An ordinary Palestinian girl born and raised in the sultry desert heat of Kuwait. In 2010, Yasmeen Ayesh uprooted her life and moved to Montréal, where she completed her DEC and earned a Bachelor’s degree in Art Education and Psychology at the University of Concordia. Yasmeen is currently working as a freelance illustrator and fine artist. Her illustrations and oil paintings stem from a love and appreciation for human vulnerability, emotion and the many ways in which it manifests itself in our lives.

Art Description

I had been having a particularly rough week during the making of this piece. A lot had been going on and, like a scene right out of some cliché pre-teen movie, I completed this piece in tears, while listening to the song “Girl of the Year” by Beach House over and over again.

Her expression of emotion through a simple “oh” is left to your subjective interpretation. In older, more illustrative pieces, the subject almost always used to be myself (a white-passing, cis female.) I did this simply due to the fact that I found this process to be more therapeutic and cathartic for me. As time passed and I began to change my style, I also started to change the way I viewed the subject of my pieces. This transition led to the illustrations of friends, family members and others as the subject of my work (the girl in my “Oh” piece is a friend of mine.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Editor ⋆⋆⋆ Cyndia Mondésir
Contributing Authors ⋆⋆⋆ Yasmeen Ayesh, Novera Shenin, Shaunna Okemow, Skylar Niehaus, Cierra Garrow, Ashante Blackwood, Nicole Areias, Nardin Maayteh, Stormy Bradley, Erin Flood, Keshana King, Luna Craig, Victoria Cosby, Dana Foley, Emma Lim, Hayley Meilleur, Katie Davey, Aleksandra Skliarenko, Julia Angot, and Mary Rouncefield

Design & Layout ⋆⋆⋆ Jessica McCuaig, Phalandia Mondésir, and Cyndia Mondésir
Cover Art ⋆⋆⋆ Yasmeen Ayesh
Translation ⋆⋆⋆ Mélissa Alig, Morgane Fortin, Lara Moussa, and Cyndia Mondésir
Final Product Assistants ⋆⋆⋆ Mélissa Alig, and Cyndia Mondésir
Review Committee ⋆⋆⋆ Mélissa Alig, Jacqueline Neapole, and Cyndia Mondésir
CRIAW Facilitator ⋆⋆⋆ Jacqueline Neapole

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CRIAW respectfully acknowledges our presence on Indigenous territories and recognizes the legacy of colonization upon Indigenous peoples in Canada. The ideas expressed in *The Feminist Word* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of CRIAW.
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The Feminist Word (a.k.a. The F-Word) was created by and for young feminists in Canada. We aim to elevate the collective voices of young feminists through a platform that allows us to creatively express our thoughts and priorities regarding women’s equality in Canada. Our goal is to provide a meaningful space in which women aged 15 to 29 from across Canada can contribute to the women’s movement.

We welcome new submissions in **English and French** all year long, including articles, poetry, artwork, photography, reviews (of literature, film, music), and stories. So send us your submission today and it may be featured in an upcoming edition!

**The Feminist Word was originally conceived by the following women:** Sarah Baker, Stacy Corneau, Rachelle DeSorcy, Caroline Flocari, Tess Kim, Susan Manning, Jessica McCuaig, Caitlin Menczel, Caroline Paquette, Jacqueline Neapole, Elizabeth Seibel, Jessica Touhey, and Miriam Illman-White.

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**Become a member of CRIAW and consider donating!**

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) is a charitable, not-for-profit, member-driven organization. Since 1976, we have produced research, publications, and events to advance women’s substantive equality in Canada. Using intersectional feminist frameworks, CRIAW is inclusive and supports the rights of diverse women in Canada. Since part of our mandate is to produce accessible resources, The Feminist Word is a free publication. Given our limited resources, if you enjoy reading the F-Word please consider making a donation and/or becoming a member.

**CRIAW is easy to join.**

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To request a copy of the print editions, please email us at: fword.efem@criaw-icref.ca.

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**ABOUT**

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Editor’s Note

I’m terrible at writing Editor’s notes, and I’m even more terrible at writing heartfelt goodbyes. Unfortunately for me, this time around, I have to do both. Almost four years ago, I was a first-year student in university contemplating where I should complete my volunteer hours. Amongst a long list, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW) immediately caught my eye. As the months passed, I was graciously given the opportunity to coordinate The Feminist Word magazine. There was a twinkle in my eye—I had a plan. I was determined to continue to celebrate young women’s storytelling in its powerful, creative, and authentic varieties. Even with our limited time and resources, so far, we’ve published more than 50 writers, poets, and artists. Thanks to our donors and our readership’s support, young women in Canada, and women from all over the world, including Europe, Africa, and South America have been published with us.

I’ve spent countless hours working on The Feminist Word, but so has our brilliant staff, volunteers, and contributing artists. Being able to collaborate, brainstorm, and work with a group of wonderful women has been one of the most empowering elements of coordinating a magazine. I am unable to adequately express my gratitude to their time, patience, and creative minds. I am immensely proud of the growth CRIAW has gone through, and I am proud of the work we were able to do with this magazine.

I will never forget my time at CRIAW; my loving coworkers who made it much easier for me to wake up early, and the community I have had the pleasure to create great content with. Thank you all for lighting a fire in me and sharing this amazing experience with me. CRIAW will always be my home, and it will always hold a dear place in my heart.

With that said, some may ask how I could walk away from a place that has meant so much—a place that has helped shape my intersectional feminist identity. To that I answer; I will walk forward with my head held high. Proud of all our accomplishments, but looking ahead to new adventures.

Enjoy this sixth edition!

Much love,

Cyn xx

---

Cyndia Mondésir graduated from the University of Ottawa, in Communications and Women’s Studies. She is an activist, a survivor, a writer, a music enthusiast, all in all, a creative. She is just an individual trying to make a change, whatever that means.

