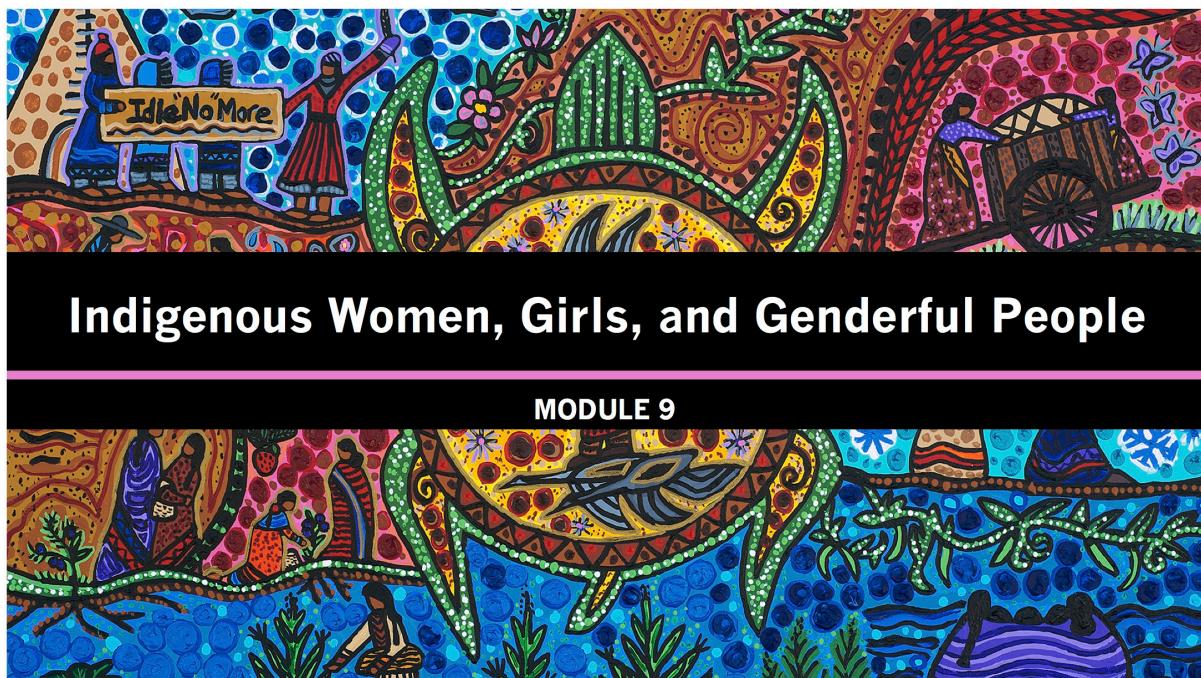




UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF NATIVE STUDIES

Indigenous Canada: Looking Forward/Looking Back



Cover Image: Artwork by Leah Dorion

The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory and respects the history, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our institution.

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Table of Contents

Module 9 Introduction	2
Section One: Indigenous Concepts of Gender	3
Gender and Sex	3
Gender Roles.....	4
Cross-Gender, or Third and Fourth Gender Identity.....	5
Examples from Indigenous Languages.....	6
Conceptualizing Gender.....	6
Two-Spirit	7
Sexuality.....	8
Women's Roles and Social Status.....	8
Colonization and Gender	9
Colonialism as a Gendered Project.....	10
Indian Act and Gender Discrimination.....	10
Section Two: Indigenous Women	11
Stereotypes and Representation.....	11
Indian Princess	12
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW)	13
Court Cases Confronting the Indian Act.....	15
McIvor Case.....	16
Indigenous Women's Groups.....	18
Indigenous Feminism.....	18
Conclusion	20
Efforts for Equality.....	20
References	22

Module 9 Introduction

"A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors nor how strong their weapons."
(Cheyenne Proverb)

Powerful assurances and statements, such as the above quote, acknowledge and recognize that Indigenous women remain the backbone of Indigenous communities. This lesson explores the resilience and vitality of Indigenous women, girls and genderful folks and celebrates the influential roles and responsibilities shared with Indigenous men as nation builders. However, as much as this lesson seeks to examine the strength of Indigenous women, we must first take into consideration why there is an entire lesson devoted to this topic at all.



