woman is perceived as empowered and self-sufficient. The other paradigm is tied to oppression, because of cultural expectations connected to gender. The interesting part of feeling oppressed when it comes to not fulfilling the cultural expectations of womanhood is that older women often enforce prevailing cultural norms by questioning why a woman of a certain age is not married or does not have children. The role of older people as gatekeepers of cultural gender norms reminds me of the sociological term "hegemony," where an oppressed group consciously or unconsciously participates in their

oppression. I am privileged and oppressed at the same time because I have accomplished a lot in my career but have not fulfilled the cultural markers of womanhood based on Ghanaian cultural expectations.

Zita: Some may argue that Yaa Asantewaa's role as a matriarchal hero was shaped by her matrilineal lineage and social class (i.e., queen mother). What are your thoughts on this assertion?

Reggie: Certainly, in a matrilineal society like the Asantes, who trace decent through the female line and give recognition and respect to women, Asante queen mothers had an elevated role in society and, therefore, had the power to influence social and political arenas. I like to think a person on a stage with a microphone and an audience at an event will have more power to influence the people gathered than someone who is not even invited to that event. Some of Nana Yaa Asantewaa's well-known spirited speeches asking Asante men to fight against the British happened because, as a queen mother, she could attend these meetings in the first place, speak up, and rally the warriors.

Nonetheless, on the other hand, it is possible there could have been other queen mothers who had status and class but still could not have influenced the Asante political arena the way Nana Yaa Asantewaa did. Maybe there were other things Nana Yaa Asantewaa had that set her apart, that greatly elevated her in society. Perhaps it was her bravery, the strategies she adopted, a sheer determination to defend the Golden Stool, her desire to protect Asante sovereignty from the British, and more. The famous Yaa Asantewaa song below shows why she is considered a matriarchal hero by some.

Original in Twi	English translation
Yaa Asantewaa	*Yaa Asantewaa*
Obaabasia oko premo ano	*A woman who fights before cannons*
Waye be egyae	*You have accomplished great things*
Na wabo mmodene	*You have done well*
	(Boahen, 2003, pp.62-63).

Ghanaian historian Arhin Brempong (2000) states that:

> Nana Yaa Asantewaa's role in the 1900 resistance war exceeded the normal political and military roles of Asante women. She did not merely dare the men to fight. The men recognized in her a potential leader and elected her as the first female *osahene* (war-leader); it was an achieved, not an ascribed, position. (p.108)

This suggests that perhaps Nana Yaa Asantewaa's contributions exceeded the expectations or her roles and responsibilities as a queen mother.

Reggie: Ghana was the first Sub-Saharan African country to gain formal political independence from the colonizers in 1957. As a formerly colonized country, the official language of Ghana is English and there is no Ghanaian language that is officially recognized. Would you agree that the English language offers you recognition as "educated" and a global audience, for better or worse? How do you navigate this persistent post-colonial paradox?

Zita: I recognize that the use of English and the privilege of being Canadian-educated offers me recognition and the opportunity to share my work with a global audience. However, it is essential to acknowledge that all ethnic groups have their unique indigenous language or local dialect. Few of the dialects are used by the larger society in Ghana. The estimated number of indigenous languages spoken in Ghana varies from 30 to 81 (Opoku-Amankwa et al., 2015). So how does a country with heterogeneity in language maintain an inclusive national identity? Although English and formal education are colonial legacies, they have been used in the post-colonial era to create a unifying national identity of "one nation, one people," which is a famous phrase often used by the political elites in Ghana.

Even with indigenous languages in Ghana, a hierarchy exists and has privileged certain ethnic groups over others. During the colonial era, the Basel mission schools and the Wesleyan Church translated the English Bible into Twi, Ewe, and Ga (Opoku-Amankwa et al., 2015). European missionaries' use of indigenous languages (Twi, Ewe, and Ga) resulted in some ethnic groups gaining linguistic dominance in Ghana. After Ghana's independence from colonial rule, the government included Twi, Ga, Ewe, and Dagbani (an indigenous language used by groups in the northern region) in the language policy for education (Opoku-Amankwa et al., 2015). This language policy is evident in the selected languages (Dagbani, Twi, Ga, and Ewe) offered by the University of Ghana as compulsory courses for all students, in order to promote inter-linguistic competency. My reference to the colonial history of language policy emphasizes the dominance and hierarchy of some indigenous languages in Ghana and how the language spoken by an individual can be a source of relative privilege or oppression. In my view, English as the official language blurs the hierarchical privilege and power associated with dominant indigenous languages like Twi and fosters an inclusive national identity.

Reggie: Narratives in the west are often problematic in their projections toward the African continent (despite work being done by decolonial feminists, writers, scholars, etc.), which is a part of what my research is about: challenging problematic and distorting narratives. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's famous argument about the dangers of a single story resonates with the late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's saying, "Until the lions learn to tell their own story, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." What is your general response to this?

Zita: It is common knowledge that Western or European accounts of history and literature are often relied on as credible sources for learning about Africans. I call for Reparations of Knowledge, which means centering the voices of African scholars and using their work to tell African history and stories. No knowledge is value-neutral, implying that those who tell the stories of others will do so based on their own values and cultural praxis. I believe you and I are making our contributions through theory and storytelling as critical interventions in framing the experiences of Ghanaian women beyond Ghana, alongside those of other Black people from the African continent. However, change takes collective action, so it is crucial to consciously promote the work of African scholars, poets, artists, filmmakers, and storytellers through an inclusive curriculum of relevant media formats and content.

Zita: From your viewpoint, how can Africans use storytelling to solidify an African identity that moves beyond colonial ties or imperialism, for instance, in reference to women's empowerment in the African context.

Reggie: Storytelling is a powerful tool to convey a message, to evoke emotions, to speak truth, and to give people the opportunity to take their power back. In many cultures in Ghana, oral tradition—whether it was through music, proverbs, or stories—was a way to pass knowledge between generations and learn about ancestors, histories in communities, etc. Storytelling by Africans, especially in the diaspora, allows for our different cultures to be shared, for us to take the stage, take space, and share the plethora of experiences and stories that have shaped and influenced us and to break out of the monolithic box we are often placed in, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Storytelling, especially critical and decolonial stories, empower Africans to shape their own identities and challenge labels that have been damaging or deprived us of voice. With reference to women's empowerment, I believe there are many ways African women can be seen as empowered and that there cannot be one definition for African women. Any woman who is a farmer, teacher, mother, feminist, and/or fearless leader can be in the same room with each of the others and be celebrated for what they may be contributing to their respective communities. Empowered African women can take many roles and this message needs to be advanced in discussions about African women. Again, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) argues, when you "show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again,. . . that is what they become." I believe storytelling allows for people—for African people—to define our own authentic identities beyond colonial ties and definitions.

Reggie: Are there many examples of genuine active allyship from white folks that come to mind in your work or research? Do you also find that problematic questions are still asked of you or only in rare instances?

Zita: Canadian Feminist Sociologist Dorothy Smith noted that our standpoint shapes our experiences and worldviews. Standpoint refers to privileging the viewpoint and lived

experiences of individuals and groups. Therefore, it would be challenging to expect genuine active allyship regarding feminism as seen and practiced by my white colleagues. Although women as a group, collectively, may have experienced varying levels of oppression, the lived experiences of white women are different from African women. Based on this understanding, I have taken the initiative to become a leading voice in advancing and understanding African feminisms. Considering that African cultures outline different gender roles and expectations for women, it would be disingenuous to expect white feminists to understand the African woman's lived experience, because the Western culture prescribes different gender expectations. The expectation I have when it comes to genuine active allyship is for my white colleagues to interrogate their standpoints and how their social position is rooted in racial privilege that shapes their understandings of the oppression of women as a collective. Through critical reflection on their worldviews, white feminists will refrain from asking Black feminists problematic questions about our struggles, as the experiences of Black women are heterogeneous as are the experiences of white women.

Reggie: Michelle Obama once said: "When you walk through an open door of opportunity, you hold it open." How do you practice creating opportunities for people of colour in this community, especially African women?

