Peel Institute of Research and Training

Foreward Women around the world will observe International Women's Day on March 8th. It is a time to commemorate and recognize the tremendous efforts made by women to be considered "capable of reason", to have a place in society, and to be recognized as "persons" under the law.

We come across situations daily that can be perceived as unfair. It could happen when we're not recognized for a job well done, when we're excluded from groups, or when we've been exploited financially by a person or company we trusted. Being treated unfairly exacerbates stress, and stress can lead to anxiety, depression, and many other mental and physical health issues.

Women have fought against a particular kind of unfairness for centuries, and that struggle continues today. It is hard to even imagine the unfairness that still exists in some countries

International Women's Day 2024 aims to

Inspire Inclusion

Inspiring Inclusion means to encourage all people to recognize, acknowledge, and empower the voices, contributions, and perspectives of women from all social groups.

around the globe, where girls are systematically excluded from social gatherings, from schools, from the economy, and from political life.

This year's theme of International Women's Day is to "Inspire Inclusion". This is a broad term, with multiple possible meanings, such as the right to be treated equally before the law, being economically empowered, and being called on to participate in decision-making. You will notice that in this newsletter, we expand on the idea of inclusion, to support an environment that respects all individuals, including those who identify as non-binary.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act protect the rights of women. History tells us of a nationwide, massive mobilization of women, which played a significant role in the development of Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. This section was set into the Constitution in 1981. An important principle stated in both Section 15 and 28 reads: "Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons."

If we look back in time to the 1800's, a Canadian woman's property was transferred to her husband when she got married, leaving her in a very precarious position, if her husband decided later to abandon her. Legislation eventually led to enactments that would protect financially desperate married women.

In 1901, a Canadian woman was legally required to resign from the workforce, after she got married.

In 1917, the federal government granted limited war-time suffrage to some women. Full suffrage was granted in 1918, at least, granting it on the same basis as men. Sadly, certain races and statuses were excluded from voting in federal elections prior to 1960.

It was as recent as 1964, that women were finally allowed to open a bank account without having to ask for their husbands' signatures.

Thirteen years later, in 1977, The Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) was passed. The Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex. It ensured equal pay for work of equal value.

Canada's strategy to end gender-based violence was announced in June of 2017.

"The federal Gender-based Violence (GBV) Strategy was designed to help support diverse populations, including women and girls, Black and racialized women, immigrant and refugee women, Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other sexually and gender-diverse (2SLGTBTQI+) people, women with disabilities, and women living in northern, rural, and remote communities."

The landscape of women's rights reflects both progress and challenges. Examining these dynamics involves scrutinizing legal frameworks, socio-cultural norms,

International Women's Day (Vancouver, BC), 1986
Photo: Rise Up Feminist Archive
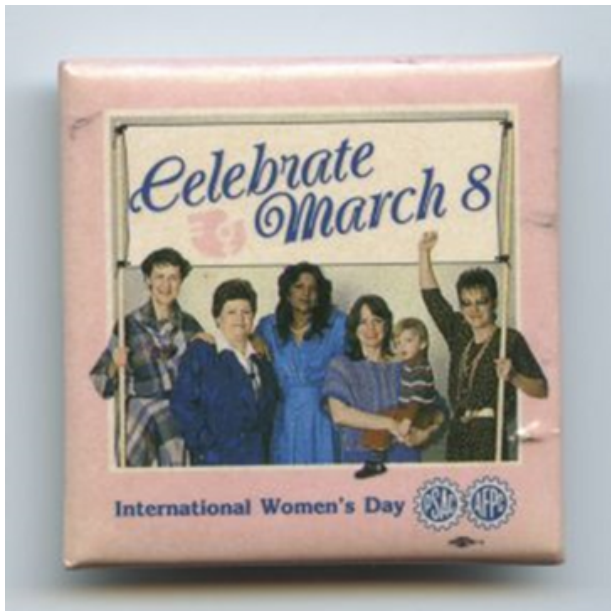
Public Service Alliance Canada (date unknown)
IWD Button
Photo: Rise Up Feminist Archive

economic disparities and political representation.

Socio-cultural norms play a crucial role in shaping women's experiences. Despite increased awareness and advocacy surrounding issues such as gender-based violence and intersectionality, deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes still influence societal perceptions of women's roles and capabilities. This is evident in persistent gender stereotypes and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions across industries.

