

Open Arms and Crossed Legs? Subjectivity and Trans-Inclusion in Canadian Feminist Organizations

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I. Introduction

In the last twenty years or so, Western feminism has undergone a marked shift from what has elsewhere been called the second to the third wave of feminist history. The publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in which Betty Friedan spoke of women's dissatisfaction with a life of childrearing and homemaking, is said to have catalyzed this 'wave' of feminist activity in which women's lack of fulfillment in a life of domesticity was, at first, seen to be the central issue. While the feminist ideology articulated by Friedan was soon after extended to include such issues as violence against women and the right to reproductive choice, the tendency of mainstream feminism of this period to speak on behalf of all women was problematic, as working class women and women of colour, for instance, did not necessarily sympathize with Friedan's experiences. Instead, some rejected this feminism despite its significant contributions because it was exclusive of those who did not fit into the white middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual archetype on which it was founded. This limited feminism has, however, since been displaced by new feminisms which seek to better incorporate and understand the diversity of women's experiences. Beginning at the time of Friedan, but most prominent in recent years, feminist theorists have broadened the feminism put forth by Friedan and others. Moving beyond traditional understandings of what constitutes the primary subject of feminism – white, middle class, heterosexual women – contemporary feminist theory largely examines gender oppression within a framework of analysis troubled by race, class and other aspects of individual experience.

Much feminist theory and activism since Friedan's time has, then, recognized the diversity of experience between and amongst women. Central to contemporary feminism is acknowledging, for example, the differences between the lives of low income and middle class women, while simultaneously upholding that women are a group around which political organization is possible. There thus exists a tenuous, yet necessary relationship between the strategic possibility of discussing women as a group prevalent in earlier feminism and recognizing the diversity that exists amongst women central to much feminism today. Furthermore, while the nature of womanhood included in feminist subjectivity has long been extended to include those of different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic (and other) backgrounds, how those people who blur 'borderlines' of gender – specifically transgender and transsexual individuals – are integrated into feminist theory and activism is still hotly debated. The recognition of diversity amongst women is not seen by all to include those who are not easily identifiable as having female bodies.

There have been various instances in recent memory when this issue of the exclusion of certain people from feminist spaces and organizations on the basis of their (gender) diversity has come to the fore. One such instance took place at the 2001 National Conference and Annual General Meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). According to some of the conference attendees, one member of the executive came out at the meeting as transgendered (or as was remembered by one individual, as "pan-gendered" or "pan-transgendered"¹) sparking heated debate. Some of those in attendance have stated that the last

¹ "Pangender" is a term used to describe non-traditional gender identities. Not often used in academic contexts, the term is found in Leslie Feinberg's definition of "transgender," where Feinberg used "transgender" to "refer to a 'pangender' movement of oppressed minorities – transsexuals, butch lesbians, drag queens, cross-dressers and others" (Stryker and Whittle 205).

hours of the conference were dedicated to “grilling and attacking” the executive member on the issue of her loyalty to the cause of women’s equality.² It seemed that because she identified as other than strictly female, some in attendance believed that the individual in question could not understand women’s experiences and therefore could not speak on behalf of other women as a representative within NAC. Here, while there was no policy explicitly excluding transgender and transsexual women from the AGM or from NAC, it was apparent that the women that NAC represented or those who could represent NAC were not seen by all present to be inclusive of the transgendered executive member.

What the case of the NAC Annual General Meeting demonstrates is that there has been tension regarding the inclusion of transgender and transsexual people within feminism in Canada, particularly within feminist organizations like NAC. Upon examining the policies, research and history of these same organizations, it seems that any attempt to make trans people feel welcome therein has generally occurred on an ad-hoc basis at best. If feminism in Canada, particularly as articulated through feminist organizations, is to broadly advocate the interests of Canadian women, who constitutes the population of women on whose behalf these organizations speak? Does this subject group of ‘women’ include transgender and transsexual individuals? And if so, to what extent?

In this essay, I seek to answer these questions by examining whom formal, institutionalized contemporary feminism in Canada attempts to speak for and the related support for transgender and transsexual inclusion (trans-inclusion) therein. By interrogating Canadian feminism through its national organizations, I will ask if and how these organizations have been inclusive of transgendered and transsexual women and what obstacles may be impeding progress towards more inclusive organizations, and consequently, a more inclusive Canadian feminism. To do so, I will first examine the way in which feminist subjectivity has been conceptualized by various theorists, focusing primarily on the work of Judith Butler and Iris Marion Young. After reviewing my methodology, I will discuss and analyze the results of interviews I conducted with current and former volunteers and employees from national feminist organizations regarding obstacles to trans-inclusion. In so doing, I will suggest how the inclusion of transgender and transsexual women within Canadian feminism - without sacrificing the feminist subject group of ‘women’ - might be possible.