Zita: I believe the best way of creating opportunities for African women is to lead by example. Leading by example means being exceptional and getting recognized for my work. I have done exceptionally well in my budding career, and my commitment to ensuring gender equity in formal education in Ghana has attracted a lot of awards and recognition. This includes receiving a research scholarship from the Canadian Federation of University Women in 2017. In addition, I was awarded the 2019 Global Research Leadership Award for students at the University of Saskatchewan because my doctoral study demonstrated international impact, fostered the diversification and inclusiveness of communities, and improved the quality of life in communities. Also, I was recognized by the Canadian Sociological Association as an outstanding graduating doctoral sociology student in 2020.

Another way of opening the door of opportunity in my community in Ghana involves mobilizing resources to support girls as they strive to complete primary education. For example, in 2017, I partnered with the Saskatoon chapter of *Days for Girl*, an international non-profit organization specializing in distributing reusable menstrual health products. Through this organization, I received 120 sanitary kits donated to girls in public schools in my hometown. Existing literature on the barriers for retention of Ghanaian girls in school emphasizes that lack of sanitary pads is a significant deterrent. I also gave out school supplies and scholarships for selected girls in my hometown based on academic achievement. However, I believe the most significant impact was being present in my hometown in Ghana and having direct interactions with female students to encourage them to stay committed to learning, because formal education offers many possibilities that can positively alter their life experiences. It is a privilege to be able to create change and light the path of opportunities for African girls and women.

Reggie: You are a role model and an inspiration in the Black community here in Canada for many and even beyond this community. How do you go about sharing your wealth of knowledge with others?

Zita: My belief in knowledge sharing inspired me to produce a documentary film from my doctoral research project. Early in my journey as a scholar, I understood the importance of making knowledge accessible to the public beyond the boundaries of traditional scholarship. I do use my documentary film and other short videos produced by Africans in my foundational sociology courses. Consequently, my students gain a lot of cross-cultural knowledge because my course content relies on African materials and resources to provide a comparative framework for understanding concepts like gender, culture, marriage and family, and education. Finally, I stay engaged with different groups and organizations where I often get invited to speak during Black History Month and other public events on diversity and understanding the African experience in North America.

Reggie: How do you get your news?

Zita: With the advancement of digital technologies, such as the internet, online platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow news to be delivered digitally. This era of digital technologies brings people together, irrespective of geographical locations and time differences. One of the positive aspects of digitalization is that interactive platforms have given Africans the chance to control narratives and shed light on stories not promoted by mainstream Western media. For example, last year, thousands of young Nigerians took to the streets to protest police brutality after a video of a man allegedly being killed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) went viral. Through organic coverage of the protest by ordinary Nigerians on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, the news became global, sparking what became known as the #EndSars demonstrations. Unfortunately, the dominant narrative by Western media of Africa and Africans is rooted in Eurocentric notions and ideas. However, I remain hopeful because digital media platforms continue to challenge traditional news reports and their power, as Africans today have the platform to contest narratives rooted in the historical experience of colonialism and imperialism. Thus, it is not an issue of how you get your news. Instead, African leaders should work on closing the digital divide between the continent and the West, so more ordinary Africans have access to internet services and can generate organic news reports by sharing their own stories on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Zita: What are some of the ways to combat deficient western narratives of Africa? How do we take ownership of our own voices?

Reggie: I think in everyday conversations we must strive to share the beauty of our cultures; we have to tell more complete stories about the continent. We have to applaud or celebrate many instances of #BlackBoyJoy, #BlackGirlMagic and #BlackExcellence, and shine a light on

positive and inspiring stories emerging from the continent. More importantly, we must correct people who make assumptions or ignorant comments. I think little remarks that are "almost harmless" like "I am going to Africa," are actually harmful if not checked, corrected, or further interrogated. Such a remark is not an acceptable sentence, especially when a person is visiting one single city in an entire continent. The follow up question to the person should be "Where exactly on the African continent are you visiting?" Bigger remarks like "those poor Africans" must be universally challenged for the generalization is obviously soaked in stereotypes.

A continent like Africa, which continues to thrive, despite so much wealth having been stolen by colonizers, cannot be considered poor. I like to think you cannot talk about poverty on the continent of Africa without discussing the role of the colonizers in this. You cannot dismiss the gold, ivory, diamonds, and wealth of many African countries and categorize them with all African countries that may not have those resources.

Have people considered that wealth may be beyond money? That it could include overall resilience, spirit, joy, and a people flourishing despite the possible obstacles they may face? Such a remark should have us asking the speaker why they are so desperate to categorize an entire continent together, what is the purpose or intention, and who does it serve when such a question is asked? I think thoughtful discussions combat these deficiencies.

We must take ownership by operating from a place of kindness and respect in response to ignorance, arrogance, and unwarranted statements paraded as curiosity. In 2022, people have access to knowledge, storytellers, researchers, writers, books, and events. Thus, problematic and alarming statements and remarks whether overt or subtle have to be addressed; there is no excuse. It is a choice to remain uneducated about an entire continent: if a person wanted to do their part and learn, they would. If they do not, it is on them and as far as we are concerned, we will do our part to get them on a path of recognizing the implications of their stereotypes. So, in everyday conversations we must take ownership.

Zita: What are some of the end goals you wish to achieve with your thesis on Nana Yaa Asantewaa? How does this critical work focus on celebrating the strength and resilience of African women?

Reggie: It almost sounds too simple, but I hope it allows us to demand more truthful and complete representations about African women. I hope that historical analyses of the resilience of people like Nana Yaa Asantewaa, the Dahomey Amazons of Benin, and Yennenga and Nzingha Mbande, for example, are discussed when people find themselves faced only with struggle stories. That stories about late activists such as Miriam Makeba of South Africa or the late Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai of Kenya, need to be told more. Contemporary female role models and leaders from the African continent such as Ghana's Ama Ata Aidoo or Nigeria's Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and other female storytellers, emphasize the strength and resilience of African women. Instead of people assuming such women must be the exception, they should ask instead: how many more are or were like her?

Reggie: What are your career goals? Are you actively working towards them? What do you hope your impact will be?

Zita: A goal I consider as a life commitment is establishing a non-profit agency that would partner with grassroots organizations across Africa to ensure girls' retention in public schools in order to complete their primary education. In terms of my career, I would like the opportunity to work with the World Bank Group or the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) as a senior gender specialist. With the experiences I would gather from working with one of the international agencies mentioned, I could offer consultancy services for the Ghanaian government on using policy to effectively include women in politics and other forms of leadership at the national level. Until women become an integral part of political and social institutions in Ghana, change will be slow and inclusion policies will represent the ideologies of the male political elites. The impact I hope to make is to promote gender-balanced leadership in Ghana and other African countries.

About the Authors

Abigail Zita Seshie obtained her doctorate in Sociology, and she is currently a postdoctoral fellow of the Department of Community Health and Epidemiology at the University of Saskatchewan, where she completed her doctoral studies. Her areas of research interest include gender and transnational feminisms, health equity, international development, and social policy. Zita is passionate about scholar activism and community service.
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Reggie Nyamekye is a storyteller, scholar, and advocate. Her research interests include Afrocentrism, gender, policies, decolonization, justice, and agency of African women. Reggie also promotes respect, inclusion, thoughtfulness, celebration of diversity, and positivity in her interactions with others. She remains an avid volunteer who believes in giving back, supporting, and contributing to make a difference in every community she finds herself.

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Book Reviews

Indian In The Cabinet: Speaking Truth to Power. By Jody Wilson-Raybould. Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2021. 352pp. ISBN 9781443465396

Indian in the Cabinet is a groundbreaking memoir that reflects Jody Wilson-Raybould's experiences and perspective as the first Indigenous woman in the simultaneous roles of Canada's Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Within this context, she describes how, within the Canadian political system, power and truth are disassociated from one another. In order for real change to occur, fraudulent power must be dismantled and replaced with truth as a primary commitment in the democratic system of the Canadian government.