Economically, women in Canada continue to face disparities in wages and opportunities for advancement. The gender pay gap remains a significant issue with women earning approximately 87 cents for every dollar earned by men. Furthermore, women are overrepresented in low-wage and precarious employment sectors, exacerbating economic inequalities.

Politically, there have been gains in women's representation in recent years. Women remain underrepresented, however, in the political decision-making process at all levels of government.

On this International Women's Day, we reflect on these complexities, celebrating achievements while recognizing the ongoing work needed to attain true gender equity.
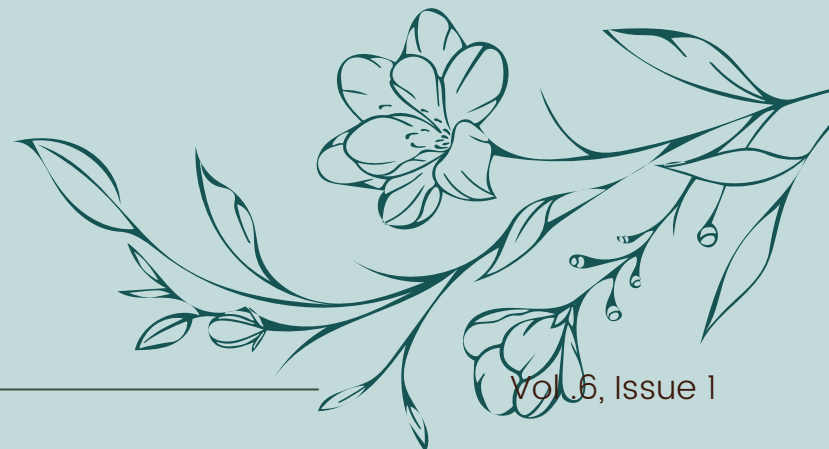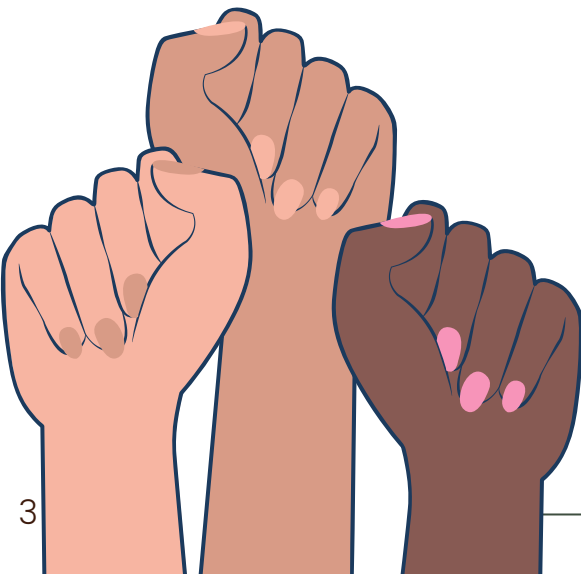
International Women's Day - A Brief History

International Women's Day occupies a special place in the history of women's and workers' struggles on this continent. It grew out of the actions of militant working women struggling for better working wages, working conditions, and the vote.

In 1857, women in the needle trade staged a demonstration in the Lower East Side of New York City to protest poor working conditions and to demand equality for working women. They were angry about indecent wages and a twelve-hour working day. When their procession left the poor district in which they lived and worked, and moved into the wealthier areas of town, they were dispersed by the police; women were arrested, and some were trampled in the melee. Three years later, in March 1860, these women formed their own union.

March 8, 1908 – Thousands of women, this time in the garment textile industry, marched once again from the Lower East Side of New York City. Fifty-one years had passed since the earlier demonstration, but their demands remained the same: shorter working hours and better working conditions. In addition, they wanted laws against child labour, and they wanted the vote.

March 8, 1910 – Clara Zetkin, the German socialist champion of women's and workers' rights, proposed that March 8th be set aside each year as International

Bread & Roses – I.W.D. March 8 1986
Photo: Rise Up Feminist Archive

International Women's Day 1981 (Toronto) – IWDC Activists Marianna Valverde & Carolyn Egan (photo: feminist archive)

Women's Day, in memory of those first struggles. Our slogan "Bread and Roses" also comes out of the struggles of working women. On January II, 1912, 14,000 textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, went out on strike for better wages and working conditions. With the cry of "Better to starve fighting than starve working", these women stayed out for nearly three months. Their courage inspired the song that has become the anthem of the women's movement, "Bread and Roses".