Figure 1 Four Native women at Bernard Harbour, NWT, 1925; Credit: Library and Archives Canada

Indigenous women currently live in an appalling state of extreme marginalization, and oppressive state policies such as the Indian Act, genocidal tactics like residential schools, and sexist policies have all worked to police and shape attitudes surrounding Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk (Lenon 2000). Including the examination of colonial history as it applies to Indigenous women does not dishonour the resiliency and strength that they represent today, but it is required in order to return to our rightful position and equal status in the world today, as healers, hunters, intellectuals, nurturers and leaders.

This lesson begins with Indigenous concepts of gender and explores some of the understandings of gender and sexuality across a range of Indigenous cultures, which leads into a discussion about the ways that Indigenous women traditionally held critical roles and responsibilities within their communities.

One of the key messages of this lesson is how colonization is a gendered project (Maltz and Archambault 1995, 239–241). This lesson outlines the ways that the Indian Act discriminated against women and discusses the issue of violence against indigenous women, the ways Indigenous women in Canada have fought to defend their rights, and Indigenous feminism.

Section One: Indigenous Concepts of Gender

Gender and Sex

Sex as a concept is used to refer to the kinds of biological differences that exist in terms of genetic makeup, anatomy, hormones, and physical characteristics. Commonly, sex is seen as a binary consisting of male and female, but scientists now recognize that gender and sex are not always so easily categorized, which is a fact that many Indigenous peoples have always understood.



Figure 2 Inuit women, two in traditional parkas at Baker Lake, NWT, 1926; Credit: L.T. Burwash/Canada Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection/Library and Archives Canada

The concept of gender is used to describe the culturally constructed categories that reflect ideas about a person's role, traits, and position within society, depending upon how they present themselves as male, female, or another category. The concept of gender is related to the concept of sex, but these two concepts are not the same (Scott 1999, 31-32). Social scientists often talk about gender as a spectrum, with male and masculine on one end, and female and feminine on the other. An individual's gender identity is how much they see themselves as either male or female, or somewhere in between. Some cultures view gender as being limited to being either male or female, but in other cultures, gender is seen as much more fluid.

Indigenous cultures across North America have different definitions and expressions of gender than are found in Western cultures (Leigh 2009, 74). Gender variance is a concept used to refer to the cultural construction of multiple genders. Multiple genders and a wide variance of gender roles existed in many tribal societies and communities.

Gender Roles

Gender roles are the culturally defined duties and responsibilities that people are expected to carry out depending on their gender identity. Gender roles in Indigenous cultures were traditionally clearly defined, and men and women would have different responsibilities to carry out within their communities. The roles of men and women were complementary, and each was seen as important and essential (Flannery 1995, 31–36). An individual's gender identity determined the associated gender roles they would perform, such as hunting, smoking the meat, or performing certain ceremonies. This was based on the cultural teachings about gender roles within each distinct Indigenous society.

For example, Inuit women's roles and responsibilities within their community traditionally include sewing and food preparation, while men's roles and responsibilities include hunting. However, in her article, "*I'm not the great hunter, my wife is*", Barbara Bodenhorn describes how within Iñupiat worldview, women are more influential to hunting than men are (Bodenhorn 1990). They are more influential, because it is women

who are responsible for attracting the animals so that men will be able to hunt them successfully (Lee 1995, 17–27).

While noting that many tribes were egalitarian and held complex clan systems, gender roles were unique to each tribe (Klein and Ackerman 1995, 12). Indigenous women often held spiritual, political, and economic power equal to men. Roles of women and men were different but equally important (Klein and Ackerman 1995, 14). Through their participation in community and women's councils, Indigenous women held a high degree of political power when it came to the management of land, nomination of chiefs, and tribal governance. Women elders chose the best suitable individuals for tribal leaders and made important decisions that benefited the well-being and livelihood of the whole community.

Cross-Gender, or Third and Fourth Gender Identity

The roles of cross-gendered individuals varied for each tribal society (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011, 3). Sometimes gender changes were strictly occupational, meaning gender changes occurred in order to perform certain roles and duties in the community. For example, there were individuals that cross-dressed only for ceremonial purposes, such as a cross-gendered individual holding a specific task in the Sundance ceremony. In some cases cross-gendered people would be the only ones able to perform certain ceremonies (Pilling 1997, 69). Cross-gendered people often conducted naming ceremonies, while others were mediators to the spirit world, or often healers (Roscoe 1998, 197–166).