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* TW: The Feminist Word provides an open space for critical exchange of ideas. Content in this issue contains discussions about mental health, racism, sexual assault, violence, gender identity, and nudity.*
The sun is slowly rising in the pink sky. I look over at my mother and start to construct a blueprint of every line that touches her face. I begin to wonder, have all of these lines slowly and graciously made themselves known? Or were some viciously carved in like words in a bathroom stall? Scars with stories of their own, staring up at me, screaming to be seen and heard.

We’re on our way to attend my first Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women awareness walk. At first, I’m worried to ask my mother to join me on the 3-hour drive. Worried to choke on the silence that tends to follow our relationship. I begin to explain what the walk means and why it’s important that as Indigenous women, we show support for our sisters.

I notice my mother’s demeanour change; she begins to adjust her seat. She opens her window, as if that’ll draw out any memories or discomfort that she feels in that very moment. I see her eyes darting from one side of the road to the other, she’s a bystander in that very moment, watching her story all over again. I can tell by her body language, that the story she is watching is quite vivid. No amount of time that has passed has been able to blur these moving pictures. I ask her, “What’s on your mind mama?” She then hurriedly unbolts the door that she has kept closed for so long. Despite being invited in, I still proceed with caution.

She tells me that she remembers pressing her toddler face against the window of her childhood home. It’s a cold, unforgiving winter night. In the background, she can hear the crackling of the wood burning in the corner of the room.
The anticipation of the next crack isn’t the only nervousness that she feels, she also spots her drunk father stumbling up the hill towards their home.

My mother darts to her bedroom and wiggles herself in between her other siblings. The space between one another is so hot and unbearable, sweat begins to bead off her forehead.

A bang fills the entire house, followed by my grandmother coming to her feet and heading to the door. Even at four years old, my mother is still able to comprehend what historically is most likely to happen next.

A cursed fortune teller who is forced to relive the same hell over and over again.

My grandmother and grandfather are screaming at one another. My mother places her tiny hands on her ears to help muffle out the sounds. But this time, she notices a change in my grandmother’s voice. A sound of pure fear and helplessness, a sound that is used to pierce the skies and reach any deity that can swoop down and save her in this time of need.

My mother peeks around the corner and finds my grandfather holding a rifle and pointing it directly down towards my grandmother who lies lifeless on the floor. My mother musters up the strength of every ancestor before her and speeds towards the living room and grabs my grandfather’s jeans and screams for him to stop.

I sit there in shock, covered in all of shrapnel that now fills my car.

I imagine my mother with her jet-black hair and frail toddler body grabbing my grandfather with such command and conviction.

My mother tells me that she wasn’t the only one who provided a moment of divine intervention within their family history.

Later in life, my grandmother would need to do the same for two of my aunties and my mother during their physical altercations with their intimate partners.

In that moment, I realized that this awareness walk was closer to home than I anticipated. It was intertwined in the very history of who I am as a person.

Years of silence and calculated conversations were instead replaced with connection and validation.

Our journey together won’t end after we’ve reached this destination, we have far more car rides to have.

Shaunna Okemow is a Woods Cree undergraduate student enrolled in Gender Studies and Counselling. She works as a Youth Outreach Worker, and is a passionate advocate for Indigenous rights and issues. She also loves to express herself through all forms of art.
Luna Rose (they/her) is an interdisciplinary artist living and studying on unceded Lkwungen territory. Their work touches on themes of body image, sexuality, and the struggles of mental health. Above all, their work investigates the relationship between self and land.

Thank you for this land that I create on; thank you to the Stoney and Tsuu T’ina peoples, the Tlingit and Tagish peoples, and the Coast Salish peoples for allowing my presence and my creating spirit in this space. I am grateful to be learning and adapting to the ways of this beautiful land. My work stems from sexual trauma and learning to live with mental health and addiction. My body was not my own for many years, abused by a person I trusted and cherished. I was so young, this relationship moulded the way I grew into my body and sexuality. The first time I got naked in front of my lens was the beginning of the end of that chapter of terror. It was a true awakening. This level of vulnerability and the energy I was putting out began to transform my life. I attracted people who wanted to be part of it. Share in the healing. The work I do is no longer just for me, it’s for all who need to know they aren’t alone.
Do you know who you are? Do you know why you’re here? Do you know how you got here?

There are a few things worse than being unable to feel... Feeling like you’re completely and utterly alone is one of them. Isolated in your crumbling pain, a chaos of fuzzy emotions and unfathomable hurt.

A fist clenched around your gut, twisting and turning. A paralyzing fear that cripples you into a heaping mess of too lates and overambitious dreams. I was supposed to be successful.

Watching the lives of others flash by on a screen as the encoded messages tell me what I’m missing. The pictures of smiles and laughter, friends and drinks, husbands and children fill my newsfeed.

But where am I? I sit here looking at an empty reflection. Trapped behind a flood of tears and hopeless attempts to be more than nothing. A desperate plea to amount to some worth that exceeds the dirt on the floor.

How did I get here? The world’s spinning a screaming mess of anxiety and pressure. The lid’s about to explode. And yet, there is stillness. A frozen impairment of functionality and a loss of grip with reality. A dissociation of identity that splits me apart from the shreds of humanity I desperately attempt to hold on to.

Why am I here? What purpose does my existence have on the people around me? My fading in and out of lives while I dance around the relationships I could have had. Did I put myself here? How did I get here?

A broken repercussion of high expectations and too many sleepless nights of unachievable perfection.