As an Indigenous woman who is an academic, I was intrigued by this book for various reasons. Indigenous people have such a limited presence within institutions of power. We find ways to navigate these systems, despite multiple challenges. Although it is mostly a political memoir, the book speaks volumes about the intersections of gender and race from an Indigenous woman's perspective. Like many Indigenous people working in colonial spaces, Jody Wilson-Raybould gathers strength from the cultural teachings of her own nation. In particular, she reflect on her grandmother's lessons and life experiences in order to explain the desire to embark on a career in Indigenous and Canadian political systems. She frames these teachings as focused on both her Indigeneity and Canadian identities, and while her stories are intriguing, she struggles to validate her decision to try to change the colonial system from within. In this review, I discuss Jody Wilson-Raybould's descriptions of power dynamics and truth telling by relating her explanations of governance within Indigenous communities and at the intersections of gender within both Indigenous and western politics.

I read this book with the preliminary awareness of Wilson-Raybould's main audience—the Canadian public, by many of whom she is considered a hero for standing firm on the recent SNC-Lavalin Affair.[1] I am not versed in Canadian political history and language, yet I am keenly interested in the dynamics of Indigenous people working within Canadian politics. Wilson-Raybould's tone, language, and storylines are framed in a way that is careful and calculated—as a politician who is adept in maintaining the favour of the public. As an Indigenous person, her decision to engage with Canadian politics is described, but is not entirely convincing. She mentions her optimism about democracy multiple times in the book, despite the disheartening experiences she has endured within the same system; at the same time she describes the Indian Act, which is problematic colonialist piece of federal legislation that actively defines and controls Indigenous people in Canada. Convincing the reader of the desire to work within a system that has been fundamentally designed to eradicate Indigenous people since contact

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1 The SNC-Lavalin scandal resulted from attempted political interference with the justice system by Canada's Prime Minister's Office. An ethical review concluded that Justin Trudeau and others had improperly sought to influence Jody Wilson-Raybould to intervene in an ongoing criminal case against Quebec-based construction company SNC-Lavalin, by offering a deferred prosecution for $48 million Canadian dollars (CD) to Libya, between 2001 and 2011. The company ultimately admitted to offering $127 million CD in bribes funneled to Libyan officials to secure contracts. In protest to these pressures, Wilson-Raybould and Jane Philpot resigned from the Trudeau cabinet.

is difficult. With such a wide audience, this book was an opportunity to suggest pragmatic solutions to the long-standing, complicated relationship between Indigenous nations and the Canadian government, yet it does not.

The author draws comparisons between the practices and traditions of Indigenous and colonial governance systems and asks, "What does a politics of inclusion that recognizes difference look like in practice?" (261). Wilson-Raybould is committed to Indigenous people, people of color, and women achieving substantive equity, beyond task forces, policy reports, and commissions. She point out,

> My experience was so out of the norm for Ottawa that it needed to be exiled,
> pushed back to the margins – to which Indigenous people, people of color, and
> women have long been relegated in this country. (261)

It seems that this is where Wilson-Raybould is divided. She refers to the ways in which Indigenous governance systems do not foster division, because a healthy community is the focal point of good governance. The stark contrast between those systems and her Ottawa experience conflicts with her stance, as she does not want to side completely with Indigenous governance, yet the most problematic aspect of her story is the fact that despite the obvious colonial and genocidal policy that the Canadian government upholds, Wilson-Raybould is still adamant to focus on inclusion and maintaining a role within that system, even as an independent.

Wilson-Raybould recognizes that there are multiple Indigenous nations within Canada with different histories, and they have endured different levels of colonial influence. Because of this, gender is a conflictual area in governance. For example, the east coast began its colonial relationship much earlier than the west coast, so the history of diverse Indigenous communities is different in each territory. Gender binaries within Indigenous communities are a result of patriarchal colonial influences. Wilson-Raybould describes numerous examples of misogyny and racism experienced within her roles, and she retaliated by emphasizing "strength," "persistence," and "resilience" as ways of moving through the structural discrimination that is foundational to Canada (135, 204). These are words which Indigenous people—particularly women—are accustomed to embodying in Canada's colonialist context.

One example that I could not forget was a campaign speech where she was speaking to thousands of people and had a miscarriage while at the podium. She completed her speech while it was happening (68). Wilson-Raybould displays her ability to navigate the space of power and maintain truth, despite the very real and continuous patriarchal onslaught. The way that she carried herself throughout her time in Ottawa was a display of the generational strength of Indigenous women, despite colonial histories.

The Indian in the Cabinet contains constant references to Wilson-Raybould's grandmother, Pugladee, who is the highest ranking person in her clan. How Wilson-Raybould was taught embodies a traditional Indigenous governance system of knowledge. She describes how Indigenous worldviews on governance are foundationally different from Canada's political systems. Examples include practices such as putting community first, versus the Canadian

political culture's focus on competition and winning. She also discusses leaders as chosen, rather than voted into power in her nations, where hereditary chiefs pass on their traditions to the next generations. The concepts of power, control, and wealth are often furthest from the minds of traditional Indigenous leaders who were expected to give everything away in Potlatch ceremonies. Wilson-Raybould's grandmother confirmed that these worldviews contrast Canadian practices of governance in ways that cannot be reconciled, so Indigenous communities must find ways to embody good governance and non-gendered practices of leadership, without colonial interference.

Contemporary Indigeneity is complex, and not all Indigenous peoples, nations and communities are the same in their motivations. That being said, there are some similarities in traditional governance systems among Indigenous nations. An example is how Wilson-Raybould explains Indigenous governance leadership roles, which are based on a model of power that is aligned with truth and grounded in the ability to uplift the community so that everyone is thriving. The question is, then: is there also power in admitting the truths of the internal conflicts that arise from enjoying the power and money that comes with being in a high position or positions in the Canadian government? Wilson-Raybould's grandmother reflects on "the contemporary reality of Indigenous people, upon whom outside forces have had huge impacts. She asks whether we, as a people, "still really know who we are" (297). Hopefully, Jody Wilson-Raybould will continue to embrace her grandmother's teachings about Indigenous concepts of governance and leadership. *Indian in the Cabinet* provides readers with a chance to understand more deeply how an alignment with truthfulness might revise the terms of Canadian governance.

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Community as Rebellion: A Syllabus for Surviving Academia as a Woman of Color. By
Lorgia García-Peña. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2022. 147pp. ISBN 978-1-64259-719-6

Lorgia García-Peña puts into one text the many conversations had by women of color, including
me, in hushed voices in the hallways or offices of our institutions, with knowing, loving, and
affirmative glances shared at meetings, and by way of informal mutual aid groups, coming
together at kitchen tables. These are conversations that have helped faculty and students
of color survive and thrive in spaces not built or imagined for us. García-Peña begins her
book by naming this long history: "My writing comes from a place of deep gratitude and
humility as I recognize all that I am as the result of a collective process of becoming that is
informed by communal knowledge and shared imaginings" (p. 13). It is not then surprising
that I learned about the book from my own long-time mentor, my former dissertation chair, a
Latinx immigrant faculty of color, one of the founding mothers of Intergroup Dialogue, and
a community organizer at heart and in practice. I was visiting with her in her yard, sitting in
an oversized Adirondack chair, when she pushed the book at me insisting that I read it, saying,
"It blew me away… it normalizes, among other things, the bonds women of color faculty and
students co-create as they forge spaces of community and resistance!" She, herself, has served
as one of my bridges into academia, supporting, nurturing and feeding me as I negotiated
predominantly white institutions of higher education as a first-generation doctoral student
trained in the fields of Social Justice Education and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies,
and now as a faculty member, teaching in the field of Social Work.

Community and resistance are the overarching themes of this book, in addition to
liberation, as García-Peña frames it: "another way of imagining the academy and the university
is possible" (p.14), echoing similar sentiments by Arundhati Roy (2004). This book, rooted in
Lorgia García-Peña's own painful experiences in academe, is a roadmap for women of color to
recognize but not internalize oppressive systems and conditions, and to engage in strategies that
bring their full and ferocious selves into institutions of higher education. I would also argue
that this book is for white allies and co-conspirators who claim a commitment to the work of
eradicating white supremacy, as it offers a searing look at the ways these very folks have failed
García-Peña and others. The book is outlined as a syllabus, with each section dedicated to a
component of a course: course objectives, reading list, midterm, and final exam. Throughout
the book, García-Peña provides detailed examples of what she and other women and men
of color have encountered, endured, and resisted. She draws on community, as a powerful
antidote to everyday experiences of un-belonging, violence, and exclusion.