Since the rebirth of the women's movement in the 1960's, we have reclaimed March 8th as a day of protest, solidarity, and celebration. In memory of the pleas of those earlier working women for economic security and a better quality of life, we celebrate our on-going struggle for bread and roses.

Reprinted from Toronto March 8th Coalition 1984 International Women's Day Pamphlet

Many IWD archival documents currently on the Rise Up! website are from the Toronto International Women's Day events. You will find these on the March 8th Coalition/International Women's Day page in the Organizations section. Click on the link in Related Organizations below.

Please help us expand our collection to include materials about the many other IWD celebrations organized from the 1970s to the 1990s across Canada.
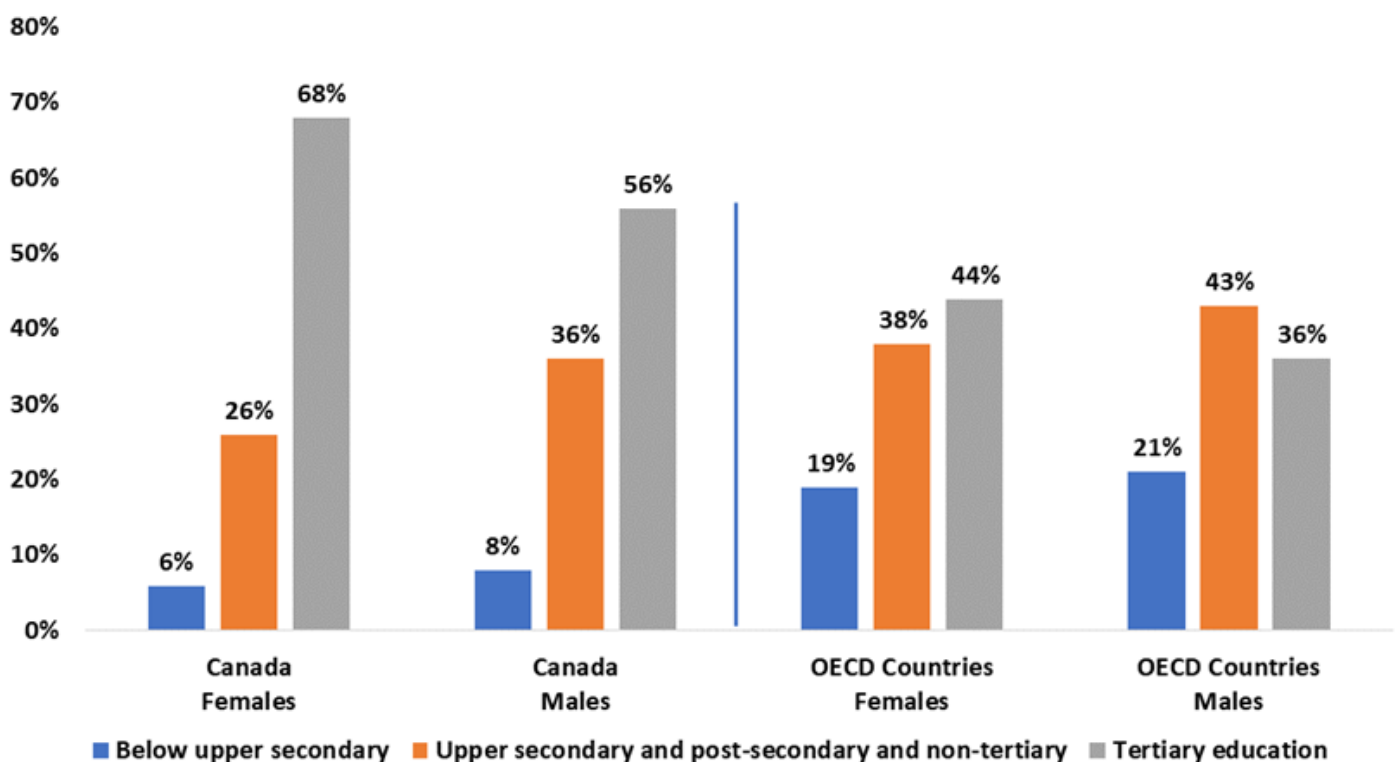
Women in Canada - What the Numbers Tell Us
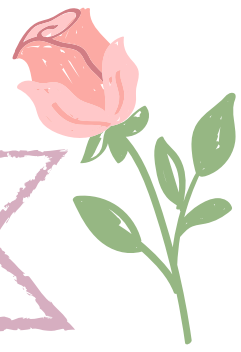
One of the great milestones achieved by women in Canada in the past decades is in education at all levels. In 2021, women in Canada had the highest level of Education among countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Over the next decades, the population of women in Canada is projected to be more diverse, originating from many cultural backgrounds, as well as different generations. Migration will be the main driver of population growth nationally. This is a pattern that began in the early 1990's.

