Silent Masculinity: The Discursive Interplay of Gender and White Logic in Alberta's K-6 Draft Curriculum

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Abstract

This paper presents a discursive analysis of the gendering of Alberta's K-6 Social Studies draft curriculum. It examines if and to what extent the social studies curriculum promotes a gender-less portrayal of history buttressed by a façade of diversity and inclusion. In borrowing from Carol Bacchi's theories of "what's the problem represented to be" (WPR) and policies as gendering, it focuses on the discursive positioning of gendered norms and knowledge structures within the curriculum to unearth how the curriculum cultivates traditional masculinist and settler-colonial forms of historical truth while silencing those who contradict these narratives (1999; 2017). Through paying attention to the inclusion of binary gendered representation, their contextual underpinnings, and where gendered absences are positioned, the paper uncovers how the curriculum promotes a return to historical narratives predicated on patriarchal and white thought that pose dire implications for student's conceptualization(s) of their and their province's identities.

Keywords

Introduction

When Alberta's Premier Jason Kenney and the United Conservative Party (UCP) were elected to office in April 2019, one of their key electoral points was to revise the province's curriculum. Kenney's announcement came amid his preceding officeholder's curriculum overhaul that, if put into place, would have included previously overlooked topics from past curriculums, such as "gender diversity and sexual orientation" (Bennet 2016). According to Kenney, a curriculum that focuses on these "progressive" and "socialist" topics ill-prepares students for the "digital age," the global economy, and the real-world labour market (Bennet 2019). To respond, Kenney proclaimed that he "will stop the NDP's [New Democratic Party's] ideological rewrite of the school curriculum" and "develop a modern curriculum that is focused on essential knowledge and skills instead of political agendas and failed teaching fads" (Bennet 2019). Put more simply, Kenney highlights two separate but inter-connected problems: the curriculum's ideological situatedness and its presumed negative impact on Alberta's labour market.

On March 29, 2021, Alberta unveiled its new draft curriculum for elementary students. The social studies portion of the draft offers four key objectives that require students to engage with the following: 1) "diverse events, people, places, and ideas related to local communities, Alberta, Canada, and the world"; 2) "the nature of work, economies, and financial literacy"; 3) "the connections between people, places, and environments"; and 4) "the origins of ideas, viewpoints, religions, and cultures to foster understanding and tolerance" (Alberta Education, 2021). Through these goals, students are expected to "build foundational knowledge of shared culture, tradition, and history" and foster "respect for people of diverse backgrounds that transcends differences and unites us in a pluralistic society" (French 2021). While the curriculum's diversity-oriented language draws vocally on the ideal of multiculturalism, opponents of the revision criticize it for its racially charged and dangerous conceptualization of Albertan history that will influence a child's sense of belonging and community (Peck 2021; Patrick 2021; Pratt 2021; Roach 2021). Through labelling it as "Euro-ethnocentric" (Roach 2021), "laden with colonial history" (Patrick 2021), and complicit in perpetuating "paternalistic, Christianized, and militaristic" versions of history (Pratt 2021), I frame this study around Premier Kenney's call to focus on essential knowledge through questioning whose knowledge is dominant and made visible, whose is excluded, and what implications these assumptions carry for the construction of Albertan history. While Kenney's narratives of essential knowledge are intrinsically tied with broader understandings of economic growth and Alberta's labour market, this article solely engages with parsing apart the curriculum's ideological situatedness to allow for future analyses of the interconnectedness of the curriculum and labour.

In a myriad of ways, this argument is not new: the foundational assumption that provincial and national education systems are permeated with hegemonic narratives in both syntactic and substantial ways has been long developed by scholars in the education field (see Apple 1988; Alayan and Podeh 2018; Teff-Seker 2020). For instance, Alayan and Podeh note how educational narratives are "intended to support agendas of certain groups or institutions, often used as socialization tools to maintain or foster hegemonic influence" (as cited in Teff-Seker 2020, 533). Similarly, Apple (1988, 22) identifies how the educational system maintains "existing relations of domination and exploitation," setting what Godlewska *et al.* (2017, 447) refer to as the "ground rules" for what is "worthy of attention." As a result, dominative national or provincial stories "posit histories that count and histories that are made invisible" (Stanley 1998, 50). In focusing on the ubiquitous influence of knowledge structures and discourse, these and other scholars demonstrate how the education system often frames

history to inscribe narratives of nationhood and identity that are exclusive, hierarchical, and oppressive (Miles 2021; Pashby *et al.* 2014; Kennelly and Llewellyn 2011).