Cierra Garrow

Cierra Garrow is a 24-year-old mental health advocate working as a Children’s Mental Health Therapist and a Community Based Psychiatric Rights Adviser in Kenora, Ontario. Cierra received two degrees from Lakehead University, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Indigenous Learning, both with First-Class Standing. Due to Cierra’s struggles with Borderline Personality Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and suicide, she has decided to pursue her passion of bringing mental health resources and services to the North. Currently, Cierra is pursuing a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology from Yorkville University.
Non-binary gender is gender without the strict confines of a man/woman dichotomy. However, it is difficult for our popular imagination to conceptualize this beyond the notion of a linear spectrum, where one end of the spectrum is man and the other is woman. This spectrum fails to eradicate the binary. However, it is a step toward undoing polarities, which brings me to examine this polarity within myself.

How do you navigate exploring a fluid\(^1\) and non-binary gender identity when you are unsure if you have a strong enough case for it?

Feeling self-doubt and egotistical, I question myself:

Am I appropriating?

Does this come from a valid place?

Would I be researching this about myself if there wasn’t a type of validity to it?

I believe in non-binary existence. There are no clear distinctions of who we are and who we are not. Humanity is in constant flux.

This analysis may seem like I am choosing to ignore the everlasting oppressive structures of white supremacy, colonialism, Victorian femininity and capitalism. However, I’m aiming to focus instead on resilience and refusal. These are attributes that allow us to dismantle unjust structures, despite their encompassing power\(^2\), by constantly putting them to work to create a new resistance. This will bring a new mode of being, engaging, performing, and/or loving. Each form of resistance will work to challenge the suppression of our multiple realities. We are not linear, nor static. We are complex, despite the oppressive structures’ aim to categorize us into binaries. We all hold seemingly contrasting identities, hopes, thoughts and lives within one body.
I may not have my gender identity completely defined yet, and it may be a very private path. I may only think about incorporating the pronoun “they” in private (while still keeping the “she/her” pronouns). I may still identify as a woman, however, not in such a polarized way. I may still be upholding biases which might neglect others’ lived realities. While keeping this in mind, I aim to be respectful and acknowledge my privilege to avoid the appropriation and infiltration of safe spaces. However, I do not want to be barred from naming a lived experience of my own. I may still be questioning if the theories I have about fluidity, non-binarity, and the restrictions placed on binary-gendered folks are influencing how I feel about my own gender. With that said, nothing harmful can come from navigating and nuancing the thoughts I have regarding my gender\(^3\). I am complex and I contain multitudes.

Learning and growing in compassionate and feminist ways are what I strive for. If this thought process leads me to the conclusion that I am tired of existing in a racetrack developed for exploitation; that’s okay. If I discover I am genderqueer\(^4\); that’s okay.

I believe in undoing polarities in self-identification and embracing the complexities and nuances within ourselves. These are courageous and noble aspects of existence. These are the ways we build links between our communities and refuse the limitations and isolation due to imposed categories.

\(^1\) Changing through time.
\(^2\) These are embedded in the formation of our governing bodies, laws, and social “norms.” It should also be noted that these structures oppress some more than others, while pretending to regard us as all the same.
\(^3\) Gender is one of the many possible identity markers I could claim for myself. Each marker can also have a variance of importance towards defining who I believe myself to be.
\(^4\) Another word for non-binary gender. I want to note that queer is not a safe word for all and that it should never be applied to those uncomfortable with this word.

**Skylar Niehaus** graduated from the University of Alberta with a degree in Political Science and Gender Studies. Skylar is passionate about dismantling hierarchies of race, gender, class and land ownership.
I was born ugly. Everybody thought that I would be intelligent, but not pretty. And I was indeed. I excelled in school and showed precocity far beyond my years. However, despite all my accomplishments, somewhere deep within my subconscious remained the idea that I was too dark.

From constant whitening cream advertisements, to children asking me in amazement “why are you so black?,” there were no ways left for me to think otherwise. Without realizing, my small hands had always reached for the yellow crayon in a feeble attempt to draw golden locks, and the “skin colour” crayon to depict milky skin.

Right before I left my home country of Bangladesh, I had attended a wedding celebration with my fair-skinned cousin. I remember how the relatives had fussed over her, and commented on her up and coming status as the next local beauty (a characteristic she knew would be accentuated next to me), as I stood beside her pensively, with no compliments of my own to show. “Who do you think is prettier? Me or her?” She would pose this riddle to the guests. Although most had the courtesy to smile and say we were equal in beauty, I knew that was far from the truth.

Not long after this incident, I had moved to Northern Ireland. At the age of 8, this was my first encounter with white people. I was ecstatic, my mind racing with pictures I had seen in films of pretty blonde haired girls running into a grassy park. A part of me was hoping that would be my reality. However, those dreams would fall short starting on my first day of school. Many pairs of blue eyes, which I so longed to have, glared at me with an open annoyance. I was assigned a “buddy”, Fiona, to show me around. Fiona enunciated her words with great displeasure and used hand gestures excessively. My feeble English was no match for Ireland. Naively I thought Fiona would remain my buddy forever. I imagined I would transform into a cherub, hold hands with the white Fiona, and the two of us would skip away into an oblivion of porcelain perfection.

After that day, my fantasy world crumbled around me. For the rest of my time at that school, I sat on a bench at recess, and watched all the rosy-cheeked children hold hands and spin around. It was as if I was watching a film take place in real life, but I was just too dark, and was too much of a disturbance in that scenery to participate.
Fiona made it evident that no one, including her, wanted to be around me. I grew into an awkward 14 year old. It was the summer before high school here in Ottawa. I was a volunteer camp counsellor. After being rejected by a slew of my white crushes throughout middle school in favour of my lighter counterparts, I surprised myself by falling for a black boy. I noticed all the girls received his undivided attention, except for me. One day the topic of his mixed heritage came up, and he said to me, “Light skin girls are better looking, that’s a fact. No one else compares.” I nodded in agreement, desperate for his approval. When I finally managed to ask how he felt about me, I remember him nonchalantly scrolling through his phone before replying, “Sorry, you’re just not my type.” This colourism existed beyond just my community.