Before I proceed, however, the terms “transgender” and “transsexual” need to be clearly defined. According to transgender theorist Susan Stryker, “if transvestite means someone who changed clothes, and transsexual means someone who changed their body, transgender means someone who changed their social identity and their public presentation of their gendered self” (Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges” 4). In this case, then, a transgendered individual may live as male or female in a configuration contrary to their biological sex,³ but will not have engaged in formal (psycho-medical) methods of physical transition. However, since the work of

² Pronouns used here are true to the way that the events were recounted rather than how the individual in question self-identifies.

³ For purposes of this essay, “sex” pertains primarily to the differentiation of males and females based on physiological characteristics, while “gender” is used to describe presentations of masculinity and femininity manifest in social roles through certain forms of dress, behaviours, etc. Put simply, sex is to the physical what gender is to the social. For example, femininity is the gender with which the female sex (body) is traditionally associated.

Leslie Feinberg in the early 1990s “transgender” has taken on a second meaning as a more encompassing umbrella term pertaining to those individuals who in some way disrupt the binary notions of sex and gender including, but not limited to drag performers, transsexuals, transvestites, and others. While both definitions are widely used, in this essay I will use the first definition of transgender to allow for a differentiation between transsexual and transgendered people. The term “trans people” will stand in for the second definition of transgender, encompassing both transgender and transsexual people. From this, “trans women” will be here used to speak to those who, transgender or transsexual, identify as female.⁴

Transsexual then, refers to only those people who are born one sex, who have a non-corresponding gender identity, and who then seek to transition physiologically. By taking hormones and undergoing surgical procedures, these individuals may seek to achieve a physical embodiment traditionally corresponding to their gender identity. There is no model of transsexuality, as taking hormones does not necessarily mean that one will seek surgery, or receiving certain surgeries does not mean that others will follow, however the distinction between transgender individuals (in the first definition I put forth) and transsexual individuals is generally made on the basis of desired physical transition.⁵

II. Theoretical Framework

Thinking Beyond the Binary

As stated above, the shift from the white, English, middle-class, able-bodied feminism of the 1960s to a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the same has looked not only to race, class and (dis)ability, but further, to trouble gender itself. Iris Marion Young sums up this tension between strategic identification and recognition of gender diversity effectively in “Gender as Seriality” where she writes that “on the one hand, without some sense in which ‘woman’ is the name of a social collective, there is nothing specific to feminist politics. On the other hand, any effort to identify the attributes of that collective appears to undermine feminist politics by leaving out some women whom feminists ought to include,” in particular, transgender and transsexual women (714).

Understanding this apparent contradiction between women as a strategic political category and the diversity central to contemporary feminism first necessitates examining how women as feminist subjects have been conceptualized in relation to trans people. With the publication of her *The Transsexual Empire* in 1979, Janice Raymond asked how feminism might need to take a stand on whether to include transsexual women in the movement. In this notorious monograph, Raymond makes several arguments culminating in the identification of transsexuals, specifically, transsexual women, as “misguided and mistaken men seeking surgery

⁴ It is noteworthy that transgender and transsexual women will be the focus of this essay as the debate over the inclusion of transgendered individuals in feminist organizations has largely focused on trans women. For otherwise gender variant individuals, as well as transgender and transsexual people who identify as men, there are other (often related) implications for feminist inclusion that are unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay.

⁵ I have stated that I base the idea of transsexuality on desired rather than realized physical transition in order to recognize the significant psycho-medical and financial obstacles which often impede the engagement of individuals in transition processes.