While it is incontrovertible that a torrent of education literature seeks to deconstruct the meaning behind national and provincial priorities in education systems, these studies often eclipse the gendered language embedded in educational discourses, leaving only a few studies that specialize on the constitutive effects policies have for the gendering of the curriculum (Kostas 2021; Bourke *et al.* 2020; Mertanen *et al.* 2020). In acknowledging the curriculum's highly politicized nature that is constructed by the state to socialize students in a particular manner and in turn, construct particular kinds of citizens, I add to the burgeoning educational literature by adopting a gendered discursive lens to deconstruct what gendered and racialized knowledges the Albertan government wants its students to equate with its history.

In this paper, I consider if and to what extent the social studies curriculum promotes a gender-less portrayal of history buttressed by a façade of diversity and inclusion. To answer this question, I adopt a post-structuralist ontology of power, discourse, and knowledge to theorize how the curriculum "*naturalize[s]* relations of domination," "*conceal[s]* the radical contingency of social relations," and stabilizes current practices of historical reflection to construe hegemonic versions of knowledge as fact (Howarth 2010, 309). To focus on the discursive positioning of gendered norms and knowledge structures within the curriculum, I borrow from Carol Bacchi's (1999; 2017) theories of "what's the problem represented to be" (WPR) and policies as gender*ing*. Bacchi's feminist ontology challenges what assumptions and representations of a problem are constituted within a policy proposal by questioning whose worldviews these policies cultivate and sustain. In simplified terms, the WPR model unsilences what structures of power and hegemonic truths are implicated in the representation of a "problem."

This study has three components. The first curates a theoretical and methodological discussion that unpacks the central tenets of Bacchi's WPR model, her conceptualization of policies as gender*ing*, and her contribution to feminist reflexive praxis. The second touches upon the usage of a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the paper's method, the curriculum as the chosen analytical corpus, and my data collection. The third, and most rigorous section, scrutinizes the social studies draft curriculum's discursive positioning of gendered and racialized identities to unveil how it overtly utilizes hidden narratives of masculinity and whiteness under the guise of gender equality and diversity. As a result, it constructs Albertan

and Canadian history as a masculine enterprise that leaves little room for women and non-binary inclusion.

Policies as Gendering: Theoretical Background and Methodology

According to Bacchi, those in power often frame political issues as having "only one possible interpretation of the issue at stake" (1999, 1). While she contends that contestations arise regarding an issue's representation, critical dissections of the policy are stifled. In other words, subjects are not encouraged to criticize how "issues take shape within these discussions," what factors lead to their interpretation, and what assumptions are intertwined within this policy proposal (Bacchi 1999, 1). To encourage such reflection and counter policy study's "relativist assumption that any one 'truth' is as good as any other," Bacchi conceives of the framework "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) (Baachi 2012, 22). The approach challenges the conceptualization of policies as "attempted 'solutions' to 'problems'" and redefines policies as embedded with multiplicities that constitute "competing interpretations or representations of political issues" (Bacchi 1999, 2). Formulating her central question, Bacchi tackles both the discursive formation of a problem and how it relies on fixed assumptions and interpretations those in power have about the world. The WPR model asks six questions:

> 1. What's the 'problem' […] represented to be in a particular policy?
>
> 2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
>
> 3. How has this representation of the "problem" come about?
>
> 4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
>
> 5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
>
> 6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced? (Bacchi 2009, xii).

Underlying this model is a post-structuralist focus on the constitutive effect of knowledge practices, power relations, and discourse, viewed through Bacchi's articulation of *policy-as-discourse*. Following a Foucauldian theorization of the term, she defines discourse as "regimes of truth' that go beyond ways of talking to include 'practices with material consequences" (Foucault 1994, 132; Bacchi 1999, 2). As discourses are influenced by and implicated in the social processes around them due to their fluid relational capacity and ability to construct meaning systems of knowledge, truth, and fiction, Bacchi identifies how policies hold the ability to construct social problems, much like discourse. Policies do not exist independently

of how they are represented or spoken about, but are instead, relational configurations "rendered intelligible within the *context* of a particular practice" (Howarth 2010, 311). Hence, policy-as-discourse articulates how policy practices construct a subject through discourse, according to prescribed understandings of knowledge and truth to further solidify the enduring realities of today's social order.