The first chapter, "Course Objective: On Being the One" focuses on the concept of being
the "one," which should be put in dialogue with Harper's (2011) concept of onlyness, defined
as "the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space
occupied by a few peers, role models and guardians from one's racial or group" (p. 190).
García-Peña describes the ways that being the one is a part of neoliberal agenda in higher

education where the labor of Black and Brown women is appropriated, while their bodies are abandoned and disposed of. As an Afro Latinx professor from the Dominican Republic in an elite institution, she was marked as a "stranger," someone who did not belong because of her way of speaking or engaging, and her stylistic choices. She urges the reader to push against these oppressive systems through beloved community and the collective, to rebel against the violence that is enacted daily, and to organize against the exploitation of women of color.

In the second chapter, "The Reading List: Complicity with Whiteness Will Not Save You," García-Peña aligns complicity with dynamics of internalized oppression and dominance, the ways in which people of color actively participate in racist systems, and white folks serve as accomplices in the "university's colonizing project of exclusion and belonging" (p. 50). She challenges the illusion of diversity and inclusion work, describing it as inadequate and hollow, and as work that ultimately upholds the status quo. It would have been helpful to further flesh out how institutions employ those terms and in what contexts the work of diversity and inclusion lives. Although she acknowledges the labor of essential workers during the pandemic, she does not address the same labor patterns within institutions of higher education where rankism has also resulted in differential treatment and expectations of faculty versus staff during the pandemic. What is one's role, particularly as faculty of color, in dismantling the practices that one benefits from?

In the third chapter, "Midterm: Teaching as Accompaniment," García-Peña discusses the establishment of the Freedom University, praxis embodied, in response to an American anti-immigration policy that targeted undocumented students. She also describes the recursive relationship between her teaching, scholarship, and activism, and the ways she co-constructs the classroom with her students as a site of rebellion. She names the imperative to not only create spaces for students' pain and trauma but for social justice. I was especially drawn to her framing of accompaniment as a liberatory practice, because it recognizes and affirms that our work happens with communities and not on their behalf.

In the closing chapter, "The Final Exam: Ethnic Studies as Anticolonial Method," García-Peña outlines the history of ethnic studies, and its importance as a discipline in decolonizing universities. She emphasizes the essential role of ethnic studies, adding to the gaps left by Eurocentric educational models, while acknowledging how the field remains undervalued and marginalized. She ends by inviting us to imagine a university where disciplinary barriers are dismantled, our work is rooted in the voices and perspectives of minoritized groups, and in subject to subject relationships in lieu of a subject to object relationships.

Lorgia García-Peña's text, rooted in personal and collective narratives, serves as a bridge for future faculty and students of color to envision what is possible when they organize collectively to dismantle institutions that do not serve them. She asks us to "freedom dream" (Kelly, 2002), drawing on our radical and renegade imaginations to demand substantive and collective accountabilities and change within our institutions and beyond.

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Podcast Reviews

Secret Feminist Agenda, **Season 4**

Website: https://secretfeministagenda.com/category/podcast/page/3/

The *Secret Feminist Agenda* podcast was first encountered by then-graduate student Andi Schwartz as assigned 'reading' in a Queer Pedagogies seminar. The seminar was part of a student-run initiative facilitated by co-reviewer, Morgan Bimm, who started the seminar series as a critical response to a lack of teaching resources available to graduate students. The podcast's aims and sensibilities spoke to our experiences and values both then, as first-generation university students and now, as emerging feminist media scholars.

Secret Feminist Agenda is recorded and produced by Dr. Hannah McGregor, an Assistant Professor of publishing at Simon Fraser University. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is McGregor's second podcast, which she began in 2017 with the aim of bridging academia and feminism and forging connections between feminists.[1] In addition to producing the *Secret Feminist Agenda* podcast, podcasting has become an integral part of McGregor's pedagogy[2] and research; she co-founded the SSHRC-funded Amplify Podcast Network to develop guidelines for peer reviewing podcasts. The original goals of the podcast, bridging academia and feminism and forging connects with feminists, remain the driving force behind season four, which is further organized around the principle of "keeping it local."

Season four consists of 30 episodes, half of which offer long-form interviews with feminists in academia, art, sex therapy, podcasting, Canadian literature, comedy, and more, which effectively highlight the various forms that feminism can take and offer a window into feminist friendships and community. While the theme "keeping it local" was challenged by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (interviews could no longer be conducted in person), the podcast consistently succeeded in prompting listeners to think about space and place as they relate to feminism and community.

In our review, we were struck by the following three themes: 1) critiquing the expert(ise); 2) the spaces and places of feminist thought; and 3) the politics and affects of community space.

1) In form, the scholarly podcast acts as a critique of the existing structures of academia. Through interviews with feminists like Dawn Serra and Khairani Barokka, the notion of expertise is critiqued alongside academia's role in perpetuating myths of excellence through citational and syllabi-building practices. Such critiques highlight the importance of DIY media, like podcasts, as spaces through which expertise can be critiqued and other points of view are circulated. Solo-recorded "minisodes" often engage with more personal

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1 McGregor started her first podcast, *Witch, Please*, as a collaboration with her friend and former colleague, Marcelle Kosman, in 2015.
2 In a review of season two of SFA, Anna Poletti suggests that the work done through the podcast is more akin to teaching than research (Poletti, 2019).

or affective topics; though we debated the merits of these episodes, we came to the conclusion that introducing affect and the personal into scholarship is both an important feminist project and a vital challenge to existing ideas about academic rigour.[3]

2) Through interviews with feminists across fields, including sex therapy (Episode 4.2), comedy (Episode 4.6), podcasting (Episode 4.8), and art (Episode 4.4), the podcast demonstrates the many places and spaces in which feminist thought is fostered; indeed, that feminist thought and critique does not belong solely to the academy. The complexities of public intellectualism or public feminism are compellingly discussed in Episode 4.7: Trans Rights are Human Rights through the lens of cancelled and protested "gender identity debates" scheduled for public spaces across Canada. Campaigns to cancel these events are framed by some as an attack on 'free speech' and thus, perhaps, an attack on healthy public intellectual exchange, but these activist efforts are themselves an example of public modes of feminist thought. This and other discussions throughout season four of *Secret Feminist Agenda* highlight the multiple spaces of feminist thought and the multiple complexities of thinking feminism in public.

3) In the spirit of "keeping it local," season four offers rich discussions of the politics and affects of community space. A favourite example is episode 4.14 with Hilary Atleo of Iron Dog Books in Vancouver, which explores the connection between small business and housing costs as well as the power of systems to foster or destroy community and communal affinities. Episode 4.15, a minisode about World Obesity Day, further demonstrates the malleability of (virtual) space via political intervention, and how the political occupation of space can foster solidarities and positive, communal feelings. The COVID-19 pandemic hit Canada midway through the season, around episode 4.16 with Kai Cheng Thom, whose work frequently engages with notions of disposability, accountability, and harm within queer communities. The intersection of Thom's work and COVID-19 serves as an acute reminder of both the affective and material significance of community, and the potential devastation of losing it.