to fulfil some imaginary notion of femininity” (Whittle 121). While Raymond’s assertions are transphobic, exclusionary and as such extremely problematic, the role of transgender and transsexual women within the feminist community – specifically how to include trans women and on what grounds – has since been widely debated. Although the arguments commonly used for the exclusion of trans women from feminist organizations are now generally articulated in the more diplomatic terms of protecting of women as a vulnerable group, the issue of whether to include trans people in organizations representing Canadian women, namely feminist organizations, has thus been raised.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses both the role for trans people and the centrality of ‘womanhood’ to feminism. Writing that “feminist theory has needed the language of ‘women’ and the identity of ‘womanhood’ in order to make political gains,” she continues to state that feminist theory must also critique how the notion of women as the subject of feminism has been a somewhat exclusive category. To this end she writes that the category of ‘women,’ “...is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (3-4). Butler here identifies the problematic relationship between women as the subjects of feminism and the diversity presented by variant gender identities. On this latter point, she writes that gender operates not in a binary manner, but rather as a gender continuum bounded by masculinity and femininity wherein the gender identities of transgender and transsexual people may fit independently of their traditionally sexed bodies. Butler thus at once identifies the critical nature of women-as-subject to feminist praxis and argues for a model of fluidity of gender and sex that has no original, no borderlines and no conclusive categories. However, she states that the “requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject,” prevents the goals of an inclusive feminism from being realized, because the idea of a stable subject relies upon the exclusion of those who do not fit cleanly into this subjectivity.

The inclusion of transgender and transsexual women is, then, theoretically possible, since the multiple configurations of sex and gender which Butler’s theory promotes understands women as a fluid subject group, incorporating those with bodies which correspond to their gender in non-traditional ways. In short, Butler proposes an alternative means of understanding ‘women’ in order to allow for the inclusion of transgender and transsexual women within a conceptual feminism. Stating that “‘representation’ will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of ‘women’ is nowhere presumed,” it is clear that Butler seeks to contest gender categories while upholding the importance of womanhood to feminism (3-8). There is in Butler’s theory, then, no concrete definition of women, but rather ‘women’ is a social category both central to feminism and one independent of biological markers into which any number of individuals may fit.

In “Gender as Seriality,” Iris Marion Young looks to Butler to similarly explain the problematic aspects of understanding womanhood in universal terms. She repeats Butler’s ideas about representation and subjectivity, writing that “feminist politics...speaks for or in the name of someone, the group women, who are defined by this female gender identity,” continuing on to state that “the insistence on a subject for feminism” does not enable women to exist outside of the framework (such as traditional female bodies) of that subjectivity (716). Also like Butler, Young simultaneously recognizes the need for women to be identified as a group as “without

conceptualizing women as a group, in some sense, it is not possible to conceptualize oppression as a systematic, institutional process” (718). This is most aptly put when she states that:

The naming of women as a specific and distinct social collective...is a difficult achievement and one that gives feminism its specificity as a political movement...The exclusions, oppressions, and disadvantages that women often suffer can hardly be thought of at all without a structural conception of women as a collective social position. The first step in feminist resistance to such oppressions is the affirmation of women as a group, so that women can cease to be divided and to believe that their suffering are natural or merely personal. Denial of the reality of a social collective termed *women* reinforces the privilege of those who benefit from keeping women divided” (718-19, emphasis in the original).

Butler’s proposition to extend how gender might be understood, and particularly, the concept of women, is taken up and elaborated upon by Young to this end. To address the diversity amongst women (inclusive of transgender and transsexual women), while simultaneously upholding the centrality of women to feminism, Young concludes that women understood as unfixed subjects might be able to remain central to feminist theory. Young articulates how this might be achieved in more practical terms than did Butler by explaining that when women are understood in the overlapping ways that they are socialized and situated in relation to men there may be an emergent identity of ‘women.’ Young looks to Diana Fuss to explain this, citing that “*woman* cannot name a set of attributes that a group of individuals has in common, that there is not a single female gender identity that defines the social experience of womanhood. Instead...feminist politics itself creates an identity *woman* out of a coalition of diverse female persons dispersed across the world” (Fuss in Young 721). Therefore, if the idea of ‘women’ can be re-imagined, through Butler and Young, as a relational term for all those who identify as women, no matter their experiences or physiology, then there may be a way to understand women in unfixed terms, extending womanhood to trans-women (Young 728).

III. Methodology

The complex nature of this debate over gender diversity and strategic identity may be best examined in the Canadian context through the approaches taken by national feminist organizations. While it cannot be taken for granted that there are many different understandings of what constitutes feminism in Canada with many different groups and individuals seeking to address many different goals, most interesting for purposes of this research are those national feminist organizations which represent Canadian women at the federal level. According to Susan Phillips, these organizations, unlike their provincial, regional and municipal counterparts, are especially relevant in setting the national public agenda because they “conceive and carry policy forward to government, and are the most visible representation of the women’s movement to Canadians at large” (*Projects, Pressure and Perceptions* 2). Although lobbies do emerge from other groups, these organizations are too numerous and widely diverse in their mandates to be within the scope of this research. Furthermore, a significant number of these smaller organizations are represented by national organizations in their interactions with the federal

government and these groups are, to a certain extent, included through the consideration of national organizations.