While maintaining the social constructiveness of knowledge that delineates and legitimizes a policy problem, Bacchi turns toward knowledge practices within policies that constitute subjects through processes of subordination and oppression. In doing so, she theorizes policies as "gendering*,* racializing, heteronorming, [and] disabling" practices by asserting that modes of oppression are not isolated but intertwine with each other and thus, one must consider the multiplicity of subordinating practices nested in a policy's narrative (Bacchi 2017, 34). The word practice in the context of Bacchi's gender analysis refers to the ongoing and performative process of gendering an individual, which Butler (1990, 25) argues is "always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed." In pairing the active verb of gendering with practice, Bacchi sheds light on how policies shape, and make come into existence, gendered entities such as 'woman' and 'man' that are marked as 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Bacchi 2017, 21; Connell 1995). The word gender*ing* removes the sexed category away from practices of 'man' and 'woman' to focus on how bodies become labelled by their performance(s) of gendered 'norms and assumptions', leaving any sexed body in a policy space the ability to exude masculine or feminine traits (Baachi 2017). In emphasizing the *doing* of gendered categories rather than their fixed and real assumptions, she renders the categories open for challenge and refrains from perpetuating a violent binary logic of gender. Instead, Bacchi challenges gender's naturalization and highlights the "dynamic processes involved in how inequality is 'done'" by examining a policy's constitutive and interactive effects across numerous oppressive planes (Dhamoon 2011). As a result, her theory calls into question the processes and practices of category formation that are implicit in all policy's designation of a problem.

While Bacchi is widely regarded as having "reframed the very objects of policy studies" following her WPR method (Goodwin 2012, 29; see also Mertanen *et al.* 2020), Goodwin notes that Bacchi's contribution is also heavily methodological. In acknowledging society's gendered intonations, Bacchi calls for theorists to deploy feminist reflexive practices when analyzing policy. She encourages policy theorists to confront "built-in assumptions, presuppositions, and biases," to challenge how problems are represented in policy proposals and question what implications this designation of the word "problem" carries for society

(Goodwin 2012, 30). When conducting gendered analyses, this means confronting hidden normative and exclusionary assumptions in narratives of gender equality and the construction of man and woman that cordon off the innate fluidity of gendered bodies in society. Bacchi argues for the researcher to be ethically responsible by "reflect[ing] on the particular reality their methods and concepts create" (Bacchi 2017, 22). By turning the researcher's gaze toward their assumptions in policy proposals, Bacchi's emphasis on feminist reflexivity extends her post-structuralist theorization of policy-as-discourse by drawing attention to the researcher's own biases and presuppositions. Hence, I adopt Bacchi's feminist reflexive methodology by curiously questioning by whom, how, and for whom certain policies and practices are made to benefit while remaining aware of my gendered presuppositions (Enloe 2004).

Method and Data Collection

Following Bacchi's post-structural and discursive theorizations of policy, this paper employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to make visible the structures of knowledge and power embedded in society. The method examines "how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or resisted in a variety of ways" by (in)visibility, discursive positionalities, rhetorical patterns, portrayals of truth and fiction, and (in/ex)clusion that frame a narrative in a particular light (Lazar 2007, 149). In shaping this study around the constitution of knowledge, reality construction, and making visible systems of meaning-production, CDA unearths how a seemingly mundane artifact, such as elementary curricular materials, perpetuates gendered knowledges and hegemonic truths. In sum, CDA problematizes the discursive and productive potential the curriculum possesses, demonstrating its viability to disrupt the gendered constructions in Alberta's K-6 draft curriculum.

The core data collected consists of the draft kindergarten to grade 6 (K-6) social studies documents alongside an excerpt from *The Dorchester Review* to offer a short historical analysis of the curriculum's conception. The draft K-6 curriculum consists of eight subjects: English Language Arts and Literature, Fine Arts, Français immersion et littérature, Français langue première et littérature, Mathematics, Physical Education and Wellness, Science, and Social Studies (Alberta Education 2021). While all subjects are of equal importance, I focus explicitly on the social studies portion of the curriculum as it delves the most heavily into discussions of identity, community, citizenship and informs "the schooled construction of the nation" (Sant 2017, 107; see also Miles 2021).