Many tribal societies recognized individuals who took up opposite gender roles and responsibilities (Lang 1998, 77–78). These individuals would sometimes fall under a third and fourth gender category, neither male nor female, which would have different obligations and duties to community than gender statuses of other men and women. Their roles are sometimes understood as bridging the genders, or having a combination of both. Indigenous peoples recognized gender as fluid (Roscoe 1998, 123–129).

Examples from Indigenous Languages

Taking a closer look at Indigenous languages is helpful when trying to understand Indigenous concepts, including the different concepts around gender.

The literal translation of the Navajo word “nádleehí” means “a person in a constant process of change.” Nádleehí is a Navajo word for a person with an unclear physical description of being male or female (Epple 1995, 174). The first part “ná” translates to being continuous. The Navajo origin story tells how the very first people born were hermaphrodite twins with undetermined sexes, this story underlies the entire basis for understanding the spiritual role and high status of the nádleehí. The nádleehí was highly regarded in Navajo society and was often an integral part of ceremonies and other events (Roscoe 1998, 39–48).

Another example is from the Nuxalk, also known as Bella Coola, of the Northwest Coast (Roscoe 1998, 133). The Nuxalk have an oral story of newborn children that go through sex reversals (Lang 1998, 92). It is unclear which sex and gender the children are identified with. Similar to the Navajo, many Indigenous gender systems like the Navajo and Nuxalk emphasize the idea that human beings may have both masculine and feminine gender characteristics. There are many terms in different tribal societies that were used for cross-gendered individuals, such as Heemaneh’ for the Cheyenne, Agokwa in the language of the Anishinaabe, and Tainna wa’ippe for the Shoshone (Roscoe 1998, 15–16, 133).

Conceptualizing Gender

Oral tradition describes how Indigenous peoples conceptualized gender. Children were raised in flexible ways that allowed them to discover their gender identity. For instance, a child may have physically male traits and later take up a women’s role after they have exhibited their preferred and most befitting gender identity.

This gender system not only gives children the freedom to express their personalities but also contributes to the community by capitalizing on the skills of each individual and utilizing each community member's intelligence and passion to the fullest extent (Anderson 2011, 68).

Choices about gender and the responsibilities attached to that gender may happen after a vision or develop over a series of childhood and adolescent milestones that confirms the person's choice. Gender transformations could happen before or during puberty.

Indigenous oral traditions also pass on stories about women warriors, people that performed the traditionally male role in warfare. Sometimes, a female warrior would then hold a traditionally male status within their community (Lang 1998, 303–308). There were a number of women who partook in war from various tribal communities, such as Cheyenne, Choctaw, Cherokee, Crow, Ojibwa and Blackfoot. Other stories are about males who dressed in female clothing and performed duties of a woman. They then held a gender status that was completely separated from either male or female.

Two-Spirit

Indigenous people today, youth in particular, are involved in a movement to reclaim lost ways of understanding traditional gender systems and have introduced the term “two-spirit” to describe cross-gendered people.

Two-spirit is a term that has only come into use in contemporary times and originates from the Northern Algonquin word “niizh manitoag” meaning two spirits. The term two-spirit represents the presence of masculine and feminine traits within an individual (Williams 1992). This newer word includes Indigenous understandings of kinship,



Figure 3 Gender neutral washroom, 2013;
Credit: David Wallace

sexuality, and gender that are often more complex and fluid than mainstream perceptions of sexual orientation and gender (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997).

Sexuality

There are key differences between the concepts of gender and sexuality. Gender roles, performance, dress, demeanour, and sexual preferences may be seen as separate categories and one does not necessarily link with the other. For instance, an individual may wear clothes of the opposite gender, but this does not necessarily codify their sexual preference (Williams 1992, 2–3).