Therefore, in order to assess how the diversity versus strategic identity debate (as it pertains to trans women) plays out within Canadian feminism, I set about to engage in interviews with those involved directly in national feminist organizations. In so doing, I hoped to determine whether certain people working within feminist organizations envision transgender and transsexual individuals as part of the population on whose behalf they do equality-seeking research and advocacy work. I initially set out to interview upwards of ten (past and present) volunteers and employees of national feminist organizations in order to ensure a reasonable representation of organizations and to ensure that a diversity of perspectives were included in the research. Due to temporal limitations, the limited resources of the organizations in question, and the sensitive nature of the topic, I eventually conducted five interviews with individuals that each had extensive experience in national feminist organizations.

The selection criteria for research participants were based around those organizations which have been visible and have engaged in collaborative projects in recent years. In this regard I focused on the loosely formed Coalition for Women's Equality which has brought together some of the most significant organizations which represent women's and feminist concerns at the national level.⁶ Although other national feminist organizations, (such as the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund) also contribute substantially to advancing women's equality in Canada, the organizations that founded the coalition can be taken to represent the interests of a wide range of diverse women and feminists across Canada to the federal government primarily through policy development, lobbying and advocacy work. Furthermore, through the formal collaboration engaged in through the Coalition for Women's Equality, it is evident that there are overlapping and common interests of the organizations involved, highlighting some elements of prevailing attitudes and values amongst them. From these organizations I sought out volunteers and employees of the organizations who have worked or volunteered at fairly senior levels, either as the authors of major policy documents, senior staff members, executive directors or senior members of the Board of Directors.

IV. Results/Analysis

The (approximately hour-long) interviews delved into the intricacies of how individuals and groups involved in Canadian feminism at the national level have conceptualized feminist subjectivity and the potential ways that transgender and transsexual people are, have been, and may be included within it. On these issues, the interview participants seemed to return to several themes. First, interview participants stated that there is a divide amongst feminists, often occurring along generational lines, as to whether or not the term "women" may be inclusive of

⁶ The Coalition for Women's Equality was originally comprised of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA), the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), the Fédération des femmes du Québec, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, the Native Women's Association of Canada, YWCA Canada, the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), Womenspace and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, which were the organizations around which I centered my search for participants. In recent years, the Coalition has grown to include a number of other organizations, diversifying the constituencies and interests that it represents.

transgender and transsexual women. Secondly, participants collectively stated both that the term “women” itself is central to feminism as an organizing principle and that trans-women who self-identify should be included within this category. Third, participants asserted that the failure to clearly articulate that transgender and transsexual women may be included in feminist organizations is partially attributable to a lack of available resources. Finally, participants stated that too much energy is being wasted on the issue of transgender inclusion which should not be an issue at all so long as those who self-identify as women are considered to be the constituency on whose behalf national feminist organizations speak.

Generational/Ideological Divisions

According to research participants, the debate over the need to recognize women as a cohesive identity category and the simultaneous need to recognize diversity among women (inclusive of trans women) is often divided on generational lines. While participants took care to note that despite this division this debate sometimes occurs cross-generationally, they generally indicated that there were generational differences between younger and older feminists.⁷ To this end, one participant noted that some Canadian national feminist organizations “tend to be made up of older, well-off women who have a certain conception of what a woman is,” and “although they’ve tried to expand their view, it [their particular view of women as a group, likely exclusive of transgender women] is part of the equality that they are seeking.”

It is not surprising that the difficulties apparent in addressing the strategic identity of womanhood for feminism, while acknowledging diversity amongst women, are manifest along somewhat generational lines. As indicated above, the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was largely invested in the notion of a universal womanhood; in bringing women together in a sort of gender-based solidarity. As race and class-based critiques expanded in later decades, new generations of feminists have instead engaged in a feminist politics rife with critique of universal discourse. According to one participant, “a lot of the women who are still involved [in feminism] at the national level come from a different place. They come from the 1960s and 70s, when women had no space to do political work...those women can be more resistant to expanding their notions of equality.”