The Dorchester Review is a "robustly polemical" Canadian history journal that gives a voice to "elements of tradition and culture inherent to Canadian experience that fail to conform to a stridently progressivist narrative" (The Dorchester Review 2023). As a small, libertarian-leaning outlet, it publishes work that is male-centric and perpetuates discursive violence and colonial logic towards marginalized communities in Canada, such as through residential school denialism. In connecting it to broader discussions of Alberta's education system, the Albertan government hired *The Dorchester Review*'s founding editor C. P. Champion as a subject matter expert to review the social studies draft curriculum. During this time, Champion used *The Dorchester Review* as a platform to vocalize his concerns about the state of education in the province. These views became mired in controversy and demonstrated a broader trend in the Albertan political sphere that lent itself to highly white, settler-colonial, and patriarchal beliefs. In acknowledging Bacchi's call for the researcher to address both the representation of a problem alongside the proposed solution, I draw on discussions from *The Dorchester Review* to understand the "problem" construction of the previous K-6 Curriculum and what knowledge the government relied upon to propose a "solution."

To make sense of my approach with Bacchi's six WPR questions, I pair Questions 1, 2, and 3 together as Bourke *et al.* (2020, 730) argue that it is "necessary to work backwards from the 'practical texts' to answer these two questions." In the Foucauldian tradition, practical texts are key production sites of governmental decisions that offer an opportunity to assess a policy's constitutive effect(s) (Bacchi 2017, 27). *The Dorchester Review* acts as the practical text for these three questions as it outlines Champion's justification for why a new curriculum had to be created, his knowledge assumptions, and what problem he intends to solve. To do this, Bacchi (2009) recommends identifying prominent categories, binaries, and key concepts in the text. Question 4 sheds light on what, or who, has been ignored in the policy construction. Question 5 challenges the reverberations of the problem construction by analyzing subjectification effects as Bacchi fears that a problematization may negatively affect a group and hence questions who that may be (Bourke *et al.* 2020). Question 6 looks at the reverberations of the policy. As the curriculum draft is not yet implemented across the province, I can only hypothesize the effects of the problem representation and posit how it could be disrupted when put into force. As a result, I do not engage with Question 6 in this paper.

The following analysis interrogates the knowledge assumptions in Champion's construction of the curriculum, and the organizing ideas, guiding questions, and learning

outcomes for each grade of the K-6 social studies draft curriculum. In doing so, I identify two core themes: masculinity and whiteness. Together, they illuminate how Albertan history narratives are promulgated on hidden gendered and settler-colonial logic, prompting a level of conformity toward the "dominant modes of intelligibility" in the curriculum (Giroux 2004, 790).

What's the Problem Represented to Be?

In this section, I first situate the analysis in a brief discussion of the Albertan political context and define the problem, what assumptions are embedded in this problem, and its brief genealogical evolution. Grounded in this problem construction are binaries and categories of discourse used in the text to define and separate groups based on their lived experiences, identities, and histories, which I argue are: the binary ours versus foreign and the categories of whiteness and gender.

Similar to many settler-colonial societies established on the basis of white hegemony, misogyny, and settler-colonialism, Alberta's political culture is a mix of conservativism and desires for white protection but also hints at contemporary attempts at reconciliation and equality. As Wesley and Wong (2021, 62) note, Alberta's political culture can be equated to "non-conformity, frontiermanship, and bootstrap individualism that corresponds with a 'cowboy' mentality." In viewing the province as entangled with "notions of nostalgia, moral traditionalism, free-market capitalism, and libertarianism," Wesley and Wong assert that Alberta was "built on settler-colonial assumptions" that seep into individuals' understandings of Self and Other. However, nationally, discourses of multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, and diversity serve to upend these narratives. At the time of the draft curriculum's creation, Albertan politics was becoming increasingly fragmented due to pushes for greater inclusivity and simultaneous attempts to temper white anxieties and preserve tradition.