Most of the time individuals who crossed genders were encouraged to enter a relationship with someone of the opposite gender. For example, if a biological male who took up a woman's roles had a relationship with another man who performed a conventional man's roles, this would be accepted. An individual's sexuality and gender were often viewed as different things (Williams 1992, 110). Sexual and occupational preferences were placed into different categories.

Women's Roles and Social Status

Indigenous women were known as the community caretakers and primary teachers of children. Women held a great deal of autonomy in many Indigenous societies. They were respected and valued partners their communities. In many cases, women were able to choose what role they would take within their community.

Relatively matriarchal social systems and matrilineal kinship or clan systems were found in Indigenous cultures across North America (Kelm and Townsend 2006, 3). The term matriarchy describes a society where women hold the positions of leadership. In Haudenosaunee society women were responsible for choosing the political leaders, but this society might not be described as strictly matriarchal, because the leaders were usually men. The Haudenosaunee clan system was matrilineal, which means that hereditary clan membership followed the mother's line (Shoemaker 2006, 97). For

example, if the father was Deer clan, and the mother was Wolf clan, their children would be Wolf clan.



Figure 4 Native woman making snowshoes,
ca. 1928 at Pointe Bleue, Quebec; Credit:
Canada. Dept. of Interior/Library and Archives
Canada

Colonization and Gender

Settler colonialism in North America was a gendered process, as it imposed European patriarchal social systems. The term patriarchy describes societies that are male dominated. In a patriarchal system, men hold the positions of power in political, spiritual, and domestic spheres. Colonialism was a gendered project, because it reproduced the sexist beliefs held by Europeans. Mainstream North American society today can be seen as a heteropatriarchy, where the superiority of patriarchal beliefs and heterosexuality are seen as the norm (Simpson 2012).

Colonization disrupted the balance of complementary gender roles and shared power in Indigenous societies. Europeans introduced new values and ideals steeped in white male superiority and suppressed the leadership roles of women held in many Indigenous societies (Kugel and Murphy 2007). The result created an imbalance and inequality within Indigenous communities and upset the fluidity of gender roles.

Colonialism as a Gendered Project

There are specific examples of colonial strategies that were aimed at reconstructing Indigenous societies to fit into a patriarchal structure (Carter 2008). Government policies institutionalized gender inequality and led to the internalization of patriarchal values within Indigenous communities. Consequences of colonialism include the disempowerment and devaluation of Indigenous women's participation in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms of the community (Andersen 1991; Goyette 2013; Silman 1987).

During the treaty negotiations, Indigenous women were excluded from political interactions due to Western customs where women did not step into a political realm and remained within the private sphere performing domestic duties. The Indian Act further institutionalized gender discrimination. Through Indian status, band governance, access to band services and programs, and band membership, the Indian Act established provisions that exclusively gave men positions in political, economic, and social power (Jamieson 1978).

Indian Act and Gender Discrimination

The establishment of status Indians is considered a process of racialization by minimizing the scope of what it means to be an Indian. One of the methods was in the ways that the legal category of status Indian was determined. Under Section 12(b) in the 1951 Indian Act, women who married non-status men would lose their status and therefore were unable to pass on status to their children (Jamieson 1978, 67). Indian status has no connection to social or cultural aspects, and this has resulted in issues for women and their children in obtaining a sense of identity and belonging.

The Indian Act introduced a Eurocentric government model with the "Chief and Council System" that prevented any influence or participation of Indigenous women. The Indian Act created power imbalances in band politics and governance where men dominated Chief and Councils and where women were unable to vote.

Indigenous women were also prevented from holding title to property, as European customs dictated that only men were able to have possession of land (Jamieson, 1978, 67). This diminished the influence women had over the distribution of goods from the land. Many First Nations and Inuit women traditionally held positions in community governance and politics. Federal law discriminated against Indigenous women in multiple ways, and gender and race were important factors in the establishment of colonial policies.

Section Two: Indigenous Women

Stereotypes and Representation

Many historical recordings express views of Indigenous women as overly sexual, according to the sexist and repressive sexual mores of those doing the documenting. This helped to create a stereotype of Indigenous women that, along with prejudicial forms of settler sexuality, continues to exist today (Green 2007, 7; Smits 2007, 27). Explorers wrote prolifically in their journals, often going on tirades about the deviant acts of the Native population. Terms like polygamy, female chiefs, hermaphrodites, and cross-dressers were seen as unnatural. As was the norm of the day, notes and papers of male ethnographers and archaeologists demonstrate overt sexism that often denigrated or trivialized the female experience. Therefore, indigenous women were denigrated in particular ways within a broader application of settlers' repressive cultural ideas about sexuality.