Nevertheless, participants who addressed the generational divide seemed convinced that with the eventual replacement of older feminists by their younger counterparts, or with the arrival of a critical mass of younger women in these organizations, a more inclusive understanding of womanhood would follow. However, if the inclusion of transgender women is as pressing an issue as the heated nature of related debate in these organizations and in academic scholarship would indicate, than an option other than waiting for time to bring about change may be in order. The goal need not be to replace older feminists, but rather to, as one participant stated, “to expand notions of equality.” This involves a concerted effort on the part of both younger and older feminists to understand the history of one another’s experiences and to strive for the feminist goal of fighting patriarchy rather than articulating exclusion. One interview participant aptly stated that:

⁷ It should be noted that there was no clear consensus among research participants as to what age groups might comprise these categories. However, generational discords were, at times, discussed along the lines of second and third wave feminism corresponding to older and younger feminists respectively.

...there has definitely been a tendency by older feminists to think [...] that theirs was the definition of feminism that would last forever. I also think that on the part of some feminists that there has been a reluctance to acknowledge the work that came before and to think that the way the world looks now is the way it has always looked. But it's not. [...] And I think that there has to be a little more acknowledgement both ways.

While there may be a need for older feminists to more openly recognize the legitimacy of those struggles in which younger feminists engage, as indicated by this participant there is a corresponding need for younger feminists to recognize the work of those who came before them. There is a tendency, it seems, for younger feminists to either ignore or to criticize the shortcomings of second wave feminism for what it may have largely omitted, such as race or gender or (dis)ability, without recognizing the very different realities of the lives lived by women at different times. All involved thus need to understand feminist history as cumulative, and to commit with engagement with one another to ensure that the fluid nature of feminism works towards the general goal of the eradication of gender oppression/patriarchy. This participant continued on to state that:

...what became apparent [in my work is] that there is an information gap and an age [gap]. I don't know if I'd say second wave or third wave, but there is this lack of understanding and awareness for these older feminists who have done so much amazing work. They were on the front lines doing the rights to abortion work, they've sacrificed their lives. [...] But there definitely needs to be education that needs to happen. And I think it needs to happen not from reading reports online..., but actual conversations with actual women, that's where the change happens.

The need for legitimate dialogue between younger and older feminists, where their respective experiences and views can be exchanged, is the forum for change here advocated. By really speaking with one another, this participant identified that mutual respect of the perspectives of younger and older feminists might be achieved and a space between the valuing of strategic identity and diversity negotiated. Research participants also identified how informal networks between organizations often develop, for example, on walks back to downtown Ottawa from press conferences on Parliament Hill, and leasing office space to one another, enabling such dialogue to occur. Thus, this feminist generation gap is, according to research participants, being bridged to a certain extent by the informal interactions that take place between feminists. However, participants also spoke to the idea that while those currently working within national feminist organizations may recognize the need for education and collaboration between different generations of feminists, diminished capacity due to waning resources has and continues to impede upon their ability to do so.

Protecting/Extending "Womanhood" Within Feminism

Another relevant theme discussed in the interviews was how to concretely recognize diversity while keeping the idea of 'womanhood' central to the work of participants' respective organizations. Recounting personal experiences and making clear statements on the issue of

transgender and transsexual inclusion, participants generally presented a dedication to preserving the place of ‘women’ as a strategic identity central to feminism. For example, discussing the utility of the word “women,” one participant stated that it might be dangerous to move away from “women” in hopes of recognizing diversity, as the word “women” itself captures the marginalization that women as a group experience. Furthermore, this participant clearly stated that for her, the idea of womanhood was an individual and largely fluid category, commenting that:

While some trans women might exclude themselves out of the category ‘women,’ a lot of trans women are women. It’s up to them [to determine] when their identification and whatever else fits under that guise for them. I think being a woman is very individual, very personal. When it comes to the organization that I work with, I guess I’m biased. I see women as *all women*, if you don’t identify as a woman, then I’m not working for you.

This participant continued on to state that the term “women” is central to feminism whether or not it represents a specific group of experiences or a certain type of body. For her, to move away from discussing women as a group was to move away from political gains for many who are oppressed or marginalized on the basis of having a female gender identity. This sort of thinking that women (inclusive of those who identify as women) need to have a specific political category in order to engage in anti-oppression politics was also clearly identified by another participant who stated that:

My position was [relating to the use of the term “women”] – we are a violence against women organization – that’s what we do. And there’s plenty of that, it’s not like we’ve gotten rid of violence against women and now we can move on. We still have to do that work. That can be inclusive of trans-women. But to eliminate the term ‘women’ is not a step that I’m politically willing to make.