To Champion, the previous curriculum was nothing short of an ideological affront to socialist dogma set to undo Alberta's capitalist mode of production and indoctrinate students (citizens) with false conceptualizations of gender, settler-ism, and Albertan history. As Scott argues, Champion voices concern for the aberrant "ongoing cultural changes" taking place in the "western" world, igniting fear that those who have held advantaged positions in society are "becoming marginalized and left behind in their own countries" (2021, 4; see also Norris 2016). The problem represented to be in this narration is the misrepresentation of Albertan history and the dilution of core Albertan values that are "trending in the wrong direction" (Scott 2021, 8). As a rebuttal, the new curricular draft aims

to refocus Alberta's ideological commitments and "reinstate what are perceived as traditional values," beliefs, and "factual" narratives of Albertan history. In doing so, it challenges the curriculum's previous degradation by partisan ideology and "the prevailing, politicizing social justice tendency that has already gone too far" (Scott 2021, 8; see also Champion 2020).

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and multiple federal apologies to marginalized communities in Canada, Alberta's previous curriculum synchronously moved toward an apologetic discourse revolving around educating students on historical injustices and multiculturalism (Alberta Education 2005). In other words, Albertan whiteness became disrupted and de-hierarchized with the focus reverted away from learning about Alberta's contribution to the "great" world wars and European historical ties and instead, toward the concepts of reconciliation, debunking settler-colonialism, and critical thinking skill development. To illustrate, Champion decries and lays blame on the curriculum's misguided teaching "fads," such as the "need [for] 'more' First Nations 'perspectives'" that "brainwashes children into thinking of themselves as 'settlers' stealing land" (Champion 2020). He further contends that albeit there is "value in [learning about] other cultures," we "can never truly appreciate or evaluate *foreign* culture without first knowing *our* own" (emphasis added, Champion 2020). Our history, to Champion, originates from "Classical, European, and US history because North American societies are offshoots of Europe's," while Indigenous and immigrant histories that do not adhere to the white Western European past of conquest and settlement are Othered and should not be visible in historical Albertan narratives (Champion 2020). As a result, the usage of the possessive pronoun "our" draws tight boundaries around who Champion sees as included in the historical narratives – the logic that is predicated on the furtherance of the white Albertan identity even though the myth of the white province is not very tenable.

In bringing the educational discourses back to portraying Alberta as who it "really is," Champion recommends the curriculum move away from a thematic approach to a chronological pedagogy. He argues that "[t]hematic history seems ideally suited to transmitting left-wing dogma" and that it is

> [b]etter to equip them [students] with the great stories and give them a key life-skill by the
> end of high school: the capacity to think critically about men and ideas and their place in
> history, as opposed to imposing sterile doctrines of race and 'gender.' (Champion 2020)

Immediately, it is apparent that Champion's vociferous writing is predicated on hegemonic, masculinized, and white presuppositions. Not only does the quote impose binary thinking that epitomizes a patriarchal understanding of the importance of masculinist narratives in

history while rendering women and non-binary individuals invisible, but it also further denigrates the importance of identity factors such as race and gender in the education system to fallaciously misconstrue the multi-racial and gendered realities of the province. In the context of Champion's often male-centric language, the above quote acts as an instantiation of his writing's hidden gendered logic that frames stories of the white, masculine, European settler as neutral historical "truths" while those who do not conform to the historical path of 'men and ideas' are rendered unintelligible (Champion 2020). Together, the policy proposal's goal is to revert Albertan history narratives back to their European underpinnings, take the politics out of the classroom, and replace far-flung tales of racial discrimination with 'our stories' of pride and conquest (Champion 2020).

What is Left Unproblematic and Silenced in This Problem Representation?

In speaking in Baachi's terms, Champion frames Alberta's education "problem" around the unwanted imposition of Indigenous knowledge, and "'sterile doctrines of race' and 'gender'" in previous curricular narratives (Champion 2020). However, at first glance, the curriculum's discussion of Albertan history goes against this assertion in terms of its racial and gendered representation(s) and could be argued as inclusive. In its overview, the curriculum is interested in reflecting "diverse events, people, places, and ideas related to local communities, Alberta, Canada, and the world" and in the "origins of ideas, viewpoints, religions, and cultures to foster understanding and tolerance" (Alberta Education 2021). On the surface, these discourses run parallel to broader Canadian multicultural narratives and create a false sense that the curriculum is truly created for a diverse audience with history from an array of perspectives and events. However, as Abu-Laban and Nath (2020, 516-17) point out, multiculturalism "is not a linear process of greater inclusion and progress," while Thobani (2007, 184) notes that discourses of inclusion and belonging often construct a façade over past and present racism and oppression. Lastly, Bakali (2015, cited in Abu-Laban and Nath 2020, 517) sees the use of multiculturalism as linked to a state's white-saviour complex that normalizes "the settler-colonial state's determination of who should be 'tolerated' or 'saved' and on what terms." As a policy that manages diversity, multiculturalism regulates conceptualizations of difference and stabilizes understandings of nation and belonging by limiting diversity to only forms that are pre-determined as safe for the state. In situating the curriculum as one of "understanding and tolerance," it positions the white