When we examine the way Indigenous women have been shown in the media or pop culture, it is often ones with negative connotations or leads to such ideas. The consequences of these images are that they develop and maintain social stereotypes of Indigenous women. Representations of Indigenous women create harmful beliefs about them, which are closely connected to the gender violence that occurs.

Indian Princess

The image of Pocahontas in American folklore created the idea of the Indian Princess who was seen as innocent and in need of protection (Bird 1999, 72). The story would become romanticized, and later there would be the creation of Disney's tragic love story of John Smith and Pocahontas. The image of Pocahontas would be highly commercialized and then used for merchandising purposes. The idea of the "Indian princess" versus the "immoral women" creates a misrepresentation of Indigenous women as being one of these polar opposites. This can be harmful for young Indigenous girls who view these images in the media as the way society views them, and they internalize these social stereotypes.



Pocahontas. — Dessin de Stael, d'après une estampe américaine.
et cette union cimenta la paix entre les colons et les Lenni-jadis, ayant aimé celui qu'elle admirait, colon qu'elle avait

Figure 5 Pocahontas from Le Magasin Pittoresque, 1853; Credit: Unknown

In many ways, the image of Indigenous women has become culturally appropriated in Halloween costumes. During Halloween, some people dress up in Pocahontas costumes without considering or knowing how they contribute to these oversexualized representations (Deloria 1998). Many do not understand the harm it eventually does to Indigenous women. These negative representations have led to the acceptance of stereotypes, which diminishes the respect for Indigenous women. The oversimplification of this marginalized population into one-dimensional stereotypes and caricatures has resulted in the oversexualization and dehumanization of Indigenous women.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW)

This societal issue also impacts Indigenous children and two-spirited people. Across the country there have been efforts to create awareness and push for an inquiry into Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit. According to a 2013 RCMP report there have been 1200 known cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women (Royal Canadian Mounted Police 2014). This figure does not include unreported cases, and the number of women affected may be understated. Many unresolved cases compound the problem of missing and murdered Indigenous women.



Figure 6 Murdered and missing Indigenous women, 2013; Credit: Howl Arts Collective/Thien V

Many times, victim blaming has occurred for Indigenous women, especially in the sex trade. In other ways, Indigenous men have been targeted as the perpetrator. Simultaneously, in history there have been misrepresentations for women as well as Indigenous men being naturally violent. When general society is shown this in the media, what is often left out is the historical trauma Indigenous peoples have endured. Most times it does not explain the cycle of poverty many Indigenous women face because of Canada's history of colonialism. As a result, these stereotypes create greater chances of the internalization of these false beliefs by Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous women have been the target of oppression in multiple ways, and assimilation efforts in the past have included the sterilization of Indigenous women. This tactic was used to prevent the reproduction of Indigenous peoples and the growth of

their population. Today Indigenous people's lands have been destroyed and polluted from the resource extraction industries, which has also done serious harm to a woman's reproductive health. The toxins produced eventually come into contact with women's bodies while stored in fats and breast milk during pregnancy. Breast-feeding directly impacts the growth of newborns. This is another example of the harm done to Indigenous women's and children's bodies.

Some research shows how violence against women is linked to violence against the land. Destruction of the land and wildlife gets equated with violence against Indigenous women's bodies, as both are disregarded and devalued in a society that functions on capitalism and patriarchy (Finley, 2011, 34; Smith, 2011, 55). Patriarchal settler colonialism is also bad for Indigenous men, undercutting their complementary roles with women in helping as caretakers in Indigenous communities. Patriarchy has had an insidious effect on Indigenous men, producing misogynistic notions of male superiority that have become embedded into every aspect of their lives. These attitudes devalued and undermined entire systems of governance, education, and economies and excluded half the population from decisions regarding the cultural and spiritual aspect of life. Since the onset of colonization, the land continues to be threatened, taken and abused by development industries, and this is parallel to what we see occurring with Indigenous peoples.