In addition to these themes, the podcast incites interesting questions about the feminist and scholarly potential of the podcasting form. McGregor and colleagues have developed podcast peer review guidelines as a mechanism for folding podcasts into the institutional understanding of rigour, and we further understand *Secret Feminist Agenda* as rigorous in its feminist politics of accessibility and the feminist practice of critique. Podcasts can be understood as a feminist

3 In a review of season two of SFA, Carla Rice noted that the minisodes are where the podcast "shines," writing with admiration of McGregor's ability to address these more affective topics from both a personal and "big picture" perspective (Rice, 2019).

medium in that they often feature grassroots and DIY production, have a wider reach than more sanctioned forms of scholarship, and have the capacity to bolster women's, feminized, and otherwise marginalized voices. The feminist and scholastic merits of podcasting were explicitly discussed in episode 4.20 with Stacey Copeland and minisode 4.21, "Introducing the Amplify Podcast Network." As Copeland and McGregor discuss, women's voices have long been interpreted as unintelligent and unauthoratitive. Podcasting, with its grassroots and DIY sensibilities, has the potential to instill confidence in women, feminized and otherwise marginalized folks through building a practice of speaking; McGregor notes how podcasting has bolstered her own confidence in both academic and non-academic spaces.[4]

Oriented toward low theory and feminist media scholarship, we are perhaps already primed to welcome podcasts into the scholarly fold. In our view, *Secret Feminist Agenda* is exemplary of the benefits wrought by bridging traditional academic knowledges with low theory, community, and collaborative practices. It is our hope that, as academia becomes better acquainted with podcasts, they retain their radical potential, rather than become another research output taxing already overburdened academics.

Reviewed by Andi Schwartz and Morgan Bimm

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4 Similar arguments have been made by podcaster-academics, Raechel Tiffe and Melody Hoffman, who hosted the podcast, *Feminist Killjoys, PhD*, among others (Tiffe & Hoffman, 2017).

Engaged Scholar Journal Podcast Transcript

Secret Feminist Agenda, Season Four
Podcast review by
Andi Schwartz [A] & Morgan Bimm [M]

00:00:00   [INTRO MUSIC: DONKEY KONG BY MOM JEANS]

00:00:08 A   Hello, hello, hello! And welcome to the reviews section of a special issue of the _Engaged Scholar Journal_ on "Engaging Feminism: Challenging Exceptionalist Imaginaries." My name is Andi Schwartz, and my colleague Morgan Bimm and I will be reviewing season four of Hannah McGregor's podcast _Secret Feminist Agenda_.

00:00:28   [TRANSITION MUSIC]

00:00:32 A   I was particularly excited to be invited to review this project, because my research to date has been focused on femme internet culture. And I basically argued throughout my dissertation that memes and selfies are forms of femme theorizing. My undergraduate degree is in journalism from Carleton University, and I was a freelance journalist and writer before starting my graduate studies. So disseminating my research and my other scholarly ideas to a more general or a wider, non-academic audience has always been part of my practice. I've published bits of my scholarship in Canadian publications _Xtra, Herizons_, and _Flare_. I also write a zine series called Soft Femme that is all about femme theory. And I run an academic Instagram account called @acafemmeic. So I am very excited to be reviewing a podcast in a scholarly journal. So excited that I had to invite my frequent collaborator Morgan Bimm to help me, because she actually introduced me to the _Secret Feminist Agenda_ podcast when she assigned it to me in her queer pedagogies seminar series back in—what was that? 2019? So hello Morgan, and thank you for joining me for this review. Would you introduce yourself and some of the many hats you'll be wearing for this review?

00:01:51 M   Absolutely. Hi Andi. I love how we're pretending like we never talk, when really we talk all the time. And this is just, you know, a continuation of many of the conversations that we already have. Yeah. So as Andi has explained, we are pals and frequent collaborators. We met in the Gender, Feminist, and Women Studies PhD program at York University here in Toronto. And my research, like Andi's, is kind of preoccupied with this idea of what it means to think about cultural production in a way that privileges spaces of low culture and DIY cultures

in addition to the more kind of traditional modes of cultural production that are taken up and kind of valorized by the university. So my own research—my dissertation project looks at the cultural mainstreaming of 2000s indie rock, and I study TV, film, and early internet cultures of the era. And then as Andi mentioned, I've also been involved in some organizing and some programming in the department putting together this kind of scrappy, DIY, queer pedagogies collective that offers workshops and seminars to graduate students and early career faculty across the university, as well as an accessible, one-day conference with another colleague of ours, Margeaux Feldman. So yeah. Super stoked to be here. Super stoked to be talking about *Secret Feminist Agenda*. I've been a long-time podcast lover, and *Secret Feminist Agenda* was actually one of the podcasts that originally got me really excited about pods as a form of media and a form of feminist conversation.

00:03:29 A   I was wondering if like, before we get into the conversation about the themes of this season four, if you wanted to give us a little overview of what the podcast is all about?

00:03:32 M   For those of you who are familiar with Hannah McGregor's work, or who are *Secret Feminist Agenda* listeners—it's not her first podcast. She originally started *Witch, Please*, which is a feminist Harry Potter rewatch pod with her colleague and pal Marcelle Kosman when they were both based in Edmonton. And then *Secret Feminist Agenda* is kind of her second podcast project that she began as she kind of left postdoc world and entered into her position as a full-time faculty at Simon Fraser University. Both podcast projects, but *Secret Feminist Agenda* in particular, are kind of invested in recreating the best parts of academia. I think there's one quote from episode 4.8, so from earlier in the season that we're reviewing today, and they're saying, you know, if *Witch, Please* was about kind of recreating and amplifying the best parts of a graduate seminar, upper years seminar course—getting really nerdy and talking about texts that we really enjoy—*Secret Feminist Agenda* is really about distilling and pulling out the best parts of chatting with a colleague at a conference or kind of approaching somebody after a panel to pick their brain about that one really cool thing that they said. So it's a series of conversations, but it's also a series of conversations that's really interested in illuminating and getting really excited about different aspects of feminist life—to borrow from Sara Ahmed, right?—and activism and academia and kind of academia-adjacent ways of moving through the world that we can learn from together.

00:05:15 A   Thank you for that overview. So yeah. We're going to be focusing on season four, and so I think we'll just kind of dive into some of the themes that we pulled out in our review. The first one that I wanted to highlight is one I'm calling critiquing the expert, or the notion of expertise. You know, in the project of low theory and public scholarship, I think that this is a really important theme. There are some really specific examples, like in episode 4.4 about—it's called "Off Mic Conversations." So there's like this specific critique of Foucault and like can we stop centering Foucault in a conversation about citational practice? And I think in

the same conversation, there's also—they talk about Margaret Atwood and like the role that academic structures play in creating these superstar academics, I guess. So they were kind of saying like, well, if English departments would stop assigning Atwood, maybe we could stop talking about her. [laughs] So I thought that this was a really, really interesting theme. And it showed up in a couple of different ways, like around what is—who is the expert? And I think that this is like a feminist contention, this notion of like "who is the expert?" has been a real question. This kind of conversation really brings into focus the importance of alternative or DIY media like podcasts as one of the ways that we can critique expertise as well as circulate other points of view.

00:06:53 M   Yeah! I mean, I think we both agreed that this was a really prominent theme across the pod but in this season in particular. And I think it works in a couple of different ways. As you already alluded to, I think there's this idea of locating expertise and locating knowledge outside of traditional academic structures. And this functions both in like the materiality of the podcast itself and like what that means from a production point of view and a research output point of view, but also the folks that Hannah is talking to and interviewing. I think it also functions in terms of age and seniority. So we have like a couple of really wonderful episodes from this season where Hannah McGregor is interviewing younger scholars, emerging scholars—her RA for the SpokenWeb project at one point, Stacey Copeland. And so I think there's this troubling of the idea that, you know, knowledge can only flow in one direction. And younger scholars are always kind of primed to learn from their mentors and from older folks within the academy—there's that, as well.

00:08:04 A   Yeah. I think like this idea shows up in both—and I think it's important to mention in both form and content. So I was talking about citational practice: who are we citing? Who are we assigning? And how do we contribute to creating this expert? But also like, you know, the academy as the only way in which expertise can be produced. One of the minisodes that stood out to me was episode 4.3 on "Enthused." So I wanted to note this one because in this episode, Hannah McGregor is talking about bringing enthusiasm to her work and how like the kind of idea of a rigorous, prestigious scholar is one that is very serious and unaffected. The critique of that was like bringing in your enthusiasm for your work, and how does that change the shape of academia? So I thought that was also really, really interesting.