On July 1, 2022, there were 19,572,198 women of all ages in Canada, just over half (50.3%) of the total population. The Canadian population, estimated at 38.2 million in 2021, is projected to increase to 56.5 million by 2068, under a medium-growth scenario. Women are expected to represent at least half or slightly more than half of the population.

Educational Attainment Of Women Aged 25 to 64 Years Canada and OECD Countries, 2021

	Below upper secondary	Upper secondary and post-secondary and non-tertiary	Tertiary education
Canada Females	6%	26%	68%
Canada Males	8%	36%	56%
OECD Countries Females	19%	38%	44%
OECD Countries Males	21%	43%	36%

Source: Statistics Canada

The increase in educational attainment of women in Canada is reflected in the growing number of female students completing postsecondary degrees. In 2021, a rate of 36.1% of women aged 25 to 64 years held a bachelor's degree or higher. This percentage is almost three times greater than the proportion of women with the same level of education in 1991 (12.7%).

The high school completion rate of Indigenous women aged 25 to 64 years increased from 2011 to 2021. About three-quarters (74.2%) of First Nations women, 85.6% of Métis women, and 54.2% of Inuit women had a high school diploma or the equivalent in 2021.

Immigrant women, particularly those who arrived in Canada in recent years, are highly educated. In 2021, 3 in 5 (60.7%) recent immigrant women aged 25 to 64 years had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 31.1% of non-immigrant women.

Women in Canada continue to encounter challenges in many areas. Specific examples are in the areas of employment and health.

Despite an increase, over the last 4 decades, of women participating in the Canadian labour force, (more than three-quarters [76.5%] of women were gainfully employed in 2021), the income gap between men and women persists.
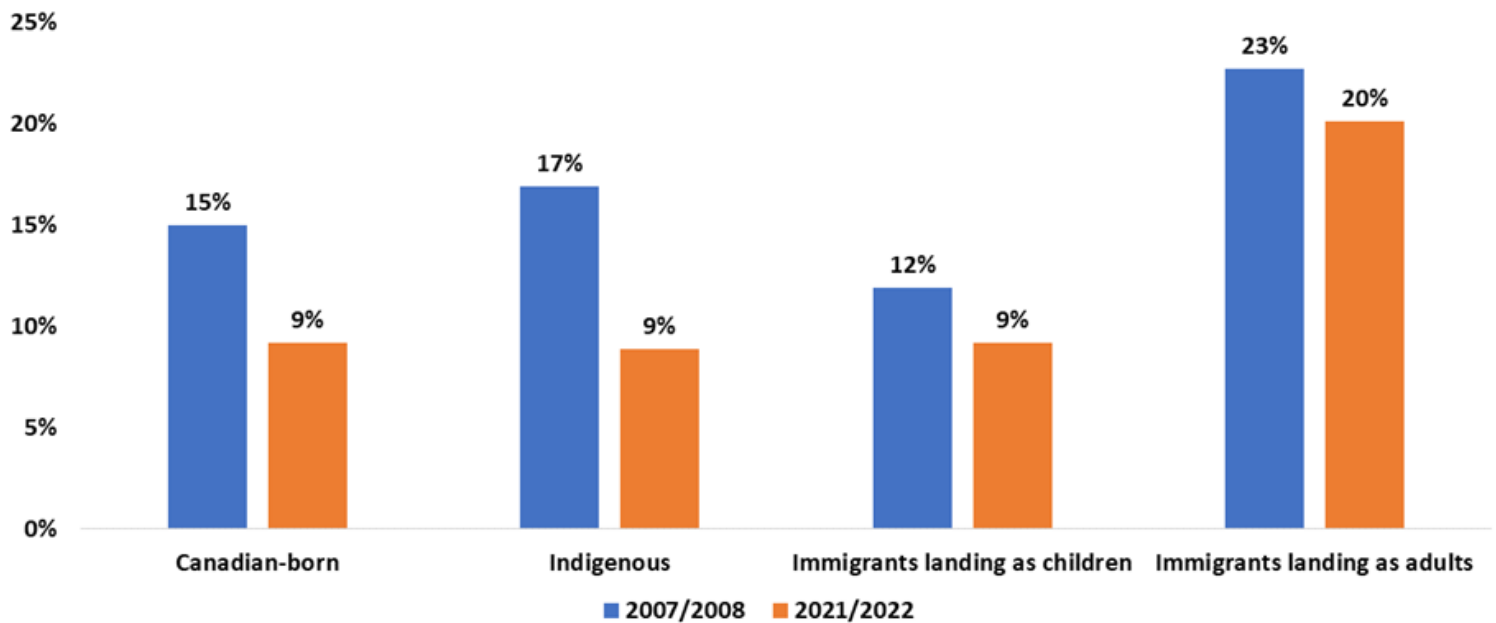
International Women's Day 1980 (Toronto) – Bread & Roses
Photo: Rise Up Feminist Archive