In many ways, Indigenous women have been invisible or overlooked. Indigenous women's traditional positions in society have been removed, their images have been misrepresented, their cultures mocked, and they have become devalued in the process. However, Indigenous women have continued to fulfill traditional caretaking and mothering roles, even within the colonial context. For instance, Minnie Grey shares her memories of her strong Inuk mother who continued to live a very traditional lifestyle even after her husband's death, and she was forced to provide love, food, shelter, and clothing for all of her five small children (Grey 2010, 21–22). This accomplished Inuit woman was able to work her dog teams, hunt and fish, as well as act as a midwife and caretaker to her community. Indigenous women were skilled and proficient caretakers

long before contact, and although the ongoing processes of colonization continues to undermine and dismantle their traditional lives, they continue to be resilient and determined to attain social justice along gender lines. Over the decades there have been efforts to reclaim the rights of Indigenous women in the court system to establish their rights for Indian status.

Court Cases Confronting the Indian Act

There have been efforts by Indigenous women to have representation in politics and obtain equal treatment, specifically the battle for Indigenous women's equal rights for Indian status. The gender biased provisions in the Indian Act created issues of sexual discrimination for obtaining Indian status and band acceptance.

The three main court cases that confronted the patriarchal structure of the Indian Act with respect to status were Lavell v. Canada (1971), Bédard v. Isaac (1972), and Lovelace v. Canada (1981) (Green 2007, 140). From a legal position, marital status classifies people as married, divorced, single, or widowed. For Indigenous women, marital status also largely determined Indian status, band membership, access to band programs and services, and the inheritance of property. These court cases challenged the fair protection of human rights and constitutional protection for women's Indian status.

Lavell v. Canada addressed the Indian Act's provisions on status using the argument that it went against Canada's Bill of Rights by sexual discrimination (Kulchyski 1994, 127; McIvor 2004, 16). Jeannette Vivian Corbiere, an Anishnaabe woman from Wikwemikong Reserve, lost her Indian status by marrying out when she married a male without Indian status, and she was no longer able to reside on her reserve. The provincial court ruled that it did not go against any human rights or freedoms. Corbiere then petitioned the Federal Court of Appeals about her case. In Corbiere v. Canada, it was found that the Indian Act did go against the Bill of Rights. This court case was significant, as it was the beginning of the legal acknowledgement that the Indian Act held gender discrimination.

Yvonne Bédard, an Iroquois woman from Brandford Reserve, married out. She lived off reserve for six years. When she later divorced, she could not return to her reserve, based on the 1951 amendment to the Indian Act where bands had the opportunity to create their own membership rules for residency based on Indian status. Bédard v. Isaac followed the same argument in the Lavell case that it violated Canada's Bill of Rights. The case went from the Ontario High Court to the Supreme Court (Kulchyski 1994, 127).

At this time, Lavell and Bédard faced criticism from within Indigenous communities, the National Indian Brotherhood, and band leaders. They were accused of putting individual rights before collective rights, because Indigenous peoples in Canada were already fighting for sovereignty. Fighting for Indian women's rights was seen as interfering with the chances of achieving sovereignty. In 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against Lavell and Bédard, which also dismissed the argument that the Indian Act provisions went against Canada's Bill of Rights.

The case of Lovelace v. Canada, which was eventually brought before the United Nations, gained international attention for Indigenous women in Canada (Silman 1987, 74). Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet woman from Tobique Reserve, married a non-status man, thereby losing Indian status. Once she divorced, her situation was more apparent. She did not have Indian status and no longer had band membership. She argued her loss of status violated Canada's Bill of Rights and the United Nations Human Rights. Canada did in fact violate the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, because equal treatment was withheld from Lovelace.

McIvor Case

Sharon McIvor's court case, McIvor v. The Registrar, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (1985), pushed for legal changes to the Indian Act's discriminatory provision, which eventually led to Bill C-31 (McIvor 2004, 120).

Initially, McIvor's case had three positions: (1) to remove discriminatory parts of the Indian Act; (2) to allow band control over band membership; and (3) to restore rights to individuals who lost Indian status. While these were successful victories, the amendments through Bill C-31 did not reconcile all the injustices surrounding status that were found in the Indian Act.

