



Introduction: Sexual Landscapes, Lives and Livelihoods in Canada

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Spaces, sexualities, nation: Geographies of sexualities and/in Canada

This special issue brings together articles and commentaries highlighting Canadian scholarship on the geographies of sexualities. Canada is often represented as a global leader in progressive lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer politics (LGBTQ), being one of a handful of nation-states to grant full marriage rights to same sex couples (in 2005), human rights protections (although not expressly for trans individuals) and various legal protections for sexual minorities. Canada often tacitly accepts and even plays up its reputation as a good place for LGBTQ people. Major Canadian cities, working within neoliberal ideologies around the creative economy and entrepreneurial city (e.g. Florida 2000), point to LGBTQ legislative and political gains as indicators of Canadian tolerance and diversity, marketing our cities as major destinations for the highly mobile and moneyed cosmopolitan (e.g. Walks 2001; Catungal and Leslie 2009; Kipfer and Keil 2002; Keil 2009). Beyond Canadian urban centres, there is also the suggestion that sexual minorities are

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welcome and secure in smaller towns and rural areas, and while there may be some progress, there is also evidence of ongoing difficulties (Muller Myrdahl, this issue).

Despite the more supportive legal and social climate, it remains important not to obscure the *ongoing work* of community leaders, activists and academics that continue to labour to protect these gains from being eroded and, in many cases, to fight for necessary protections yet to be achieved. For example, the protection of trans people under human rights and hate crimes legislation remains unfulfilled. Similarly, many sexual health and LGBTQ advocates decry the increasing criminalisation of HIV/AIDS non-disclosure while others battle efforts to roll back protections, including threats to strike down gay marriage and gay adoption. In recent years, the Conservative federal government has refused to continue longstanding funding for both the Montreal and Toronto Pride events and recent gay bashings in Vancouver, Windsor, London, Thunder Bay, Halifax and Edmonton remind us that violence against LGBTQ people remains a reality. Internal debates, sometimes healthy, sometimes divisive, amongst LGBTQ activists and the wider community continue around such concerns as the apparent demise of gay villages, the fragmentation of LGBTQ communities along gender, class and racial lines and new neoliberal forms of regulations captured in the term ‘homonormativity’ that pose challenges to any unified LGBTQ social and political agendas.

In this special issue, we explicitly showcase original Canadian geographical scholarship highlighting research undertaken from a variety of perspectives on the intersections of sexuality, subjectivity, practices and place. Geographical scholarship owes a debt to other disciplinary work in history, sociology, anthropology and women’s studies on sexual and gender life in Canada and while the following overview is not intended to be exhaustive, it highlights the existence and diversity of the major bodies of work informing geographical research. To begin, scholarship on historically and geographically specific Canadian gay and lesbian political and social movements is invaluable for understanding the uneven spatial expressions of lesbian and gay social networks and concentrations particularly since the World War II (but see Maynard 1997 and Ingram 2003 for Canadian research on gay men pre-WWII). This includes work on human rights activism and political movements across a variety of scales (Herman 1994, Smith, 1998, 2005; Smith and Gundy 2005) including comparative research on the distinctive political and social contexts between Canada and the United States (Smith 2010; Rayside and Wilcox 2011). Important historical and sociological work by Gary Kinsman (1995, 2000, 2010) has been invaluable for geographers seeking to understand how shifting state interventions, including the prosecution of gays and lesbians in the civil service in the 1950s and 1960s, are implicated in the constitution of gay and lesbian identities and spatial organization. Early historical work by Line Chamberland (1993) on Montreal’s lesbian bars in the 1950s and Elise Chenier (2004) on Toronto’s lesbian bar culture during the same period are useful starting points for understanding lesbian historical and geographical

experiences in these cities (See also Ross 1995). More recently, research by Tom Warner (2001; 2010), an activist engaged in gay and lesbian political organising for over 30 years is an important resource for geographers looking to situate their material in a rich historical context (see also Persky 1982; Adams 1995; McLeod 1996; Adam *et al* 1999; Churchill 2003). Work by Mary Louise Adams on the constitution of 'normal' sexual and gendered lives in Canada in the 1950s and 60s highlights the roles of heterosexuality and heteronormativity in the formation of sexual and gendered identities.