I yearned to feel beautiful, to be wanted so badly that I even wished to be fetishized. I believed I was unworthy of love because of this wretched skin that I should gratefully accept whatever fate was handed to me. I believed that someone who looked like me could never expect anything more, anything better.

After much of the same trials and tribulations, I am finally seventeen. It took me many years to come to terms with how I look, and to consider all who look like me, and darker, to be just as beautiful. I realized the melanin in my skin is like art, and I was surrounded by walking masterpieces. I have never looked back since.

Novera Shenin is a 12th grade attending Colonel By Secondary School in Ottawa. She is originally from Bangladesh, and moved to Canada in 4th grade. She enjoys debate club, art, and drinking bubble tea in her free time.
Ashante Blackwood is a 23-year-old fine artist based in Toronto. She specializes in portraits and concept art. Her work captures the beauty and struggles of her culture and the process of self-acceptance as a black woman. Her goal is to one day open up her own gallery/space for art, fashion, music and events to showcase Toronto’s greatest talent.

“Insecure” is based on the struggles of young black women, who grow up feeling trapped in their own minds due to pressures surrounding their body image and their cultural background. The black woman laying down with her natural hair illustrates the struggles of not fitting in with European beauty standards. She is placed in a cage to represent the daily negative thoughts that go through our head. Such as; Should I bleach my skin? Should I lose weight? Is my hair too kinky? All these things affect our perceptions of our identity and cultures, and accentuates our insecurities.
From our earliest years, we are fed this idea that we as people are all unique and individuals; possessing our own unprecedented existence—truly one of a kind. There is no being evidently like us or who can be us better than us and thus, we should be ourselves as that is all we really know.

But how true is this statement?

Clearly, this is a ruse to instill self-worth and heighten our esteem, but realistically are we really born individualistic?

How alike are you to your parents? Your friends? Anyone you deliberately surround yourself with? Where do we gain this so-called uniqueness? Is it innate? Genetically there is no one being with DNA replicating yours, so in that sense our make up is unique to us—but that goes for entirely any species (to my knowledge—correct me if I am mistaken). But how does this contribute to our own sense of individuality? How can we continuously reinstate this idea as a fact but not support it in the analysis of our society?

Frankly, we are not unique. Most often we are influenced by our surroundings and adapt to what we are exposed to. This can be measured on any scale imaginable. Whether you’re referring to habitual lifestyles and ideologies, personal interests, or even your colour preferences. These are conscious decisions we make throughout life based on our own biases.

So how are we unique if we are the sum of our exposures?

It is easy to give in to popular opinions and waves. Quite honestly, it doesn’t take much thought to like, believe, or follow whatever we see. Naturally, we are sheep. Obviously not literally as we possess much more complex thought capabilities as our brains are unmatched but, in society, we are sheep.

Trends, ideas, beliefs—these are all instilled in our head from when we begin to process language. We are told what to like, what’s cool and popular, what’s right and what’s wrong. It is very easy to do. Even those who purposefully go against popular opinion are still sheep because they are choosing one of two choices—follow, or simply don’t.

But that still doesn’t make you individual.

We are told we are individuals while being directed like sheep. You are you but you only count if you follow societal obligatory beliefs.

So then what is individuality?

I don’t think it’s merely innate. We are not all individual or unique, we are not born with our own ideas or opinions that no one else shares. The entirety of the term itself is subjective.

I think individuality is a journey—an internal battle we face to truly uncover our own mentality and self. That is what makes us unique. Not what we like, follow, value, or stand for. These can be shared, preecedented, and rebutted. What is truly unique is the journey we take to get there. The battles and moral epidemics we face and in turn (hopefully) concur that is unique to us. No one can copy that. No one can share it either. We face a battle of internal realization and discovery that make us unique beings to this earth. But we have to voluntarily take this path. It is a conscious decision to embark on the battle of individuality and find our true self. Break out of the sheep’s clothing and become a nonconformist. It is scary not going to lie.

But what’s scarier? Following society as a sheep among billions or diving into the depths of your consciousness? Personally, I find the former to be petrifying.

What do you think?
Sex Equity in Health Research

Nicole Areias

The female body is as wondrous as it is mysterious. Continuously cycling and ever-changing, our bodies coordinate a system of signals to create an environment that is suitable for new life, and then bring that new life into the world. Our bodies showcase some of the most sophisticated systems and processes in all of human physiology, improved and perfected with each successive generation of girls, women, mothers. As a female scientist, I am reminded each day of how special and powerful our sex is. However, as I step out of the lab, walk away from the textbooks and re-enter reality, I am reminded of what it can mean to be a woman. The female body and all of its wonders are not always seen under as positive of a light—they are perhaps even cast under a shadow instead.

On the one hand, an understanding of and appreciation for our biological differences have helped us to work towards achieving equity within the scientific realm. Obvious differences in reproduction and sex hormones aside, scientists initially viewed women and men as fundamentally the same. Because of this, enrolling women in clinical trials was deemed unnecessary, and investigating conditions and diseases that uniquely prevail among women unprecedented. However, in recent years, organizations that advocate for women’s health research have successfully increased our attention towards the differences between the sexes. With greater funding, better models, and an increase in female perspectives in the field, progress continues to be made in our understanding of women’s health and our representation of women in medical research.

On the other hand, from a social perspective, many of the inequalities we face as women hinge on these very differences. As a woman, I have seen how our biology has been used to distinguish us from our male counterparts, however, no longer to our benefit. To begin, our biology has historically been used as an excuse to thrust upon us certain lifestyles and identities and exclude us from others. It is common for a mother to see her earning power drop with each child she bears or to miss out on promotions and other professional opportunities on the basis of her reproductive ability and decisions. Yet, in spite of all of these setbacks, the decision to opt out of motherhood also does not often come without guilt or judgement.