00:09:00 M   Absolutely. Yeah. I think one of the things that really drew me to Hannah McGregor's work when I discovered her, you know, all those years ago was the joy with which—and the enthusiasm with which she approaches these conversations. A really common refrain on the *Witch, Please* podcast with Marcelle Kosman was, "We're critiquing this thing, or we're talking about this thing, *because* we love it so much." You know? The notion of critique and joy isn't mutually exclusive, and shouldn't be mutually exclusive. Because it actually makes for much stronger scholarship.

00:09:33 A   Yeah. I love that point. And I think that's also like one of the other things I love about this podcast is that it's a way of critiquing expertise but also offering something else. Because I don't think it's that exciting or that helpful, really, to only offer critique. Like I think it's really amazing when people offer critique paired with creation. So that's what I really appreciated about it. And I think that that's like—brings a bit of nuance to that joy and criticism that you were just talking about.

00:10:03 M   Yeah. And I think a theme that kind of emerges over the course of this season in particular—you know, it began in summer 2019 and wrapped in late 2020. So it really kind of did encompass the COVID-19 pandemic kind of taking over the collective consciousness. This theme of hope becomes really, really important, particularly later in the season. And I know we'll probably talk about this a bit more, but yeah. Just returning to this idea that these aren't mutually exclusive ideas or affects, you know? We can critique and we can have these scholarly conversations but it's also important to kind of retain hope and joy and connection in the midst of all of that as well.

00:10:47 A   Yeah. That's a really, really beautiful sentiment. Because we're kind of already talking about affect, one of the other themes that we had noted we wanted to talk about was the politics and affects of space. So I really appreciated the connection in episode 4.14 with one of the owners of Iron Dog Books about the ways that like physical spaces become community hubs, and the politics and the systems that either enable or disable this. So they were talking about, you know, the act of curation in a book store. Like what politics that are involved in your curation of your inventory can be welcoming or signal the kind of expectations for this space in a way. And so they were talking about small businesses and they were talking about also—you know, in Vancouver, much like here in Toronto—but maybe even more—the cost of housing is like astronomical. And so they were thinking about these two things in relation to each other. Like we are often thinking about the cost of housing, but they also got into the conversation that the cost to small businesses of operating and how these two things go together. So I thought that that was really interesting. So thinking about the politics of the creation of space in this really broad but also interlocking, overlapping way was really interesting.

00:12:13 M   Totally. And I think it's really interesting, as well—you know, season four begins very grounded in the physical space, you know? In the first episode, Hannah McGregor is explaining that because she's had a few years to settle into Vancouver, she's really invested in this idea of exploring the local and really exploring those connections to local businesses and activists and other community members. And obviously that's really turned on its head. As the season goes on, COVID-19 arrives on the scene and everything is forced to shift into this much more insular kind of production mode, recording over Zoom and speaking to folks from further away. So again, I think there's this kind of parallel thing at work here where the content of this season— similar themes are reflected in the production and in the materiality of the podcast itself.

00:13:08 A   Yeah. I think it was also really interesting—so now we are in calendar year three of COVID-19 as we are recording this episode, or this review. [laughs] So I noted that it was really interesting to be listening to something—I think it was kind of the first time that I was listening back to something that was happening—that was kind of watching the pandemic hit.

00:13:31 M   Yeah. Just that dissonance, I guess, between those two spaces—the recording space and the listening space, now, two plus years later—is definitely interesting.

00:13:43 A   Yeah. Obviously like recording over Zoom like we're doing now doesn't sound as intimate sometimes. Because you can hear space in between the guest and the host. I think it was really around like episode 4.16, which is a conversation with Kai Cheng Thom, where this shift really happens. And I think that's really interesting, too, to think about loss of community happening because of a pandemic also in relation to a lot of Kai Cheng Thom's work, which is about kind of like disposability or—I kind of wanted to avoid using the term 'cancel culture,' because it's just like super loaded. But yeah. I think they talk a lot about accountability, disposability, and these kinds of community politics. So it was interesting to think about, I guess—yeah, the kind of scale of loss of community that can happen. So it was kind of a really acute reminder of the importance of community and like our responsibility to community. Is there a way in which we can think about this podcast as an act of creating community or showing responsibility for community?

00:14:58 M   Yeah. It's a great question, right? And I think something else that they spend a lot of time chatting about in this particular episode is this idea that there are groups of folks who have been innovating and who have been building community in alternative ways forever. So queer folks and racialized folks, trans folks. And so this idea that—which I think we've all engaged in conversations about this over the last two years—but the idea that the pandemic has really forced us to come face-to-face with the ways in which we can't always rely on institutions and governments and universities to look after us. And so what would it look like to invent alternative or, you know, historically very precedented but still non-traditional ways of reaching out and connecting and folding folks into our spaces and into our communities in a way that is still safe?

00:15:54 A   Yeah. I think we'd also had some thoughts about thinking about what it does to take these conversations public and the kind of extra responsibilities that a host takes on in volunteering this scholarship and activism and, you know, just kind of like political discussions in such a public way. I guess I'm thinking about this in relation to the Iron Dog Books episode about like—you do what you can to create a particular space that communicates kind of inherently what the expectations are when you're in this space. But then there were also—I think Hannah mentions at some point the kind of jarring, in a way, experience of realizing that oh, not everyone who listens to this podcast shares the exact same kind of politics. And then

what do you as the host do with that with that information? What responsibility do you have as a podcast host or other kind of public intellectual, I guess, to respond?

00:17:02 M   Yeah. There's a way in which—to a certain extent, you know, the responsibility or the accountability of public-facing work is so much different and in some ways so much more than kind of traditional academic publishing avenues. Obviously we're doing this very funny thing of reviewing a scholarly podcast for a scholarly journal via podcast, so we thought it might be worth some time talking about the form itself and sort of what—yeah, what opportunities might be offered here that other media don't.

00:17:38 A   Yeah. So I think this really connects to the first theme that we mentioned, this idea of critiquing the expert and creating this space in which this critique can exist. So a lot of the conversations are with academics—many are not, too. But it's a space in which the critiques of the institution can be made because they're not—it's not bound by the structure of being held within the institution. Also in doing that, in like having these conversations with such a wide range of feminist thinkers, the podcast really demonstrates that feminist scholarship, feminist pedagogy, feminist activism happens in like a wide variety of mediums. So that includes sex therapy, comedy, podcasting of course, art, and all other kinds of forms. So it shows, really, that critique does not belong to the academy and like scholarship does not belong to the academy.

00:18:40 M   What is kind of uniquely feminist about podcasts and about this scholarly podcast in particular? If we think about podcasts, again, as a form—putting on the media studies scholar hat—yeah, they are in many ways a lot more accessible for folks than taking a class, than stepping into traditional university spaces. And so that question of accessibility and of having conversations and choosing language that is going to be kind of legible to a wider audience I think is a really core tenet and a really core value of the *Secret Feminist Agenda* project as a whole.

00:19:19 A   Yeah. I actually really enjoyed—there was a couple of episodes on the podcast about podcasting or like talking to other podcasters—

00:19:26 M   Very meta.

00:19:27 A   Yeah. [laughs] Very meta. And I think they were some of my favourite episodes. One of the things that really stood out to me was, in the conversation with Stacey Copeland, was the idea of voice and particularly women's voices. And women's voices being interpreted as like not very intelligent-sounding, not very scholarly-sounding, and not very serious-sounding. And this has been taken up by a couple of different people. I thought it was really interesting, Hannah talking about how the practice of doing a podcast like helped to develop

this confidence in her own voice and just a comfort with speaking. Which I think is a very feminist outcome. Which is probably not even planned, but it's something that's happened, I think, through the course of podcasting.