This participant continued to say that the need to recognize the gendered nature of some discrimination renders the broadening of gender categories problematic, as doing so fails to recognize the specificity of gender relations involved in much sexist oppression. This then might “create a slippery slope towards the eradication of any gender specific services.”

It is interesting to note that even though most of the participants explicitly stated that they support the ongoing use of the term “women” in relation to feminism and include transgender and transsexual women within the notion of womanhood, some clearly identified that there has been resistance to this inclusion in the organizations that they have worked or volunteered for. One participant stated that while an organization with which she is affiliated has been affected by the proliferation of transgender and transsexual issues, in addressing the diverse experiences amongst women, identities are “broken down” into categories of “age, class, race and ethnicity, but not necessarily trans people.” Another interview participant recounted that at a recent meeting of one national feminist organization comments were made as to how a certain trans woman should not be allowed to work in a rape crisis centre because she did not look like a stereotypical woman. The participant stated, “I thought, am I hearing this from a group of feminists? Is that [appearance] what this is about?” The participant continued to

articulate how resistance to trans-inclusion is still clearly expressed in meetings of this same organization, impeding any progress towards trans-inclusive policy. Extrapolating from the interviews, then, it seems that while many individual feminists are interested in engaging in revising what the subject group of 'women' comprises, the resistance of some people in these organizations stalled clear change, or in the very least, clear commitment to the inclusion of transgender individuals at the level of national organizations.

Declining Resources

This lack of clear commitment is not only attributable to individual resistance, but may also involve other factors limiting the capacity of feminist organizations to articulate dedication to transgender inclusion. Interview participants generally agreed that funding has played a significant role in determining the policy and advocacy agendas for their organizations, often involving the prioritization of issues which are either more pressing or seen to affect a larger population than does trans-inclusion.⁸ To this end, participants all referred to the most recent funding cuts made to a number of Canadian feminist organizations, in particular, the modifications made to the funding criteria for the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada in late 2006 and early 2007. This new criteria excludes any funding for research, advocacy and capacity building. Participants also focused on the implications of these recent budget cuts for the end of 2007, when the funding for various organizations, inclusive of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA), the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) as well as the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) was rumoured to be ending. As one participant stated, "we don't even know what that [the spectrum of national feminist organizations] will look like in October [2007] or who will be at the table because of funding loss." Consequently, interview participants discussed what impact recent reductions to the budget of Status of Women Canada would have, in the short and long term, for the national feminist organizations with which they are affiliated.⁹

As some of the organizations have lost their funding and others are barely operational, engaging in campaigns to promote rethinking 'women' to ensure the inclusion of transgender women might not have been (or currently be) a priority. Even prior to these most recent funding cuts, the Status of Women Canada funding that was given to some of the feminist organizations was primarily program funding, and only allowed organizations to choose four projects (or less) to work on within a grant period, usually eighteen months. Thus, when there has been funding for projects, the funding would generally run out after a set period, and the project would be replaced by another one, pertaining to a different, albeit very important issue that had been set aside in the meantime. Transgender and transsexual inclusion, is most often found far down the

⁸ There are few available statistics regarding the number of transgender and transsexual individuals living in Canada, however these communities are generally assumed to be very small. According to the Canadian Auto Workers Union, "it is estimated that 1 in 11,900 males and 1 in 30,400 females are transgender," with transgender in this case used as a broad term incorporating various gender diverse people.

⁹ It is interesting to note that in spite of the significant funding cuts, these organizations have sought ways to continue their work. The National Association of Women and the Law devised a fundraising strategy (called, quite plainly, "Staying Alive") to attempt to raise \$300,000 before September 1, 2007 to ensure that it could continue operations. This included smaller fundraisers, solicitation of individual donations and potential corporate or foundation partnerships (Fenton). In spite of this campaign, NAWL closed its office, laying off staff and ceasing regular operations, in September 2007. Efforts continue to raise funds in order to resume NAWL's work.

list of priorities for these organizations, due to these limitations in addition to the small population involved and the oft-questioned place of this small population within feminism.