It would appear that we as a society still have trouble departing from the notion of a woman’s duty. Our biology imparts a sense of obligation that influences our professional and personal decisions and establishes a means by which our worth can be evaluated, by ourselves and by others. However, while we as women are expected to regard our biology as a fundamental part of our identity and what it means to be a woman, social priorities and attitudes towards women’s health fail to do the same.
Take, for example, contraceptives and female hygiene products, among others, which have yet to be widely accepted as a public health priority, or more basically, as a human rights issue. Granting access to these products is instead up for public debate, suggesting that women’s health and its associated expenses may actually be a social or economic burden. In the context of an androcentric system, our unique health needs are made out to be abnormal. There is also the unwillingness in many places to discuss issues like infertility and miscarriages, or even menstruation. While bearing children remains a priority, a necessity even, a similar significance is not assigned to meeting the needs of and establishing an open dialogue around women’s health.

While science continues to use our understanding of what makes us biologically different to strive towards equity in our research, society continues to allow these differences to create inequalities between the sexes. As a woman in science, this conflict is as clear as day. Because of it, I have come to see what the female body is, and what it is not. Our bodies and their capabilities can fundamentally shape our identity and experiences as women, this is true. However, we have the power to recognize that there is more to our existence than the narrow confines of the identities that our biology implies. Moreover, we have the power to make this known to those who think otherwise. In the sense that this unequal status is imposed, we must change the ways in which those around us view our experiences as others, and advocate for the equal rights we deserve.

Nicole Areias is currently completing an Honours Bachelor of Science at McMaster University where she contributes to engineering research that aims to increase female representation in clinical trials. Outside the lab, she loves to stay active and spend as much time as possible with her pup.
Stormy Bradley Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is a First Nation artist from Whitehorse, Yukon. Her mediums are primarily beads, hide, fur, and other materials. She was taught traditional sewing from an Elder at harvest camp and has since been incorporating modern techniques to create one of a kind pieces. Her work incorporates materials from the land that reflect the environment she lives in; she also uses her skills to create bold discussion pieces. In June 2020, she will have an exhibit with two other Indigenous artists showcasing Indigenous sexuality.

The Pink Vulva was a commission piece created based off of her original artwork. For Stormy, this artwork is meant to create a positive discussion around the feminine body.
Hayley Meilleur is an emerging Canadian multimedia illustrator. Growing up with a learning disability, Hayley has had difficulties reading and writing. Due to this, Hayley relies on images and colours to make sense of a story. Her work explores themes of identity, body positivity, personality, and fantasy. Check out Hayley’s work on Instagram: @Hayleybeehobbies.

Flower Girl is a multimedia piece inspired by femininity and power. Hayley believes that “it’s very important that as women we empower each other. Just like a flower, every individual is unique in their own way. We should acknowledge this and empower others to love themselves.”
Welcome to the Pressure Point
This is where diamonds are made
Where your weakness disappears
And where your imperfections fade
We deal with refinery
Never with tomfoolery
We’ll take you from crackpot coal
And turn you into jewelry
You could be a girl’s best friend
Symbolizing endless love
On a display, a golden ring
Fitting like a glove
You’ll sparkle like a star
You’ll shine as bright as day
You’ll go on dates with men like Gates
And never have to pay
Come on you lump of coal
Prepare for your makeover
We’ve seen the blackened bits of you
And we want to start over
But before we do continue
If you’ve got the waiver signed
We’ll explain how our procedure
Will affect your heart and mind

At our institution
We will bend and drill and break you
We will hammer, we will shatter
In our efforts to remake you
We will burn and we will boil
Everything you loathe and fear
But we warn you very sternly
There will be no crying here
Everything you know
Will be refracted and reflected
And any sign of weakness
Will be notably detected
If you should show the slightest slip

You will not be protected
But punished until polished
For your flaws must be corrected
We will stress your creases clean

Diamonds are Refined in the Fire

Keshana King
Keshana King is an aspiring entrepreneur and long-time poet. At age 16, she entered the spoken word scene, and has since graced multiple stages in Toronto and Ottawa. Currently, Keshana mentors young poets at the Ottawa Public Library’s YouthSpeak poetry program.

We will prim and we will preen
So that by the very end
You’ll be nothing but pristine
Hard and diamonds, stronger yet
If you pass our little test
So you’d better toughen up
This is every woman’s dream
You’re a soldier in a dress
Built for flirt and for finesse
So adhere to our restrictions
And be nothing but the best
You will march with heels so high
As your feet are bruised and bleeding
But once we reach the frontline
There’s no option for retreating
We don’t believe in favours
Second chances or mistakes
This is a war that never gives
But almost always takes
We will put pressure from all sides
And in our pain we will be dutiful
But pucker up my dear
This is the price of being beautiful

At the Pressure Point
Every diamond is unique
Clearly crystalline and cut
Perfect polish, perfect chic
But we’ve disciplined our diamonds
By the sharpest subjugation
The apocalypse of fire
In this, beauty’s revelation
It’s a small price to pay
For eternal glam and glitter
You’ll either come out crystal white
Or broken, black, and bitter
But we’re really glad to have you
All perfection, nothing lesser
So smile there my dear
Or you’ll crack under the pressure.
Have you ever put on a bra, tossed on an uncomfortable pair of shoes, or gotten annoyed when the strap of a bag cut in all the wrong ways and thought: "why is this so uncomfortable? Why doesn’t this work for my body?" I know I have. I’ve also wondered why women-specific products don’t often seem to work for women.