Gender Gap in Hourly Average Wage Within Groups
Paid Workers Aged 20 to 54
Years 2007/2008 and 2021/2022

Source: Statistics Canada

There are health issues that uniquely and disproportionately impact women in Canada. For example, young women and girls are less likely to report very good or excellent mental health than young men and boys. In 2021, just over half (52.2%) of women and girls aged 12 to 17 years rated their mental health as very good or excellent, which was about 20 percentage points lower than the proportion of men and boys in this age group who reported the same (72.1%).

Women and girls in more remote areas of Canada are less likely than their counterparts in more accessible areas to have a regular health care provider. Over the 2015-to-2018 period, 55.4% of women and girls aged 12 years and over in very

remote areas reported having a regular healthcare provider, compared to almost 9 in 10 (87.7%) women and girls in easily accessible areas. This gap was even more pronounced among Indigenous women and girls, with just over one-third (35.1%) of those in very remote areas reporting that they had a regular healthcare provider, compared to 87.3% of those in easily accessible areas.

With more highly educated women included in decision-making throughout Canadian society, it is likely that today's challenges will be resolved, leading to a better and more equitable future for all women.

The Exclusion of Vulnerable Groups During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, undoing decades of progress in promoting health and reducing poverty both in Canada and globally. Specifically, racialized individuals, school-going children and those of lower socioeconomic statuses faced elevated rates of COVID-19, limited resources, and heightened discrimination (Tan et al., 2023).

During the initial two months of the pandemic, 1.5 million women experienced job losses, resulting in the lowest labour force participation rate for women since the 1990s. Racialized women, particularly those engaged in precarious and underpaid roles—hourly, non-unionized, often with limited benefits and contractual protections or none at all—have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic. Additionally, racialized women find themselves overrepresented in frontline positions such as Personal Support Workers (PSWs), nurses, and other caregiving roles, exposing them to a significantly elevated risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19.