00:20:21 M   Totally. I mean, I think whether we're conscious of it or not, right? A lot of us kind of come up through academic and scholarly spaces with this idea that traditionally quote-unquote "male" voices confer authority. There's all sorts of writing on like NPR voice, right? And kind of Ira Glass, and that whole vibe [laughs]. And so I think this idea that *Secret Feminist Agenda* is kind of modelling this type of academic conversation that is not invested in recreating that and is in fact openly critical of that, you know? We're keeping in the laughs, we're keeping in the jokes and the curse words. And alongside all of that, there's this really intense, wonderful conversation about theory and about activism happening. Again, this idea that those two things aren't mutually exclusive is really powerful. Yeah, I mean just related to this question of what are the possibilities and what are the opportunities for scholarly podcasts—you know, this idea of intimacy and of an audio medium potentially being a really effective way to build a listener's or an audience's connection to the ideas being discussed. Obviously I'm intensely biased, because I'm a popular music studies scholar, but I think this idea of there being a particular kind of space that is created whenever you're kind of listening in on these kinds of conversations is a really important one. And is definitely something that I've felt over the years as a frequent podcast listener.

00:22:05 A   Yeah. So one of the reasons I really wanted you to join me in this review is because you are moving into a research project about podcasts. So I wanted to also hear—like in your framing of that project, what do you think is scholarly about a podcast? What do you think is feminist about a podcast?

00:22:27 M   I mean, I think the thing that's really incredible about podcasts is it has the capacity to be such a grassroots form of media, right? It's not always. And I think it's—I mean obviously it's really hard. You still have to have certain types of technical knowledge and certain types of access and privilege to create, like with anything else. But by and large, I think the reason why we've seen podcasts emerge as this really exciting space for women and queer folks and racialized folks who have been kind of historically kept out of mainstream media spaces is because of that question of possibility and of access. And by those same virtues, I think a lot of those same things continue to kind of preclude podcasts from being folded into media and Canadian media writ large. So there's one episode—I think it might be in the Stacey Copeland episode? They definitely discuss it at some point in the season. Where podcasts continue to not be included under certain federal arts granting structures. So there's still kind of—they're still a fairly new form of media, and they're still not really accounted for in a lot of the ways that would both lend legitimacy to them as a space for conversation and also like support their future, as well. Like I know one of the big conversations happening in podcast scholarship

is this question of like archiving. Like how are these things being preserved? How are these conversations being cared for? So that future audiences, and in this case future scholars, can kind of go back and tap into the conversations happening here. And so as much as it's—we can talk about the project of *Secret Feminist Agenda* as being really interesting from a publishing perspective, from a point of view where we're critical of traditional academic outputs and we're seeing that terrain kind of shift and change in real time, I think it's also a really valuable project for the attention that it's bringing to the ways in which we can preserve podcasts. And kind of—yeah, the ways that we can put them in this framework where they're valuable not just for the conversations as they're happening now, but for people to return to those in time.

00:25:14 A   You know, I think we're both scholars who do what Morgan often terms as front-facing—or no, sorry, "public-facing scholarship" I think is your term—the term that you use the most. But yeah. This sort of accessible form of scholarship. So when we're doing a podcast or a zine or whatever that's scholarly, I think the question of rigour comes up. Because outside of the academy, outside of the structures of the peer review and the standardized article and, you know, a dissertation—all of these different kinds of structures. Outside of that, how do we know that it's scholarly? [laughs] And I'm laughing because this is a bit of a devil's advocate question. But it's an opportunity to talk about it. So I'm just curious about your thoughts on that, Morgan?

00:26:07 M   I think in a lot of ways, the gift or the opportunity of *Secret Feminist Agenda* is kind of offering this alternate model, right? So rather than kind of reproducing or reifying those traditional values of academic publishing, which is exclusivity, we're going to hide it behind a paywall, and you're going to have to have a particular type of vocabulary to engage with these ideas—the rigour that Hannah McGregor brings to the project—and there is a lot of rigour—but it kind of takes a different form. You know, it's like are we covering all of our bases? Are we considering intersectionality in particular kinds of ways? And so I don't think it's any less rigorous. I think it's perhaps just offering a different framework.

00:26:57 A   Right. Like it's rigorous in its commitment to feminist politics, which include accessibility, which include the critique of the academy as this inaccessible, often violent institution that excludes particular groups of people on purpose.

00:27:15 M   Yeah, absolutely. I have here, written in my notes as well, "care as a kind of rigour." I think in previous seasons of *Secret Feminist Agenda*, there was a self-care corner where Hannah and her guests very explicitly kind of engage with these questions of what care might look like within these structures. So yeah. I think there's a lot of potential and there's a lot of power in those types of rigour, as well. You know, what does it look like to build those kinds of mechanisms into our practices as scholars from the ground up?

00:27:55 A   Yeah. And I think that's like a really important project for feminist scholarship in general.

00:28:00 M   Totally.

00:28:01 A   But I also think—so like we were having this conversation where we were like, okay, maybe there might be critiques of this podcast or other kinds of public scholarship that are about rigour. Because maybe there's some hesitancy to let go of these structures. Critiques may come from people who obviously benefit from these structures, who like the exclusivity of the institution and all of that. But I do think it is also like so important to note that Hannah, in collaboration with a few other folks, have worked to develop guidelines for peer-reviewing podcasts. So there are guidelines for it to be rigorous in similar ways to other kinds of work produced in the academy. So I think that that's really, really interesting. I think the other three seasons of *Secret Feminist Agenda* have been peer reviewed. And the peer reviews were also done kind of in podcast form, or like in recorded form. And the—we're starting to see now, I think, other projects taking up the podcast as a potential scholarly output of their research and using these same guidelines that have been developed by Hannah through the Amplified Podcast Network. So Hannah and colleagues. So yeah. So podcasting isn't outside of the concept of rigorous scholarship. It is actually becoming adapted or I think folded into these structures.

00:29:38 M   Yeah. More and more so. And I think that's also part of just like a wider conversation happening across academia, you know? As the field or as the industry becomes more precarious, we're looking to these ways of troubling traditional ways of doing things. Because honestly they don't serve a lot of scholars, especially young and emerging scholars. We're learning that we can't really count on these traditional and—I'm just going to go ahead and say outdated modes of publishing or of moving through academic space. And so I think it's really exciting that—we had this moment in our chat the other day. I think it's really exciting that something that is so explicitly challenging those norms is happening in Canada and is happening in such an exciting kind of project form.

00:30:31 A   Yeah. Totally! So then the other point of critique, I guess, we wanted to engage with is the kind of format of the alternating minisodes versus longform interview on alternating weeks.

00:30:49 M   Yeah! Absolutely. So I think just going back to the podcast as a form where you are perhaps a little more vulnerable as a scholar, right? You are perhaps a little more accountable to your public. I think Hannah McGregor is very explicit from the top of this season about aiming to make it a more sustainable project. So switching to a twice-monthly or, as she calls it, "fortnightly" publication schedule. And another kind of conceit of that sustainability model is alternating shorter minisodes with these longer interviews. We can definitely kind of draw

a direct line between the conversation about sustainability and that transparency to those feminist values that we were just talking about. And then I think there's also another really important conversation to be had—which you brought up, Andi—around the particular kinds of conversations and particular kinds of affect that kind of show up in these minisodes versus the longer, sometimes more focused interview format.

00:32:02 A   Yeah. And I think that part of the reason why the minisodes are important is because they do bring—and going back to going back to episode 4.3, "Enthused," I think Hannah's quite explicit about wanting to bring affect into your scholarly identity and your scholarly practice. And that is part of critiquing—as we kind of mentioned at the top, kind of critiquing the structures of the academy that is like such a crucial element of this podcast project. And I also wanted to note that Carla Rice is a scholar at the University of Guelph who actually was one of the peer reviewers of I think season two, if not other seasons of *Secret Feminist Agenda*. But I just wanted to kind of note that in her review of it, the minisodes were actually a standout for her. So while we were wondering, oh, are these as valuable for other people? Carla Rice in particular, this was like a highlight. So I think that that's—and I think that they were a highlight because they offered this kind of meditative opportunity for taking like a little break and also having the opportunity to talk about feelings more. Like feelings or affect or things that are more maybe internal. Anyway, I just wanted to note that I thought that was really interesting.

00:33:31 M   Yeah! I guess—totally. I think one metaphor, one analogy I maybe want to draw on here—again, my research is feminist popular music studies, and so I'm thinking a lot about these questions of publics and audiences and what it means to be accessible to fans in particular ways. It feels weird to self-identify as a fan of Hannah McGregor, but here we are.