I recently picked up Caroline Criado Perez’s book: “Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men.” The overarching results of Caroline’s research show that by and large, our world was designed for men, by men. The research shows that our products and services are designed for the “Reference Male” described as the “average” 40-year-old 155-pound Caucasian male. She offers a laundry list of products and services that were never designed with women in mind. The list was extensive, and not limited to consumer products, it included health-related services. For example, historically, heart failure trials were only run using male participants even though female heart failure symptoms can be vastly different.

With this information comes, the rise of a new era of design and opportunity: Women centred design—products, and services made for the other half of humanity. Historically, products and services designed by both men and women were centred around research focused on the male population, for reasons such as cost saving and the general disregard for the fundamental differences between the needs of males and females. With woman-centred design, more women are designing products that are made for women—rather than making products intended to hyper-sexualize women for the purpose of men.

Not only is women-centred design the right thing to do, but it is also showing enormous profitability potential.

Take for example, the recent drop in sales for Victoria’s Secret. Once famously known for its “internet-breaking” popular fashion shows, it is now being criticized for being out of touch with women’s needs. This company was started by a man, Roy Raymond, who felt uncomfortable on a shopping trip while purchasing underwear for his wife. Victoria’s Secret was born from his desire to create a women’s underwear store targeted towards men. How could things go wrong?

Erin Flood is the Founder and CEO of godo, a company that takes a woman-centred approach to bag design.
In contrast, we see the rise of rapidly growing and successful companies like Knix and Third Love that also sell intimates for women. All three of the companies mentioned above sell products in the same category to the same audiences, but there is an undeniable key differentiator:

Intimates that are DESIGNED for women (Knix and Third Love) vs. Intimates that are MARKETED to women (Victoria’s Secret)

As reported in Newswire, Knix "prides itself on being the first intimate apparel brand to feature real women rather than models in their campaigns and recently celebrated photographing their 600th customer. Knix campaigns feature women of all shapes and sizes, in various stages of life, to make women feel comfortable in their skin.”

We are seeing an increasing number of people calling bullsh*t on marketing narratives that insist women should be smaller, more “luminous,” shiny and perfect. Yes, there still exists a long list of products with seemingly one objective in mind: Force women to try and fit into unrealistic boxes to cater to the male gaze. And if you think about the monumental negative impact that this kind of idealistic marketing has on the female population, you realize just how big a problem we’re dealing with. With that said, with a big problem, there are great opportunities for companies who are doing it differently.

Companies like Knix and Thirdlove have stepped up to the plate and have taken responsibility of creating a new narrative. A narrative focused on solving real problems for real women, bringing forward people everywhere to discuss and celebrate topics that were once frowned upon.

The opportunity here is not only in the products we design, but the narrative that we choose to deliver. So, what narrative will you choose? Empowerment or ignorance?
It wasn’t until I started my PhD that I started to see women and gender being treated as important topics of historical study. I would open a syllabus in my undergrad courses and be consistently disappointed to see that if there was even one mention of women in a twelve-week course, those readings were confined to a single week. Occasionally that week would also be combined with additional “others” of history, such as racial or sexual minorities. The rest of the course would focus on men (mostly white) and their deeds, the “real” historical subjects. Even if my professors were not intentionally saying it, the message was clear: Women aren’t considered worthy of serious historians.

By choosing to study minorities, you yourself become an academic minority. And like every other minority—sexual, racial, cultural—you are marginalized academically by the choices that others make around you. Even at conferences you are put onto panels that are frequently labelled “women” or “gender” even though each presenter’s focus may be decades, topics, and nations apart. The fact that you study women is always the overarching factor with how you are categorized in the academic community. You are not a historian; you are a women’s historian. It is not always intended to be condescending, but it often feels like your work is being labelled as different and somehow less serious. Immediately you are written off by a certain type of “old school” historian because you study things that have previously been considered inconsequential.

I am not saying that the dominant norms in the field aren’t changing. People like Adele Perry, Cecilia Morgan, Stephen Maynard, and Sarah Carter are making strides in the subjects of gender, race, and class in Canadian history. They are also breaking down the decades’ and centuries’ old walls between traditional history and modern interests. Thanks to these pioneers, there is more and more of a push to incorporate intersectional approaches to our understanding of the past. Social movements, which involve people fighting for recognition and validation for the spectrum of racial, sexual, and gender identities, are also a major part of this shift.

I am currently part of a department that is devoting more research funding at the graduate level and even hiring professors who are focused on exploring the complexities of gender, sexuality, and race. But these changes are slow to trickle down to undergraduate courses and are even less likely to make it into high school classrooms. I hope that myself and my colleagues will be part of the solution to this issue. No historical subjects, or their researchers, should be relegated to the position of “other”. Intersectionality only serves to enrich our historical understandings of the wide variety of human experiences.
On the day I was born and my cry pierced the air in an Ottawa hospital room, the midwife looked down and saw the strawberry-pink stork mark on my forehead, that read out “feminist.”

I’ve been a feminist since before I learned about The Famous Five and Ruth Bader Ginsberg. I was a feminist before I knew I’d have to walk in women’s marches to protect my rights over my own body.

I was a feminist before age twelve, when a snot-nosed ninth grader said to my friend that she gave more blow jobs than a five-cent bubble gum machine and I let my snow-caked boot sail right into his groin.

I knew I was a feminist, but what I did not know was that my understanding of feminism would grow and change, like vines creeping on a stone wall.

When I was thirteen, my friend Blaire said she couldn’t wait to get married, to have children and stay at home making their tuna sandwich lunches and putting Band-Aids on their scratches.

I scrunched up my nose like I’d tasted something vile and didn’t try to hide the judgement seeped onto my face.

When I was sixteen, I sat under the Christmas tree, and ripped red and green wrapping paper addressed to me off a baby-pink fleece sweater.