School-going children grappled with challenges such as virtual learning and school closures, leading to reduced social interactions and a decline in the quality of education. According to OISE professor Lance McCready, schools with a considerable number of Canadian-African, Caribbean, and Black students were more likely to close during the pandemic. Furthermore, Black
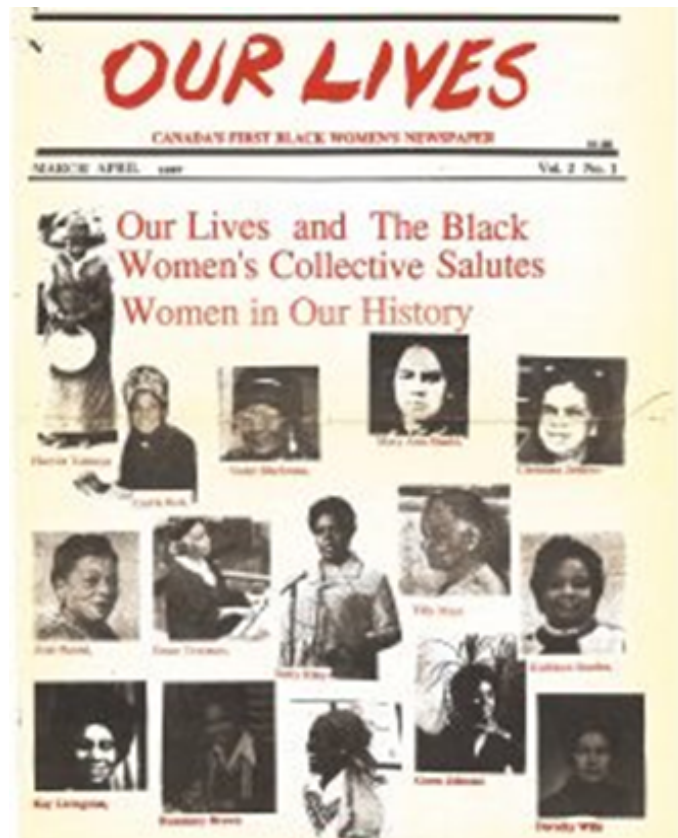
Black Women's Collective (1987)
Photo: Rise Up Feminist Collective
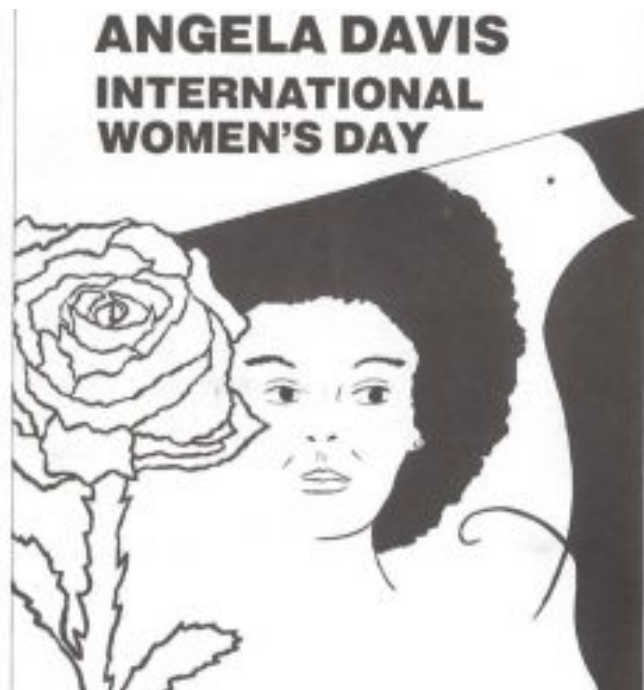
Angela Davis: International Women's Day 1985
Photo: Rise Up Feminist Archive

children, already overrepresented in special education encountered difficulties in transitioning to the virtual learning environment due to a lack of financial resources for private tutors and computer access.

In urban areas and neighbourhoods characterized by a significant ethnocultural diversity or lower income levels, there was an observed higher incidence of 14 to 30 COVID-19-related deaths per 100,000 individuals when compared to residents of single-detached homes located outside urban centers, where ethnocultural concentration is lower or income levels are higher. Those experiencing poverty were more likely to be exposed to substandard housing conditions, including living in overcrowded conditions, thereby elevating their susceptibility to COVID-19 at disproportionately high rates. The rates of infection in visible minorities, especially Black people, were higher than in white people.

Racial and social inequities created conditions that unfortunately led to the exclusion of vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Overall, the experiences of vulnerable populations during the pandemic highlight the importance of social inclusion.

Black, Latina, and Indigenous women, 2SLGBTQIA individuals, and people living in larger bodies who experience eating disorders face ongoing exclusion from accessing the care and support (that is also safe and appropriate) they need to heal. Moreso, society's role in pain and eating concerns for these individuals is hidden from view. Stigma relating to eating disorders causes people to blame and further isolate people suffering from eating concerns.