Not surprisingly, the role of the state is a key concern for Canadian academics interested in LGBT and queer politics, given that the state has been and continues to be a key site in the battle for LGBT and queer protections particularly since the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969. Often framed in terms of citizenship recognition, in the form of law, policy and state funding, LGBT and queer activism have been quite successful (Smith, 2005), even while the state remains complicit in facilitating the exclusion and regulation of gendered and sexual others (Kinsman, 1996). Despite these problems, many, though by no means all, forms of LGBT and queer activism still regard the Canadian state as the highest and best arbiter of social protections. This is evident, for example, in recent and not-so-recent attempts to seek legal support for LGBT and queer student groups in publicly funded schools. The recourse to the state is strategic, given its central, if contested, role in liberal democratic societies. Its power to legitimize social relations, through law and policy, is statement of this centrality (Herman 1994; Kinsman Smith 1999, 2010; Kinsman 2000; Kinsman and Gentile 2010).

However, some LGBT and queer activists and academics have demonstrated the limits of state recognition as the ultimate goal of LGBT and queer politics (Kinsman, 1996; c.f., Smith, 1999; Warner, 2002). In the Canadian context, a vibrant history of often agonistic and antagonistic relations with the state can be traced back at least to the gay liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Smith, 1998). More recently, such critiques have engaged intersectional and interlocking approaches to examining LGBT and queer lives, widening the theoretical and political ambit not only of queer studies, but also of queer activism. Often these recent critiques take to task how mainstream LGBT and queer activists reproduce older exclusions and normativities or create new ones by attaching themselves to a state that is white-settler not only in its history, but also in its current political orientation (see Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007).

One crucial thread that ties these critiques together is their analysis of the ways that state recognition for LGBT and queer lives also tend to align sexual politics with particular forms of Canadian nationalism, producing its own normalizing governmentalities and violent exclusions. In using liberal discourses of inclusion and visibility, mainstream LGBT and queer activists have the tendency to call on Canadian society, through the state, to recognize sexual Others as "just one of you" and therefore as "normal" or "ordinary" (see Lenon, 2011). This discourse of ordinariness is particularly evident in the socio-legal battle for same-sex

marriage in Canada. In her study of this struggle, Lenon (2011) notes that affidavits and legal *facta* from gay and lesbian activists, as well as the court rulings themselves, “ubiquitously represent lesbians and gay men as ordinary people who live ordinary lives and who harbour an ordinary wish: to marry the person they love” (p. 351). She reads this attachment to middle-class coupled domesticity and normative ordinariness as the alignment of mainstream same-sex marriage politics with a neoliberal politics of whiteness, which privileges individual self-determination and private property relations and calls up the “white racial normativity of [the] popular figure of the ‘ordinary Canadian’” (p. 353). In another article examining the debates over same-sex marriage within the Canadian Parliament, Lenon (2008) notes that a powerful discourse of Canadian modernity pervaded legislative debates. This construction of national modernity is characterized not only by the idea that Canada should exercise its status as a tolerant society, as evidenced in its supposed disavowal of its history of racism through its contemporary multiculturalism, but also that the country should serve as an example for others in the world to follow. She notes that such a progress narrative is nationalist and racialized insofar as it serves as an “occasion for a pedagogy of what it means to ‘be’ Canadian and what Canada stands for” (Lenon, 2008, 26).

Similarly, in her analysis of the Canadian Blood Services’ (CBS) exclusion of bisexual and gay men and men who have had sex with men (MSM) from being blood donors, Dryden (2010) argues that the activism of Canadian gay and lesbian organizations such as EGALE (‘Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere’) on this specific issue have tended to separate out sexuality from race such that the inclusion of gay, bisexual and MSM subjects from blood donation is privileged as a goal while removing the exclusion of other subjects (notably people from Africa) is not. She also notes that these gay and lesbian activists are particularly attached to the idea of blood donation as a performance of a noble *Canadian-ness*, and are therefore complicit in perpetuating normative and racialized ideas of which bodies are to be allowed to be a national subject. Clearly, the politics and geographies of sexuality are never only about the sexual. They are also about constructions of ideal subjects, who are adjudicated as belonging or not through discourses of gender, race, class and nation. Some contributors to this special issue, particularly Nash and Catungal, highlight how the production of sexual landscapes, lives and livelihoods in Canada are also simultaneously about the production of both intersectional subjectivities and the metaphorical and literal boundaries of belonging within and beyond where they are situated.