How could I tell my parents that feminists didn’t wear pink? Only superficial, ditzy-brained girls who wanted boyfriends or to feel pretty liked to wear dusty rose.

When I was twenty-one, I packed my bags for a family vacation. As the car engine revved on, I choked, “I forgot my makeup!”

My father’s voice floated to me from the driver’s seat, “You don’t really need that garbage.” But I realized I did and asked myself if a real feminist would need mascara to feel whole.

I had an idea of what it meant to be a woman who called herself a feminist. She looked and acted a certain way. She made certain choices. She had certain dreams.

Now my vines have grown. Their course changed by the wind and their leaves faded and browned by the sun.

I can be a feminist while realizing that I’m still figuring out what that means.
Emma Lim is a climate activist living in Montreal, Canada. She is the founder of the No Future No Children Pledge, and a climate strike organizer.

We learn about climate change in school. At first, it’s photos of polar bears, penguins, and melting Arctic ice and later, it’s about logging techniques—clear-cutting and selection harvesting. When we’ve reached high school, the discussion has then shifted to greenhouse gasses and chlorofluorocarbons. We are taught that climate change is our fault, and that we need to reduce, reuse, and recycle, but we are also taught that there is nothing we can do about it.

Often it feels like we’ve been handed a future of ecological collapse and devastating weather patterns. Like the generations before us have left us a reality where the planet is warming, and now the blame falls on all of us. It falls on every person who won’t buy a metal straw or carpool to work. It’s a convenient rhetoric that puts the blame on the backs of individuals, but it’s a rhetoric that’s false and perpetuated by a select group of the wealthy who stand to benefit from the destruction of our future.

I started actively fighting for action on climate change the moment I realized that it was a fight we could win. I am fighting because I believe there is a future for my generation, and that we have changed as a society. Combating climate change isn’t an insurmountable mountain—it’s a possible goal that begins with a change in policy.

I live in Ontario, where Doug Ford is Premier. Since becoming the Premier, he has cancelled the cap-and-trade program, opposed the federal carbon tax, eliminated the Environmental Commissioner, made changes to the Endangered Species Act, and recently cancelled an initiative to plant one million trees in the province.

In Ontario, fighting climate change means opposing our elected representatives, who fail to realize that their actions have real and tangible effects.
As I write this, the Amazon rainforest that provides 20% of the world’s oxygen, is burning. President Jair Bolsonaro opposes conservation efforts, and his open support of logging, farming, and mining in the Amazon has led to an unprecedented amount of forest fires.

All over the world, our democratically elected leaders choose short term economic benefit over the future of their people. For example, our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau approved the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion project just 24 hours after the government declared a climate emergency. I often wonder if future generations will look back and wonder why we didn’t act while there was still time.

Now more than ever, we must act to reduce our emissions. As our planet suffers, we suffer too. Premier Ford cut funding meant to deal with flooding by 50%—and now my province is dealing with 100-year floods annually.

The first to suffer are the people most marginalized, those who are feeling the effects of climate change even now; namely Indigenous land protectors who have been in this fight for longer than anyone else. There are also people without the economic freedom to leave their homes for safer regions. But even the most privileged people need air to breathe and water to drink.

I am terrified for the upcoming elections, because although climate change is the most important election issue for my generation, most of us can’t vote yet. I can’t express how frustrating it was to be unable to vote in the election when Doug Ford was elected as Premier, especially because many of the people who voted for him refuse to believe in the same science taught to school children. My generation is taught about the greenhouse effects in ninth grade. We are given the tools to understand the climate science—but we aren’t given the tools to act on it. We are intelligent enough to realize our futures are at stake, but when we try and demand action we are told to go back to the same classrooms to learn more about exactly what we stand to lose.

At this point in time, our best hopes lie in convincing our parents to vote for a candidate committed to climate action, or at least a candidate who believes in science. Our best hopes lie in convincing the generations above us that we ARE in a climate emergency. Most of what our political leaders do to fight climate change is for optics alone, because what good is declaring a climate emergency if you aren’t going to act like you’re in one?

With that said, my generation gives me hope. The last Canadian election saw a record number of young voters. Canada has always been a country of progress, and I believe that for every setback, there will be an equivalent push in the right direction. I believe in us, and I believe in the power we have when we stand together. Vote for climate!

Image by: Amelia Holowaty Krales
We hear about the future of work all the time, but that conversation is really about the future of jobs. Here in Canada, employment and GDP are up, but many feel affordability is not improving. We’ve got lots of metrics, but are we measuring the right things? It used to be that when the economy was good, most other things followed suit. That isn’t the case anymore. As we continue the conversation about the future of work, we must also discuss the future of the economy; since few interventions show as much promise as a universal basic income.

McKinsey estimates that women’s unpaid care work contributes 10 trillion dollars annually to the global GDP, yet women reap none of the economic benefits. The distinction between work and jobs could not be more apparent. Our economy doesn’t allow us to value the unpaid work of women in a way that supports their lives. We also hear every day about how AI and automation are making jobs obsolete in many sectors. All you’ve got to do is head to Wal-Mart or McDonald’s to see this in action at the most basic level. And if you step onto a factory floor, you’ll likely be shocked to see robots are replacing many good-paying jobs. These changes show no signs of slowing down and will continue to displace workers along the way.

We’ve got a slew of social programs loosely targeted to address these challenges, including parental leave, unemployment insurance, re-skilling programs, and social assistance. Why not simplify these programs and centre human dignity within our social safety net? A universal basic income (UBI) could do that. And while we’re at it, let’s add a gender-based analysis to ensure that a UBI wouldn’t solidify existing gender inequities. We saw political parties of all stripes across the country suggest minor tweaks and expansions of the existing programs, but nothing as bold or quite frankly, forward-thinking, as a basic income.