Research, treatment, and care for those with eating disorders have disproportionately centred around the image of the young, white, cisgender, heterosexual, affluent woman diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. This disproportionate focus on anorexia and the 'normative' image continues despite research since the 1990s that has drawn attention to higher rates of individuals diagnosed with bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder than those diagnosed with anorexia (Sonneville & Lipson, 2018), the disproportionate rate of eating disorders in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (5x the rate of the cisgender and heterosexual population), the disparities in access to care based on body weight (Harrop et al., 2021), and that severe outcomes occur regardless of gender, race, class, weight, diagnosis, and other social factors (Bordo, 2009; Harrop, 2020; Thompson, 1994).
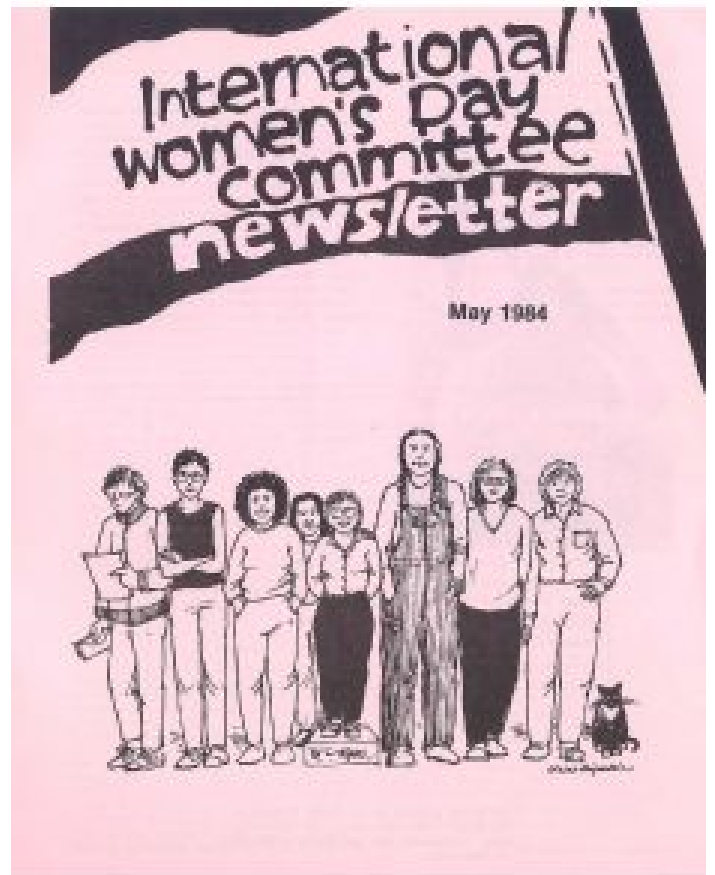
International Women's Day Committee – Vol. 6, Issue 3 – May 1984
Photo: Rise Up Feminist Archive

Numerous social justice activist-clinicians and scholars from Black, Latino, queer, and other communities focused on liberation in care have been advocating for change in the field of eating disorders (Dr. Jennie Wang-Hall, Allyson Inez Ford, Dr. Neeru Bakshi, Dr. Mae Lynn Reyes-Rodriguez, Dalia Kinsey, Gloria Lucas, Nia Marie Rivera Patterson, and many others). They advocate and promote care that challenges the dominance of Cis-Heteropatriarchy, white privilege, capitalism, neoliberalism, biomedicine, and ableism that have historically dominated care for those with eating disorders.

In 2024, a time when the rates of eating disorders and eating struggles continue to rise, care that is anti-oppressive, anti-carceral, responsive, and accessible to individuals of diverse identities is crucial. Supporting the work of advocates and clinicians in this area is necessary to ensure that all women, men, and 2SLGBTIA+-identifying folks can access healing spaces and live fulfilling lives.

Enhancing Women's Representation in Science- and Technology-Based Roles Globally

While science and technology play crucial roles in driving social and economic advancements worldwide, women continually face barriers that hinder their active participation and recognition in these fields. A recent literature review conducted by Avolio et al (2020), highlights the following five main grouped and interrelated factors influencing the access, participation, and advancement of women in science careers and positions:

1)Individual factors: Attitude towards science, personality, and self-efficiency.

2)Family Factors: Family background, parents' education, family stereotypes about science, family demands, family support and encouragement.

3)Social factors: Lack of role models, cultural beliefs about gender and science, lack of consistent roles, "chilly" environments, and racial barriers.

4)Educational factors: Science curriculum and pedagogy, academic performance, beliefs about science skills, and vocational expectations and stereotypes.