settler as drawing up boundaries around who can be tolerated and what forms of diversity are safe for students to consume.

In the curriculum's narratives, it continues to draw on notions of diversity across gendered ways by referencing predominantly European male but also white women's accomplishments. As much of early European colonialism and governmental involvement was heeded by men, the curricular narratives follow suit and ask students to memorize a plethora of facts regarding Canadian, American, and European wars, war figures, and dates of conquests by Christopher Columbus and Vasco de Gama. Depictions of white Canadian women became visible after the 1800s when a greater number of women immigrated to the region to help the colonial effort. Already, the curriculum's attempt to reflect a diverse understanding of Albertan history falls short by selectively elevating stories of white women over women of colour. Throughout the text, four key women are highlighted and given biographical space: Laura Secord, Joan of Arc, Madeleine de Verchères, and Susanna Moodie. Secord was an Upper Canadian woman who warned Britain's troops before an impending American attack in 1813, Joan of Arc a French heroine in the Hundred Years' War, and Verchères a "Canadienne heroine widely known for rallying to the defence of New France" against an Iroquois attack (Alberta Education 2021). Verchère's iconic status is also situated in a more contemporary context as being "used to inspire women to engage in the [First World] war effort in Canada" (Alberta Education 2021). Diverging from these narratives of war involvement is Moodie, a pioneer who "clear[ed] a farm near Peterborough" albeit "[m]ost of the settlers were men" (Alberta Education 2021). By defying feminized norms of the time due to their presence in highly masculinist spaces, students are taught to celebrate white women's performance of certain traits such as war-making and homesteading, while normalizing the invisibility and silencing of women of colour or those who were primarily involved in work such as home care and child-rearing (Hooper 2001). In other words, the text draws attention to gender performances where policies make to come into existence sexed bodies who conform to masculinist knowledge assumptions while subordinating those who do not perform the state's desirable norms across both gender and race.

All while the curriculum makes its first attempt to brand itself as gender-inclusive and non-patriarchal, it simultaneously furthers white supremacist logic masked in narratives of equality. Similar to practices of white feminism, the curriculum erases women of colour and fails to "hold white women accountable for the production and reproduction of white supremacy" (Moon and Holling 2020, 253). As Moon and Holling point out, by erasing the "built-in privilege of whiteness" and equating all women with white women, racism is

"conveniently made invisible" (Moon and Holling 2020, 254). More specifically, in the draft curriculum, suffrage is framed as an unproblematic movement that granted women the right to vote. However, the movement was both inundated with eugenics supporters and actively sought to exclude Indigenous women (who were not granted the right to vote until decades later). Through whitewashing this movement and overlooking their racist and classist stances, the draft curriculum overlooks the reality that many suffragettes wanted "gender equivalence within a white racial system that benefitted them" rather than racial and gender equality (Moon and Holling 2020, 255). By overlooking an opportunity to engage student's critical thinking skills, the draft curriculum pursues both a white and ablest line of thought that minimizes and ignores the realities of women of colour and prevents a broader reflection on both the successes of the suffragette movement as well as the harms committed.