U.S. Presidential Candidate Andrew Yang often says UBI is about everything but the money; it’s about dignity and the things that make us human. The model he is campaigning on is built to assume that every American 18+ gets $1,000 a month. UBI would be the floor, not the ceiling. The model Mr. Yang presents is one model, but UBI can be tailored to the needs of our society. We’re currently hyper-focused on measuring outputs like productivity, GDP, and workforce participation, but outputs matter less when a large part of your citizenry can’t make ends meet.
This idea isn’t new or particularly innovative. Indeed, Canada ran one of the first basic income pilots in the world in the 1970s in Manitoba. More recently, Finland ran a successful basic income pilot, which showed that the levels of people working did not decrease; however, levels of stress went down. A pilot in Ontario also started up in 2017 and was built much on the recommendations of former Conservative Senator Hugh Segal. Unfortunately, the Ontario pilot was cut short due to a change in government. Ensuring that all citizens have a basic level of financial safety and security does not incentivize leaving the traditional labour market, but instead gives folks the freedom to contribute more meaningfully.

People will often suggest that a universal basic income—or traditional social assistance programs for that matter—will disincentivize people from working. There is no evidence to support that claim. People want to contribute to their communities, but we need to push beyond our archaic ideology of what work means and what contributions look like. We can’t wait until it’s too late to be bold. We’ve got to re-imagine our economy in a way that measures work, not jobs, in a way that puts human dignity at the centre of policy rather than racing to the bottom.

We’ve also got to ensure that women’s economic empowerment is at the centre of this discussion rather than creating a gender-blind program. Let’s stop over complicating our social safety nets to support not only the future of work but a future that works for all Canadians.

Katie Davey is a 2019/2010 Action Canada Fellow and the founder of Femme Wonk—an organization working to raise the policy conversation around gender and inclusion.
Feminism Around the Globe

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

– Audre Lorde
Dolls or people?

Today you can choose with whom to spend the night or day with. Who is better? Do you need emotions or just the body? This photo series was recently made in “Bordoll” in Dortmund, Germany. This men’s club has more than 15 different inanimate prostitutes to “love.” “A new generation of love” is their motto, and they promise intimacy with a woman/doll that is “always willing” and “uncomplicated.” Here, you can do anything you want, even things you cannot do in real life. Many dolls have scars and they are scared when you beat them, they are funny when you play with them, they “love” when you “love” them. There are a few such clubs in Europe, and this is becoming more and more popular. It is a problem when the female body becomes a thing, an object of use. It is a way to glamorize rape culture and for the patriarchy to continue to display their dominance over women. This time around, the violence against women they commit goes unnoticed and is categorized as a “fun fantasy.”

(2018-2019)

Aleksandra Skliarenko, lives in Düsseldorf, Germany. She studies photography and also has an art blog @artmagazine. In the future, this blog will be used to showcase various projects from young artists.
The desire for a “decadent self-portrait” is to make the aging body of women and men acceptable to them, at all stages of life. Many people feel that after 30 years old, their body and imperfections make them ashamed. I symbolize this idea with a cyclic shaped body, alluding to an egg timer. With time, the body is worn away, losing its roundness and winning in textures and asperity. We have to accept our bodies the way they are, and reject the perfect lies displayed on advertising billboards.

Julia Angot is a French decorative painter in trompe l’oeil and a feminist artist who creates pieces on how our bodies are controlled by our patriarchal society. Julia claims freedom in her work, and how every body is beautiful no matter its age or shape. For more, follow her on Instagram @peintredecorateurjulia and @angotjulia.
Mary Rouncefield is a graduate from the Faculty of Art Media and Design at the University of the West of England. Mary works in both drawing and print. In 2014, a series of her drawings were exhibited by Guerilla Galleries in London. And most recently, Mary has painted live at Upfest 2015, the Street Art Festival held in Bristol and was there again each year, until 2018.

this piece was made to highlight the campaigns women have embarked on over the past century. These attempts to change society and to change the roles of women, should now be part of our cultural identity and should shape the ways in which both men and women are perceived. These boots are covered with drawings illustrating a range of issues and campaigns which have been fought in the past, but sometimes forgotten in the present.

Mary Rouncefield is a graduate from the Faculty of Art Media and Design at the University of the West of England. Mary works in both drawing and print. In 2014, a series of her drawings were exhibited by Guerilla Galleries in London. And most recently, Mary has painted live at Upfest 2015, the Street Art Festival held in Bristol and was there again each year, until 2018.
**Flicks**

1. **Status Quo? The Unfinished Business of Feminism in Canada** (2012)  
   Director Karen Cho

2. **Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia** (1992)  
   Director Sylvia Hamilton

3. **Below Her Mouth** (2017)  
   Director April Mullen

4. **Whatever Linda** (2014)  
   (Web Series)  
   Director Hannah Cheesman

**Hits**

1. **Hey Boy**  
   Random Recipe ft. Sunny Moonshine

2. **Free Power**  
   Austra

3. **Warriors Tongue**  
   Masia One

4. **Fool’s Paradise**  
   Cold Specks

**Reads**

1. **Blank: Essays & Interviews**  
   by M. NourbeSe Philip

2. **Disintegrate/Dissociate**  
   by Arielle Twist

3. **Woman World**  
   by Aminder Dhaliwal

4. **Shut Up, You’re Pretty**  
   by Téa Mutonji
CRIAW celebrated its 44th birthday!

Since 1976, CRIAW has been researching and documenting the economic and social situation of women in Canada. This year we celebrate our 44th anniversary and in order to continue on in our mission, we need YOUR help!

Support CRIAW, support feminist research! CRIAW relies heavily on membership and donations to continue doing our work.

Help us stay strong for another 44 years!

For more information visit our website or email us at info@criaw-icref.ca

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