5) Labour and economic factors: Lack of information about careers in science, vertical and horizontal segregation, and wage gaps.

Together, we can support the participation of girls/women in science careers, enabling them to make valuable contributions to advancing positive and inclusive social, economic and health systems changes.

As Individuals:
Empower girls/women through emboldening initiatives, support, and recognition.

As Families:
Providing a nurturing and supportive environment for girls/women pursuing careers in science.

As Communities:
Creating inclusive social contexts that encourage and enable girls/women to participate and excel in STEM fields.

Decision-making organizations and society systems:
Implementing changes in education, labour, and socio-economic systems to promote equality, opportunities, resources, and recognition towards girls/women.

Gender Equity & Inclusion: Non-Binary and Gender Non-Conforming Identities

It's a boy! It's a girl! At birth, we are assigned a sex based on our biological sex characteristics and this dictates how we become socialized into specific gender roles. We are expected to adhere to these gender roles for the remainder of our lives. This binary construction of gender is thought of as static, polarized, and dichotomous. For those who adhere to the gender binary, it is considered a complete and whole conception of gender within and of itself, where one belongs to the categorization of either male or female. But what happens to those who fall into the spaces and places between, or refuse categorization at all?

Here, the spectrum of identities and expressions between polarizing concept-

ions of gender is illuminated, where those who do not identify within the binary construct are liable to experience erasure and harm. For non-binary, and gender non-conforming peoples, this is their lived experience. Without dismantling, rethinking, and reconstructing our conceptions of gender, there is no space or place to belong. Voices are left unheard and needs and concerns are unmet.

To begin the process of repairing and reconstructing this flawed system of gender categorization, it is imperative that stigma is addressed and that all gender identities be recognized, included, and embraced. In so doing, true gender equity and inclusion can be achieved.

Challenging Ideas of Inclusion: A Reflection

As the brightest student from our college, Urmi won many scholarships and went to Germany to pursue her Masters. Many years after graduation, I met her at the alumni reunion. Everyone had questions about her; all of us ensured she received the first piece of cake, and girls swarmed to guide and escort her everywhere. Later, I found her expressing discomfort and annoyance about everything.

In my second meeting with her, I expressed the desire to learn about her experience. During the discussion, she turned everything that I understood about women's inclusion and gender equality upside down. Urmi informed me that our intention towards her, which I misinterpreted as high admiration for a female scholar, impacted her in a totally opposite manner. She further added that people made her feel that she constantly needed assistance because of her visual impairment. I felt knocked to the ground. According to her, men mostly want to do their best to help her because of her disability, but they never learn to ask if she needs any assistance. "Wouldn't it be nice if men cared to pay attention to the ways in which I would like to be supported and learn when to step in and step out?" she concluded.

A Reflection on Inclusion in Sociology

As an undergraduate pursuing a degree in Sociology, I am grateful for the opportunities I have had to expand my understanding of the systemic barriers faced by marginalized women and communities within Canadian society. I have been fortunate to learn about the unwavering resilience of these individuals and communities. This resilience has been observed within my own academic field, with female sociologists and professors having shown dedication and perseverance in their profession, despite Sociology's deeply rooted patriarchal foundation.

Historically, sociological labour was male-defined, and for years, women were pushed out of sociology and transferred to other fields, such as social work (Deegan, 1988). In this way, male standards of knowledge in sociology were held to a higher standard than the academic and experimental knowledge of female sociologists. However, the female founders of sociology such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ida Wells-Barnett, and Harriet Martineau, to name just a few, have paved the way for current women sociologists and the inclusion of feminist pedagogy.

Currently, most graduate students and associate professors are women, and they have outnumbered men in obtaining sociology PhDs (Bucior & Sica, 2019). This has resulted in more graduate-level courses centred on women's issues and more dissertations linked to women-based topics (Bucior & Sica, 2019). In my own experience as a female student, the representation of women working professionally within my field has been consequential for my mentorship and continued learning. Undoubtedly, their presence and that of those before them have cast a brighter inclusive future for all women in Sociology.

Working together equals strength. The ABR committee aspires to empower and include everyone regardless of race, gender, age, or economic status. We all deserve the right to achieve anything we put our minds to, through fairness and equality.

○ FSP Anti-Black Racism Committee

Acknowledgements