Indigenous women's concerns about status and loss of status were not addressed until later with Bill C-3 Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act, which went into effect on January 31, 2011 (Government of Canada 2010). This legislation addressed what was known as the double mother clause, where the great-grandchildren of women that married out could not receive Indian status, which was not the case for men.



Figure 7 Sharon McIvor, 2016; Credit: Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos/Daniel Cima

Discriminatory policies and practices of the Indian Act, through the regulation of status and band membership, severed important kinship ties. When Indigenous women lost their status due to marrying non-status men, they and their children were separated from extended family networks and communities. Often when Indigenous women divorced, they found themselves not only with familial support, but in financial hardship. As a result, many of these dispossessed women and children struggled with issues of poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, and lack of adequate housing (Monture and McGuire 2009, 291–436). The long-term consequences of the discriminatory practices of the Indian Act reverberate even today as generations of Indigenous children and families continue to struggle with poverty and issues of identity and belonging.

Indigenous Women's Groups

The lack of representation of Indigenous women during the proposal of the White Paper in 1969 initiated an Indian sovereignty movement where Indigenous groups formed in order to address their rights. Later in the 1970s, two Indigenous women's groups formed – the Indian Rights for Indian Women and the Native Women's Association of Canada – as a result of the lack of representation for women's concerns and perspectives in government debates, politics, and legal reforms (The Mohawk Women of Caughnawaga 2009, 352; Glenn and Green 2007, 233–240).

The Charlottetown Accord of 1992 addressed Aboriginal peoples' inherent right to self-government, which led to constitutional negotiations with the government. It involved Indigenous organizations and leadership that were largely male dominated. This process meant that Indigenous women's voices had to be filtered through and approved by these male dominated organizations that negotiated with the Crown. As a result, the Native Women's Association of Canada challenged the Charlottetown process in order to push for the inclusion of women's input (Green 2007, 149). This challenge demonstrated there was still, at this point in time, the need to incorporate Indigenous women in government debates.

Over the years there have been efforts to restore Indigenous women to a place of honour with the inclusion of their voices, perspectives, and traditional roles in their communities. This process must begin with analyzing Indigenous feminism, how it emerged, and what makes it different from discourses of mainstream feminism (St. Denis 2007, 36). There have been efforts to decolonize and restore Indigenous women and two-spirited people to a place of respect and honour.

Indigenous Feminism

While current mainstream feminism in Canada addresses the needs and concerns of many women, Indigenous women's interests are often distinct from other women in North America (St. Denis 2007, 36). Mainstream feminism is generally described as having three distinct movements. The first movement is identified by the suffragette

movement at the turn of the 1900s, where a group consisting of largely wealthy white women was focused on gaining the right to vote.

The second wave of the early 1960s to the 1980s ushered in the women's liberation movement and dealt with matters of family, sexuality, and work. Beginning in the 1990s and continuing to the present, a third wave of feminism illuminates the multifaceted experiences by women of all ages and races. Often known as contemporary feminism led by Generation Xers, this period focuses on issues that deal with gender, race, economic, and social injustices. For non-Indigenous women, feminism began with a fight for equality and human rights against firmly established patriarchal structures.

Indigenous women came from tribal societies that were egalitarian in nature. As a consequence, feminism is a return to their full participation and inclusion in decisions regarding land, politics, laws, and nationhood that Indigenous sovereignty and governance systems were built upon (Deerchild 2012, 100–101).

Feminism for Indigenous women began in 1492 when they resisted the imposition of European gender systems based on the heteropatriarchal views of the colonizer.

For Indigenous women, feminism must include the diversity of their cultural, social, and political experiences. Indigenous feminism is a response to racial and gendered violence and oppression that Indigenous women, girls, and genderful people face. Indigenous feminism then is more than just a struggle for equality; it is the return to egalitarian principles based on systems of interrelatedness and accountability. Today, Indigenous feminism must take into account Indigenous women's perspectives, their histories, cultures, tribal societies, and values.



Figure 8 Artwork of an Indigenous woman;
Credit: Brenda Morency

The establishment of the Native Women's Association of Canada and the inclusion of women's councils at the Métis National Council, the Assembly of First Nations and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami demonstrates the success and work of these feminist efforts (Anderson, 2010, 84).