The crucial intersection of Aboriginal geographies and sexual geographies in Canada remains largely unexplored. While fully recognizing that this special issue on geographies of sexualities in Canada has itself inadequately considered this intersection, we nevertheless want to honour and recognize work that exists outside of geography, particularly from anti-colonial feminist, queer and Two-Spirit perspectives, that could usefully inform future research on this intersection in

Canada. For example, Martin Cannon (1998) has explored, how the imposition of European understandings of gender and sexuality – particularly compulsory heterosexuality – upon First Nations, Métis and Inuit people by settler-colonists worked to violently regulate and often erase indigenous understandings of human relations. He argues that, while, “a broad range of gender and erotic relationships existed among Aboriginal peoples at early contact”, colonial officials – including missionaries and legal agents – engaged in a “conversion mission” whereby “same-sex erotic and sexual diversity was negatively evaluated and condemned” (Cannon, 1998, 2). Legal instruments, including the *Indian Act*, were adopted with the goal of erasing and supplanting Indigenous cultural systems, including understandings and practices of gender and sexuality (Lawrence, 2003). Cannon (1998) concludes by noting that “the regulation of First Nations sexuality cannot be explained apart from, or without reference to, racist and patriarchal configurations as those emerged in the Euro-Christian and subsequent colonial contexts” (13). It is in this context of colonial violence that Scott Morgensen (2011) insists that scholarly work on gender and sexual politics in Canada (and other white settler nations) be located (see also Driskill *et.al.*, 2011; Yee, 2011).

A testament to the political and cultural resilience of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, settler-colonial agents never achieved the total erasure of indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality even while they exacted vicious violence upon Aboriginal bodies and meaning systems. First Nations, Métis and Inuit political organizations exist in huge part to contest historical and contemporary attempts at violent erasure. In the field of sexual health, Morgensen (2011) and Ship and Norton (2001) document the important work of organizations like the Native Cultural Centre (Vancouver), the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, 2-Spirits (Toronto) and other more informal, ad hoc and community-based systems of care not only in creating Indigenous spaces for health, but also in reclaiming and nurturing First Nations understandings of sexual identities and practices.

To date, expressly geographical research on gender and sexuality in Canada has had a decidedly urban focus with its attention, until recently, on the lives and experiences of white, gay and predominantly middle class, men. Work by Nash (2005, 2006) on Toronto explores the intersecting relationships between political activism, social identities and the formation of the gay village. Gay village formation in Montreal has been the focus of work by geographers such as Brian Ray (2004) and Hunt and Zacharias (2008). Work on lesbians in major Canadian cities (Bouthillette 1994, 1997; Lo and Healy 2000) and regional centres (Grant 2000; Nash 2001) has ensured the experiences of lesbians in urban and regional contexts are not overlooked. In particular, Julie Podmore’s (2001, 2006) research develops alternative understandings around the relationships between lesbian and queer women, visibility and social networks beyond the established ‘village gai’ in Montreal’s downtown. Surprisingly little work exists in geography around the intersection of race, class and sexuality in the Canadian context (but see Peake 1993; Churchill 2003) and work remains to be done on geographies of sexualities

and queer geographies in smaller cities and rural areas (but see Riordon 1998; Sullivan 2009a, b). More recent geographical scholarship considers the transformative processes between political and social identities and practices and new spaces operating under the rubric of 'queer.' Nash and Bain (2007a) explore the implications of the 'queering' of space through women's bathhouse events in Toronto (see also Nash and Bain 2007b) and the experiences of transmen in lesbian and queer spaces (Nash 2010, 2011). JP Catungal and Eugene McCann (2009) consider the regulation of appropriate forms of sexualities in public space through an exploration of the debates around the placement of an AIDS monument and the murder of a gay park user in Vancouver's Stanley Park.

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The five articles and the commentary in this special issue are produced within these historical and political contexts. This issue begins with two papers focused on the specific ways in which representations and practices in Toronto and Montréal's Gay Villages are implicated in the (re) constitution of lesbian and queer women's identities and places. Papers by Catherine J. Nash and Julie Podmore complicate understandings of the interconnectedness of sexual and gendered subjects and the (re)formation of urban spaces in light of shifting political and ideological processes caught up in the notion of the queering of identities and spaces. Nash's paper examines queer women's experience of openly utilizing or 'queering' urban locations outside the gay village but within certain privileged positioning in relation to gender, class and race. Her paper highlights that even self-professed resistant or radical forms of queer politics are themselves caught up and complicit in normative and exclusionary socio-spatial processes. On the other hand, Julie Podmore considers how the production of commodified queer space in Montréal's Village gai worked to produce new forms of lesbian identities in the 1990s. While lesbians are often represented as being excluded from gay male Village spaces, Podmore's paper explores how attempts at inclusion did so based on the formation of particular sorts of lesbian consumers. Both papers insist on the importance of examining gay neighbourhood formation as a fraught process that simultaneously politicises and reinforces social difference. In doing so, they also note that the sexual geographies of Canadian cities are never static, despite efforts to make them so, and that they are still in constant negotiation and change.