In centring white women's experiences and foregoing their own complicity in Canada's settler-colonial project, the curriculum reproduces hegemonic whiteness obscured by gender equality. Further embedded in forms of women's representation are nuanced gendered subordinating practices. To illustrate, for a Grade 5 project, students are given a list of 31 male and 12 female historical figures, such as the Famous Five and American abolitionist Harriet Tubman, and encouraged to produce a short report on one of the individuals. While the draft curriculum highlights numerous independent women in active positions of resistance instead of as passive citizens, many of these women's significant achievements lack the context that is afforded to their male counterparts whose similar accomplishments are heavily represented in broader "Knowledge" and "Understanding" sections of the curriculum. As the 31 men listed are given curricular space outside of the context of the suggested assignment, the 12 women are not, meaning that all students must engage with narratives of male conquest and pioneering but interacting with women's achievements is offered as a *choice* in which students may not participate. For example, the Famous Five were suffragettes involved in a drive for women's equality. Although the push for suffrage was, and still is an iconic movement in Canadian history, the topic itself is not discussed until Grade 6 and is seemingly glanced over at best, with students only being asked to *recognize*, but not inquire into, how "[v]oting rights did not always apply equally for women, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, or for people of colour" (Alberta Education 2021). In separating the topic of suffrage across two grades with no substantial discussion given in either grade, the draft curriculum makes it difficult for students to actively engage with the suffragette's relationship to actual policy change. As such, it leaves unproblematic the lack of narration surrounding suffrage, demonstrating that topics that are viewed exclusively as

benefiting women and minority groups are often minimized in curricular narratives and must be self-selected by students to make their way into classroom discussions.

In a more nuanced capacity, the curriculum also promotes exclusionist discourses predicated on Euro-centric and patriarchal presuppositions of rule. In Grade 1, students are taught that European societies were ruled by feudalism, monarchies, and the "divine right of kings"; in Grade 2 students are to 'understand the history of hereditary rulership (monarchy) and the origins of modern forms of democracy' that were composed of the Athenian Council of 500, male citizens, and 'non-citizens'; in Grade 3, students must engage with terminology such as the "Magna Carta," "parliamentary democracy" and the "council of barons" who "represent[ed] the people" (Alberta Education 2021). Missing from these narratives of European governance structures is the notion of *who* had access to democratic representation and why European structures are privileged over other forms of governance. As the text uses gender-neutral terminology such as "common people" and "subjects" to construe the act of democracy as a form of equality, implicit in this designation of 'subjects' is the acknowledgment that women were barred from partaking in any form of responsible government and hence are not encapsulated in this purported genderless terminology (Alberta Education 2021). In effect, students learn to link the concept of "democracy" to elitist European rule where only land-owning men had the privilege to participate in society while those who do not conform to this identity are labelled as "non-citizens" (Alberta Education 2021). Students are not encouraged to think of alternative forms of governance outside of the European continent.

Even though students are introduced to European government at an early age, it is not until Grade 5 that students encounter alternative forms of governance with women's representation, such as the Iroquois Confederacy's matrilineal conception of ruling. Students are to understand how the Confederacy was a matriarchal society "unlike early European society headed by men with a patriarchal line of authority, kings, and male-dominant culture" (Alberta Education 2021). The positioning of Indigenous forms of governance in Grade 5, compared to European governance structures in Grades 1 through 4, enables students to normalize Canadian, British, and French governments with a 'patriarchal line of authority, kings, and male-dominant culture' and construct matriarchal forms of governance as "unlike" *our* Canadian form of ruling (Alberta Education 2021). While the text discursively includes women-led forms of governance, the positionality of male governance structures much before Indigenous forms coupled with the direct comparison of the Iroquois Confederacy's system being unlike "ours" in Grade 5, serves to *Other* women-led structures and further

normalizing settler-colonial leadership styles (Poitras 2021). Again, students are not given the opportunity to learn about other forms of governance systems outside of the Canadian and European contexts or to critically engage with why these systems pervade our society. While the curriculum is framed by policymakers as actively engaging in a plethora of stories that include women and marginalized communities, the narratives are positioned in a way that privileges discourses of the white male, European settler over all others.