Despite funding challenges, some organizations have demonstrated ingenuity by engaging in initiatives which might potentially promote trans-inclusion within the existing framework of feminist organizations. For example, the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), held a national consultation on transgender and women's substantive equality in September 2003. From the consultation report emerged several recommendations, which might be adopted by feminist organizations without the significant expenditure of resources. One such recommendation made by participants in the consultation was that "equality-seeking groups need to critically examine their adherence to biocentric assumptions and ideologies; to challenge their own and other's transphobia; and to develop analyses of the nexus between transphobia and other forms of discrimination" (Denike, Renshaw and Rowe 42). As such, NAWL's consultation report recommended a strategy to trans-inclusion in feminist organizations that involved consciously incorporating transgendered and transsexual individuals within the sorts of marginalized experiences that inform their work. Furthermore, the "Intersectional Feminist Frameworks" approach to research and programming proposed by the Canadian Research Institute on the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) provides a model of feminist analysis that does not only look at the gendered aspects of marginalization, but looks at experiences of oppression holistically, taking such factors as "socio-economic status, race, class, gender, sexualities, ability [and others into account] [...] *simultaneously* to determine inequalities among individuals and groups" (CRIAOW 8). While gender variance is not explicitly included in CRIAOW's intersectional feminist frameworks, by extending this model to include transgender and transsexual people, it is possible that feminist analyses and programming could be more inclusive by understanding variant gender as part of a broad range of ways that people experience discrimination and systemic oppression. In this way, by using analyses that include of transgender women to shape new policies, research, advocacy work and programming, a shift towards trans-inclusion without a substantive expenditure of funds may be possible. While a multipronged, intersectional analysis, is, to my understanding an already important part of the ideological approach of most national feminist organizations in Canada, (some of whom have developed strategies similar to CRIAOW's IFF or NAWL's recommendations) the explicit incorporation of transgender identity in their work is a fairly new and necessary addition that need not empty coffers.

A (Re)solution? Moving Past the Problematic

Several interview participants articulated their frustration with how the issue of transgender inclusion has been taken up and been made a divisive issue within their organizations, in the media, and particularly, in transgender, queer and feminist theory. They complained that the debate over trans-inclusion in feminist organizations might have been more quickly resolved if the issue was seen as an obstacle to overcome, rather than exacerbated through its portrayal as exceptionally divisive and controversial. This sentiment, of simply needing to find a way to work through the issue of trans-inclusion was widespread in the interviews. One participant stated in this regard that:

...some people in the women's movement have been a bit stuck on trans-inclusion questions. When I say stuck, I mean so many different ways. I mean stuck with respect to what it means to be a woman, stuck with respect to how you move forward [on] the safe space question and general questions of inclusion and exclusion, how they get litigated, how we resolve the challenges that we confront, and that kind of thing.

Thus, the general consensus amongst interview participants was that trans-inclusion at the organizational level should not be a major issue at all. One participant simply said of transgender individuals that "...if they self identify [as women] and I'm able to reach them with my emails, my call outs, then they're included [in the constituency of my organization]." As such, she stated that general inclusion simply should not be of concern at the national, organizational level, but rather should work at an individual level, enabling those women who self identify as women to be included and organizations to facilitate their inclusion as necessary and appropriate.

This notion of self-identification being enough for these organizations was also discussed clearly by another participant who stated that:

I believe that a woman is a person who identifies themselves as a woman (*sic*). I think that the issue of access to services in particular, but also access to employment, access to volunteer opportunities – for me, [...] these are straight human rights issues. If you present yourself to me and say that you're a woman, I will not, as a feminist, or as a human (for that matter) want to engage in an exercise of...well are you really, or you don't look like one to me. I am not prepared to engage in...any route that takes me in that direction.

The same participant continued on to state that:

The issue of trans-inclusiveness is important ...as a human rights issue. It's not a daily reality for the work that most of these organizations are doing – it's not a weekly reality, it's not a monthly reality, it's not an annual reality. Which doesn't mean that we shouldn't talk about it, but I just don't get why we can't all 'get it' in the same way and move on. And say, "work for women, anyone who says she's a woman – fine."

The importance of self-identification in this way was seen by participants as critical to enabling contemporary Canadian feminism (and its national organizations) to address diversity while maintaining the idea of 'women' as central to the movement. Just as Butler and Young write that the idea of 'women' needs to be reconceptualized as an unfixed and relational subject in order to extend the category to include transgender women, so too did research participants state the critical nature of self-identification to trans-inclusion.

Participants also expressed their frustration regarding how the few resources dedicated to trans-inclusion are spent on the endless theoretical debate about how to include transgender women within the idea of womanhood in which feminism, writ large, is invested. After detailing

the way in which the discussion of transgender inclusion at sexual assault centres has been exhaustively debated on a theoretical level without resolution, one participant stated:

What would women in Darfur think, or Afghanistan think? That this is how we spend tens and tens of thousands of dollars of money that the government gives us to all get together for a meeting and that's what we do with it? Again, not devaluing the importance of the trans issue, at all... but really...how are we spending our resources in relation to the populations in need?