00:33:59 A   [laughs]

00:34:00 M   But there's this notion that I run across in my research of like, you know, back stage versus front stage spaces. And so particularly in writing around things like punk house shows, one of the values and one of the kind of cool things about those types of performances is that the performers are so accessible and they are just kind of right on your level, both figuratively and literally. And so I think, you know, we can talk about podcasts on the whole as a medium or as a form that doesn't have a lot of back stage space. Or certainly less so than something like a peer reviewed journal article. And I think to a certain extent that's mediated, obviously, by editing and by the choices that the host makes. But I think there's something really cool happening in the minisodes, where Hannah's actually really intentionally calling attention to that. And kind of welcoming you into the more kind of mundane or everyday or like that back stage space even more. Which is perhaps why they kind of resonate so much with particular listeners.

00:35:23 A   Yeah. It's really interesting to think about the form and like what it does. Okay. So what do you think are some of the explicit objectives of season four of *Secret Feminist Agenda*?

00:35:35 M   Yeah. I mean, I think—I keep coming back to this idea of connection, right? Like I think Hannah is really explicit about—at the end of the day this started out as a project for her to meet people and find friends in a new community and kind of have these conversations within a bit more of a structured container. And so I think in that regard, you know, it's a complete success. There's been four wonderful seasons and tons of incredible guests and, you know, us as audiences, as listeners have kind of joined her on that journey. So I think in very simplistic terms, it accomplished those objectives.

00:36:17 A   Yeah. And I think one of the goals for this season anyways, from the outset, was named as "keeping it local." And this obviously became complicated with the onset of COVID-19 pandemic. But I think throughout, as we've noted, the kind of idea of place and space like remained constant. I do think that it really succeeded in making us think about space. Like the spaces and places in which feminist activism or public intellectualism can occur. Like by talking to all sorts of different feminists in different fields doing different projects. And I think many of the guests on the podcast really talked about like, yeah, the creation of space. Whether it was through like the bookstore episode or like through histories of drag, thinking about spaces as they evolve—I think that that was actually pretty successful.

00:37:13 M   The only other thing I guess I would add to that or the only other thing that comes to mind about this question of objectives is that there was a really—this came up a few different times over the season, but there was a really explicit and really gorgeous conversation in the very final episode of this season with Eugenia Zuroski around this question of what does it mean to even have objectives for activism or for feminist work? Because so much of the time, you know—I think I used this metaphor the other day when we touched base—but I think so much of the time, there isn't a kind of finite task or a sense of—a place where you'll get to where you feel like it's finished. The goal is really just kind of doing the thing or trying the thing in new ways, and kind of leaving more room for those who come up behind us. And I think in that way—I mean, it's kind of a horrible paradox, right? It's a goal about not having goals. But I think in that way, *Secret Feminist Agenda* is also modelling this process where the way that scholarly publishing works is being questioned and broken apart and put back together. And so maybe the goal is that there is no goal. Maybe the goal is just that it happened and it was cool and we got to listen, you know?

00:38:58 A   Yeah. And I'm also thinking about the theme for this special issue of the *Engaged Scholar Journal*, thinking about like collaboration. And I think producing things in collaboration is still, I think, a bit of a friction against the idea of the individualist, neoliberal

scholar. So I think that like in seeking out to like interview all of these different people about their ways of engaging with feminism, you know, broadly, is a really—is demonstrative of like, yeah, a critique of neoliberalism. The neoliberal university. And I think—yeah, and what is the theme? "Challenging Exceptionalist Imaginaries." So it's like, we don't get there on our own. Collaboration is really important. And I think that doing a podcast with all of these interviews with all of these people and still emphasizing citational practice throughout—even though it's a podcast and you don't necessarily read it, but there's the show notes and there's ways of citing people through speech, of course. So I think that the form of a podcast is—yeah, really underscores those kind of feminist challenges to the university that are about like collaboration and politicizing citational practice. So I think in that way, too, it succeeds at like creating a model of feminist scholarship.

00:40:41 M   Yeah! Absolutely. And I think that kind of brings us full circle. Obviously, you know, you were asked to do this review, you invited me on board. And so I hope, yeah—in some small way, I hope this kind of peek into our process of thinking about this podcast and this project kind of mirrors those same politics and those same objectives.

00:41:09 A   Yeah. It kind of reminds me of—you were talking about the backstage analogy. And when we were kind of conceptualizing this—how we were going to do this review, we had kind of thrown around this idea of calling this podcast slash review "Show Your Work." Because the conversations—it's like actually kind of cool to be able to have access to like the conversation part, which feels like more of the backstage part of the review. Like we're kind of working it out. It's not concise and finely tuned yet. And so I think it's really important to kind of show the process, and I think that's also kind of like what a podcast does. Like you've mentioned, it invites an audience into the more intimate process of thinking, rather than only showing the like very polished final product.

00:42:09 M   Yeah. The more intimate and also like the more kind of gatekept, for lack of better terms. Like I think we've both had lots of conversations about the kind of… you know, the knowledge that you only—or the things you only find out about the university once you're in the university. And so I think kind of making that messy work in progress a little more public and a little more legible is only going to encourage people who are maybe intimidated by that kind of—yeah, those kinds of like institutional knowledge that they wouldn't otherwise have access to.

00:43:01 A   Mhm. Yeah. I think that's really cool. But I will be interested to see how podcasting does get folded into, you know, scholarship. And how we'll feel about it. [laughs] You know, as—yeah, as it becomes more integrated.

00:43:25 M   Yeah. And how it will kind of probably continue to exist in tension with these longer ideas about institutional legitimacy and authority.

00:43:38 A   Yeah. To be continued! [laughs]

00:43:38   [TRANSITION MUSIC]

00:43:46 A   So thank you everyone for listening to our podcast style review of season four of the podcast *Secret Feminist Agenda* by Hannah McGregor. I'm Andi Schwartz. You can find me on the internet, on Instagram, at @acafemmeic or my website andischwartzwrites.com.

00:44:08 M   Thank you to Andi for having me on this one-off episode of *ESJ* reviews. You can find me on the internet at morganbimm.com or on Twitter at @bimmbles, because I am very funny.

00:44:27   [TRANSITION MUSIC]

00:44:30 A   This review was recorded in Toronto, Canada, a place originally known as Tkaronto, which has been taken care of by the Anishinabek nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat.

00:44:42   [OUTRO MUSIC: DONKEY KONG BY MOM JEANS]

From the Editor

Reflection on the Spring 2023 Special Issue on Engaging Feminisms: Challenging Exceptionalist Imaginaries

Lori Bradford

Chiasmus is a rhetorical device in which the second part of a piece of writing is a mirror image of the first. It is not necessary for the second part to exactly mirror the words that appear in the first part—that is a different rhetorical device called anti-metabole—but rather concepts and parts of speech are mirrored.

Lori Bradford
Image credit: Victoria Schramm

As I read the articles that were so carefully crafted for this issue, I thought about how by exposing exceptionalisms, we become exceptional; that is, as Lovrod and Mason suggest, the very same researchers, writers, documentarists, activists, and others who expose inequities and fight to change them face incessant erasure. I learned a great deal about the breadth of work pursued by the scholars who generously shared their work in this volume. They do this work despite being persecuted for it by their colleagues; by their own institutes' governing systems (i.e., review ethics boards, peer-reviewers, departments); and by social norms like those challenged in the Exchanges in this issue. Certain phrases stuck with me and I used those to compose my own chiasmus:

> Sustainable feminism? Feminism sustained.
> > The 'gender person', the 'fat person', homeless yet home
> > in their skin, disciplined in their ubiquitousness.
> > > Purity and pollution of caste. Cleansed not by being forced
> > > together, but by forcing others to understand why the universal
> > > 'we' is not always desired.
> > Nudged by institutions away from feminist decolonial practice, but in
> > dancing on them, over them, we refuse the norms.
> Feminism sustained? Sustainable feminism.

As you read and listen to the written and audio pieces in this issue, please think about how you can mirror what you've learned in ways that resonate with you.

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