While the text is promulgated on a set of gendered silences, it is also grounded in the racialized logic of erasure. Students from the age of five are taught to 'identify differences and similarities' amongst classmates (Alberta Education 2021). By grade 1, they are asked how to construct groupings centred around the words "we" and "they": for example, what "do *we* have in common with" the Americans and the British, while "they" questions regard Indigenous and minority groups' histories (Alberta Education 2021). In applying this skill set to a domestic context, students are cautioned that "newcomers bring new and unfamiliar religious faiths and practices" that make acceptance "come less easily" (Alberta Education 2021). To Saleh (2021), the curriculum's use of discourses such as "Eastern civilizations," "different," "the Orient," and "they" construct an "exotic Other" through oppositional logic that teaches students to essentialize cultures and leave unproblematic binary logic that subordinates groups who do not identify with the white Albertan history. Concurrently, by grade 3, students are taught to objectify African American people by referring to them as "blacks" who were "'property' of white settlers" (Alberta Education, 2021). Further, students are told to analyze "*why* advertisements would be placed in newspapers offering rewards for the capture of a runaway slave," to memorize the KKK slogan and question why the KKK *attracted* and "*appealed* to Americans and Canadians" (emphasis added, Alberta Education 2021). The usage of reductionist logic, positive adjectives, and discursive subjugation prompt students to justify why slave owners and white North Americans performed in this manner instead of criticizing the racial logic put forward in the text. As a result, the text marginalizes, reduces, and makes absent all discourses of African-American history aside from narratives of slavery and white oppression (Brown and Kelly 2001). While this is also an example of discursive absence, it, more importantly, demonstrates the clear boundaries the text constructs around whose history qualifies as Albertan by presupposing the derivation of the Albertan "we" to be from descendants of European settlers rather than inclusive of all the province's citizens.

For Indigenous cultures and histories, the curriculum draws on discourses of diversity and cultural pluralism by including "the history of First Nations and Inuit" and

prompting students to explore their "languages and varied traditions" (Alberta Education 2021). Albeit subtly, these efforts are met with a rhetorical style that incoherently places Indigenous peoples as past entities with no current structures of livelihood. While the text utilizes active verbs to describe European colonialism, it points to how the "First Nations, Métis, and Inuit *had* different languages and unique cultural practices" and "*inhabited* the land" (emphasis added, Alberta Education 2021). Moreover, students are asked to "retell the stories of First Nations or Inuit peoples and folk tales of early civilizations" (Alberta Education 2021). In deploying a past tense grammatical style and positioning conversations of Indigenous histories in the same breath as ancient civilizations that had "existed but have vanished," Indigenous peoples are framed as historic entities no longer existing (Alberta Education 2021). By leaving unproblematic discourses of Indigenous erasure, the curriculum harmfully perpetuates neo-colonial and misogynistic thinking that once again, elevates historical narratives of the white male, European settler over that of women and people of colour.

Conclusion: What Effects are Produced by This Representation of the "Problem"?

Due to this study's timely position before the implementation of the draft curriculum across Albertan schools, I can only hypothesize how it would affect student's understanding of Self and Other as well as their critical thinking and inquiry-based skill deployment. Further studies should be undertaken in the coming years to survey how a curriculum that dismisses the complexities of gendered and racialized histories through constructing a monolithic "we" while essentializing the rest of society into the category of "they" will impact students' historical interpretations of society. Moreover, one must reflect on how, while the curriculum deems what is worthy for an educator to teach in a class, it is up to that educator and the learning resources created to determine what students engage with and learn. As a result, this study only interprets the statist logic and knowledge structures evoked throughout the curriculum – but not how students interact with and understand the material.

Together, this article makes visible the oppressive and masculine performances embedded in Alberta's attempted gender and racially-diverse portrayal of its history. By challenging the positionality and constitution of these narratives in the curriculum, this article's usage of Baachi's WPR model unearths how the curriculum cultivates and perpetuates traditional masculinist and settler-colonial forms of historical truth while silencing those who contradict these narratives. In paying attention to the inclusion of binary

representation, their contextual underpinnings, and where gendered absences are positioned, I uncover the discursive processes at play to highlight how Champion's solution requires a return to historical narratives predicated on knowledge structures of patriarchy and whiteness. Moreover, in questioning how knowledge structures frame problems through practices of oppression and subordination, I identify how policies shape and perpetuate both gendered and racialized categories as they delineate tight boundaries between who belongs to Albertan history and who is excluded from these narrations.

In terms of the curricular draft's racializing discourse, it promotes a facade of diversity that is promulgated on the construction of an us/them binary that portrays Albertans as a white European entity that excludes Indigenous and minority groups from its narrative. As a result, this analysis illuminates how the curriculum deploys a provincial "we" that is grounded in narratives of colonial, masculine governmentality to reclaim Alberta's traditional values due to Champion's fear of purported ideological fads that require counteracting. In highlighting both patriarchal logic and white thought, the findings demonstrate how the curriculum's "essential knowledge" draws on a façade of equality to reignite white narratives of the province and reclaim *our* position in society (Alberta Education 2021).

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