For the interview participants it seemed that transgender women who identify as women either need to be incorporated into the conceived constituencies of national feminist organizations, or that they are already included therein. Contemplating how transgender women might complicate womanhood seemed, for the participants, to be beside the point. Instead, as they commented in the interviews, the tendency of those involved with some feminist organizations to dwell on the theoretical complexities of the issue, rather than to simply articulate that transgender women *are women*, not only has exhausted much energy and resources that might be elsewhere allocated, but it has also caused unnecessary ideological rifts amongst feminists.

Looking Forward

Implementing self-identification as a general policy is more complex than, as one interview participant stated, “just ‘get[ting] it’ in the same way and moving on” or simply identifying the need to reconceptualize womanhood in Butler and Young’s terms. The centrality of womanhood to feminism as identified by these theorists is legitimate, but only plausible when women are conceived of as an unfixed category shaped by their relationship to the society around them. The interview participants generally agreed that the potential inclusion of transgender and transsexual women on these grounds is possible and desirable within national feminist organizations, even if the same is a contentious issue among some individual feminists. Slowed by funding cuts amongst other challenges, it seems that feminist subjectivity in Canada might theoretically include all those who self-identify as women, but the extent to which this is accepted and made known through policy, advocacy, education and specifically targeted publicity is at present minute. Through the implementation of intersectional analyses which include trans women (such as the recommendations made by NAWL or CRIAW) as well as by promoting self-identification, trans-inclusion may be possible. Thus, the vision for Canadian feminism advocated by Butler and Young and put forth by the interview participants is one in which those who self-identify as women may be included in the way that national feminist organizations conceptualize their constituencies.

In brief, there are no simple solutions to the obstacles to trans-inclusion posed by generational (ideological) divisions, the need to keep ‘womanhood’ central to feminism, inadequate resources and continued over emphasis on the theoretical debates posed by transgender and transsexual individuals. However, with dedication to gender self-identification to ensure that trans women may be included in feminist organizations on their own terms and the implementation of intersectional analyses which may enable the lives of

trans women to be considered within feminist subjectivity, transgender and transsexual inclusion within national feminist organizations in Canada (should they continue to exist under the duress of funding cuts) may gradually become a reality. Through extended intersectional approaches to feminist analyses, productive dialogue and the embracing of self-identification as the cornerstone of feminist subjectivity, consideration of diversity amongst women, including trans women, may be possible within feminist organizations which recognize 'women' as a strategic category of identity.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, if the challenge to the feminism of Betty Friedan came from the need to broaden feminism's conception of its subjects to include diverse women, inclusive of women with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, physical ability, sexualities and various other elements of experience, it seems that the analogous contemporary challenge to today's feminism is how to incorporate gender diversity within feminism. One interview participant made this comparison aptly, stating in regards to the way in which some feminists have resisted transgender inclusion that, "...it's as if some people think that we're all in this club and we're all exactly the same except *these* ones [transgender women]. Well, that's what [some feminists] used to say about women of colour." The question of strategic womanhood versus the diversity of women's experiences is therefore not a new one, just one recently complicated by questions as to how far the idea of womanhood might extend, or if it should be eradicated altogether. As one interview participant stated:

...when it is strategic essentialism [...] that never augments or increases the power or dominance [of one group] we can engage in it. But the moment where it gives more privilege to one group of women, we're in trouble. To remember that it has a shelf-life and we can draw on it, but we cannot get stuck in it. National organizations have gotten stuck in it [strategic essentialism], for way too long. And that's why a bunch of people feel so excluded from that space.

Not "getting stuck" in strategic essentialism means shifting or continuing to shift feminist thinking, as Butler and Young suggest, to allow fluid and unfixed notions of what feminist subjects - 'women' - includes. Furthermore, this means expanding intersectional analyses to explicitly include the experiences of transgender and transsexual women, promoting dialogue amongst feminists with divergent opinions on the matter, and opening minds to allow women who identify as such to be included in feminist organizations as they themselves see fit. Feminism in Canada as embodied by national feminist organizations, still has a long way to go towards clearly stating that the 'women' that it speaks for may include transgender and transsexual women; however, it seems that given the responses of the interview participants there is much potential for the realization of trans-inclusion in national Canadian feminist organizations so long as they can overcome the challenges posed by generational divides, theoretical challenges, funding, and indulgence in debate rather than meaningfully moving forward.

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