In his paper on AIDS service organizations in Toronto, JP Catungal explores how the interconnected politics of sexuality, race and health shaped the landscape of AIDS service provision in Toronto through an examination of the formation and evolution of community-based ethno-specific AIDS service organizations (e-ASOs), which co-exist with mainstream ASOs. A consideration of their historical evolution, Catungal argues, demonstrates how early mainstream organizations privileged the experiences and needs of gay white men, which led to the alienation and exclusion of people of colour from the early AIDS sector. The establishment of ethno-specific ASOs worked to become sites of ethno-racial belonging and the

delivery of culturally appropriate sexual health services. His paper highlights the limits of Canadian notions of liberal multiculturalism characterized by a 'colour-blind' approach to race, noting that, in the case of Toronto's HIV/AIDS sector, such an approach served to emplace white gay men at the centre of sexual health activism, and place-making. His paper also insists on the importance of highlighting how communities of diversely racialized people resist these exclusions through their own place-making practices.

Moving away from the focus on a major city, Tiffany Muller Myrdahl's takes up calls for geographers of sexuality to venture beyond already well-studied cities (Phillips et al., 2000; Robinson 2005; Gavin Brown, 2008). Muller Myrdahl's paper challenges the conceptualization of LGBTQ lives through the 'hierarchies between "gay metropolis" and the many small cities and rural places' beyond the 'big city'. Arguing that researchers need to pay careful attention to the ways in which our theoretical lenses order our understanding of the experiences of queer life, Muller Myrdahl examines the narratives from LGBQ women located in the small city of Lethbridge Alberta to both understand and theorise the material practice and experience of everyday life beyond the 'gay metropolis.'

Nathaniel Lewis' paper introduces the important concepts of movement and migration in his reconsideration of the coming-out narratives of gay men in Ottawa Ontario. Coming-out narratives have most often been framed as an oppositional movement from one place to another; from the inside of a metaphorical 'closet' to a more liberated (and mainly urban) location. Lewis argues that these narratives can more usefully be understood as movements along a complex set of networks positioned within the social dynamics of places rather than the singular movement of 'inside to outside.'

The commentary, introduced by Nash and Catungal, considers four major contemporary texts in the area of sexuality and politics that help to illustrate the broader political, legal and social climate in which geographical scholarship is undertaken. To begin, Miriam Smith considers the book *Losing Control: Canada's Social Conservatives in the Age of Rights* (2010) by Tom Warner and *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada* by Marci McDonald (2010). Second, Eric Olund examines Becky Ross' *Burlesque West: Showgirls, Sex, and Sin in Postwar Vancouver* (2009), an important historical text on the complex sexual and gender relations in Vancouver's Burlesque scene in the 1940s and 1950s which provides much needed context for the ongoing debates in Canada today. Finally, Deborah Cowen considers Gary Kinsman and Patricia Gentile's 2009 text *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* which provides considerable detail on the specific campaigns of the state security apparatus, the broader social context of the law, social norms, and social relations' brought to bear to control and subdue the LGBTQ political and social movement.

While geographies of sexualities are well established in both classrooms and research agendas in the United Kingdom, some areas of Europe and the United States, they have not received the kind of attention one might expect in a country such as Canada. In seeking to generate a community of scholarship around sexualities research in and about Canada, we first approached a Canada-based journal, one that publishes regularly on Canadian issues of interest to geographers, with this proposal. However, the proposal was rejected on the grounds that ‘the rationale was not convincing’, that the editors and authors were relatively new appointments or PhD candidates and that such a special issue might not contribute to attracting a new readership. Given Canada’s unique legislative and constitutional context and its geographical, social and political specificity, the articles not only make clear why Canadian scholarship on geographies of sexualities and queer geographies have an important contribution to make to current understandings of Canadian society, they also expand current geographical theory around the intersectionality of questions of race, gender, class and sexuality; urban and rural lives; sexualities, movement and migration. We thank the editors at *ACME* and the reviewers for their guidance and advice and for helping shepherd this special issue into print.

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