Conclusion

Efforts for Equality

Although there has been an increase in efforts and changes over the decades for Indigenous women's equality in Canada, there is still work to be done in the political, social, economic, and cultural realms. Indigenous peoples' traditions surrounding gender roles and sexuality are being remembered, reclaimed, and restored. There are gatherings and organizations that create safe spaces for the acceptance and remembrance of teachings about third and fourth gender categories in Indigenous cultures. These movements work toward a greater appreciation and understanding about the values of equality within Indigenous peoples' gender roles and sexualities.

The well-known Cheyenne saying "a nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground" acknowledges the importance of Indigenous women in the community. Indigenous women today take up a diversity of roles as mothers, grandmothers, community leaders, university students, university professors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, writers, and filmmakers, and so much more. These successful stories demonstrate the resiliency of Indigenous women and two-spirited people after a long history of oppression, racism, and gender discrimination.

Credits

- Cover Image: Artwork by Leah Dorion; Credit: Leah Dorion; URL: <http://www.leahdorion.ca/index.html>
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- Figure 2. Inuit women, two in traditional parkas, in front of a building, Baker Lake, 1926 [Left to right: Misiraq, Elizabeth Unurniq (Tapatai), and Kajurjuk]; Credit: L.T. Burwash/Canada Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection/Library and Archives Canada/PA-099412; Restrictions on use: Nil; Copyright: Expired; URL: http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379807
- Figure 3. Gender neutral washroom, 2013; Credit: David Wallace; License: CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dnwallace/8432025340/in/photolist-dR7knf-a5zeUK-a5Cmqw-aCv114-5EPfKN-4TTC5L-9uMbWX-4iqpf8-8W2WVz-8opnLn-5RSoJD-2Zgp7T-7bmneu-5PZniy-qTqp13-4KipNf-pxBEIP-azeFmK-bdjHjZ-pg82zW-ePXGcC-f1pNMb-hjDXDi-ePLff8-nFXj3S-9KxL7Z-ePXFBw-ePXG87-ePXG1d-x2xF9-ePLFY8-J1yX4-ePLgjn-ngKUYx-4fCR9r-x2xJh-nLzGb6-ePXFa9-9WdMbb-bu369s-f1at2D-ePLgx2-x2xXP-x2w3d-x2vHb-hmc4q1-5RX8C3-f1at9r-ePXF47-pg82sb>
- Figure 4. Native woman making snowshoes, ca. 1928 at Pointe Bleue, Quebec; Credit: Canada. Dept. of Interior / Library and Archives Canada/PA-044223; Restrictions on use: Nil; Copyright: Expired; URL: http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3367092
- Figure 5. Pocahontas from Le Magasin Pittoresque, 1853; Credit: Unknown; License: Public domain; URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pocahontas_2.jpg
- Figure 6. Murdered and missing Indigenous women, 2013; Credit: Howl Arts Collective/Thien V; License: CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/howlcollective/10149577364/in/photolist-gsTeKb-8BJUq2-73RmYY-kL1Pf8-kKZRCP-kKZp9g-kKZXcK-kL2vA9-gsTfgm-kL2JaC-gsUqiH-gsU9L3-kKZZ1n-kKZGmH-8BJZiT-A8Bfj-e8s3hE-kKZD5v-73Mq1a-6NunDi-bEqERr-8BJUq8-5tU5yC-8BNx1h-8BJZjn-8BNyKW-8BNvyW-jXe2g-7bUie-4cTw7f-8BKsLp-8BKtye-8BN7CJ-pKE7wP-8BKtEp-7bUid-8BNbx8-8BKDR-8BKqmg-8BNwv5-59v18k-8BNxts-4BNSep-8KEdSk-8BN7Co-2ZBoox-7c5KD-59zek1-gyjo1-5HH4Ft>
- Figure 7. Sharon McIvor, 2016; Credit: Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos/Daniel Cima; License: CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>; URL: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cidh/26024022090/in/photolist-FDDV73-G2tsLb-FXUP5M>
- Figure 8: Artwork of an Indigenous woman; Credit: Brenda Morency, artist

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