On Saturday, January 19, 2019, The Journal of Critical Race Inquiry and The SXGD Certificate Program hosted a full day event entitled “Reimagining Kinship, Gender, and Sexuality in Indigenous Communities.” Indigenous scholars from across Canada came together to discuss kinship, gender and sexuality. Although each speaker had a different perspective, I was struck by the commonalities that linked their research together.

Simpson and Coulthard’s (2016:254) “Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity” described grounded normativity: Indigenous processes of learning as “the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are informed by an intimate relationship to place.” Each speaker reflected on these foundations within their own community. Sebastian DeLine described his research titled, “Clay and Common Ground: Beyond Racialization, Indigenization, and (In)difference in the Body” as a way to ground himself in his identity even when outside of his community’s homelands. For DeLine, this is possible because home does not have to be purely geographical, he is the land...“my body carries the toils and soils of my ancestors.” Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2013) describe the idea of refusal in “R-Words: Refusing Research.” In response to settler-colonial views of knowledge, they describe research methods which set limits on what knowledge can be shared or explained. This tension becomes further exacerbated in the context of the academy where the possession of knowledge is a driving force. Many of the speakers engaged with refusal, by choosing what aspects of their talks to define or explain, and by often returning the responsibility to the listener to educate themselves. All of the speakers centered their research on their own communities and thoughtfully considered what would be most helpful to them, instead of catering to the academy. Finally, there was an overall emphasis on stories as a way to communicate and ground research to which I was particularly drawn.

In the final panel, Joshua Whitehead an Ojibwe-nehiyaw Two-Spirit member of Peguis First Nation and an influential writer, read a section from his forthcoming book. His use of poetic prose to engage with discourses of gender, sexuality and Indigenous identity illuminated these topics in ways the typical research paper cannot. In his words, he chooses to “digest theory and expunge it through story.” The final panelists, Keri Cheechoo and Geraldine King, also exemplified how creative and critical processes can come together. Cheechoo illustrated her methodology through painting, and King used humorous stories to communicate her research to her community. I found all of these speakers very inspiring because of their interlinking of research and theory, to art and activism. This reflects the ways of knowing which Simpson describes in the article “Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence as rebellious transformation.” In this article, Simpson also uses storytelling to illustrate, explain, and embody Indigenous ways of knowing. Within Nishnaabeg knowledge systems, the process of “coming to know” combines emotional and intellectual knowledge in both a personal spiritual context and through reciprocal relationships with the natural and spiritual worlds. Since knowledge is not a possession, but a system of reciprocal relationships, it can encompass diversity and complexities and be entered into and communicated in various ways. These various ways of communicating research, from storytelling to visual art, activism, academic writing to dialogue, were demonstrated by these scholars. Furthermore, it is this understanding of the relational nature of knowledge which prompts them to thoughtfully consider who their research is for, why it is meaningful to their communities and how it can be made most useful to them.

I am very grateful to have attended this event as an undergraduate student because it helped me to contextualize and grow in my understanding of several courses I am taking this semester. More importantly it challenged me to listen and learn from these scholars without the desire to fully understand or possess the knowledge they chose to share.
Why is your main area of research, successful aging, such a diverse area of study? Firstly, it depends upon how you define people who are 65 years and older. ‘Seniors’ is an Othering and stigmatizing label. I prefer the term ‘Older Adults’ because this term better describes their lived experiences. Older adults have the same wants and needs as other adults such as the desire to be active socially, to learn and be a productive community member, and to have a meaningful life... the same things as students ...but they are just older and with more life experience. Inside, many older adults still think and feel like they did in their 20s. As a result, aging successfully involves the same identity issues such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. When we apply a label such as ‘Senior’ old age becomes a master identity that ignores an older person’s other identities. Older adults live very active lifestyles even when living with disabilities and do not feel old at all.

How does the label, ‘Seniors’ affect the privacy and independence of older adults? Canadian society provides benefits through the classifying of persons over 65 years as seniors, but this same classification is used to justify increased surveillance of older adults. For an example, an adult child may encourage an older parent to accept monitoring technology within the home for 'safety and medical reasons' to maintain independent living. However, this technology can also lead to violations of privacy. A device that detects motion within the home may send an alert that an older person has fallen or that a heart rate is elevated. The adult child may send an ambulance in response to the alert ...this seems sensible, but what if the older parent is having an intimate moment with a partner...no need for an ambulance and these alerts have just ‘outed’ the parent as a sexually active person. Many people do not realize how damaging monitoring technology can be to a person’s privacy and relationships. Someone twenty years old would not like their parents knowing about their sex lives; and older adults would not like their children knowing either. These issues matter because we will all reach age 65 someday and what we allow today will affect us in the future.

You have taught a variety of courses at Queen’s how do you incorporate ‘learning diversity’ within your courses? Often in academia we get stuck on assessing learning with exams and essays. These types of assessments are efficient, but do not accommodate different learning strengths such as auditory versus visual learners. I provide my students with multiple assessment options such as exam, essay, and/or presentations. Assessment does not have to be 100% written. This often means more work for me as an instructor, but it also allows me to encourage students to apply what they learn to real life situations rather than memorizing and regurgitating information.

How does applied learning help students to improve the lives of older adults? Applied learning allows students to take what they learn about gender, race, ethnicity, violence and social issues in other courses and apply this knowledge to an older adult context. If an issue happens to a young adult then it likely happens to an older adult too. Applied learning helps young adults to discover how many things they have in common with older adults. Recognizing commonalities facilitates understanding and stronger community relationships.
The Queen’s African & Caribbean Students' Association (ACSA) and the Equity Office collaborated to put on a town hall about how to transform education. The discussion focused on how Queen’s could create learning environments that are inclusive, diverse, accessible, and innovative while fostering a space for critical thought. The town hall brought together many members of the campus community – from professors of various faculties, staff, students and university administration. The ACSA and Equity Office felt that it was important to hear from people working at different levels of the education process in order to create learning environments that are inclusive, elevated, and that address intersectionality.

The five primary discussion points focused on visibility, accessibility, ways of knowing, decolonization, and teachers/learners. On the theme of visibility, the discussion addressed the issue of ‘hyper-visibility.’ This is especially relevant at Queen’s considering who and what is represented on both sides of the classroom. One example provided was when a professor talks about Indigenous issues and the mostly white room looks to an Indigenous student to somehow speak on behalf of all Indigenous perspectives. This becomes further exacerbated with instances of discrimination when discussing non-European cultures. For example, discussions about Black pain that fail to also talk about Black beauty, and when students showcase Black beauty their peers ask, “Where is the pain? Where is the discrimination?” This practice has very negative effects on students when speaking about damage becomes their only intelligible characteristic.

On accessibility, the discussion focused on school resources. For students who are also parents, Winter 2019 has made it difficult to attend class regularly because of school bus cancellations and snow days for their children. It’s unclear the role Queen's has in supporting these students and how hard it is to find support in general. Queen's offers accessibility services, but a great deal of research and work is required to access relevant support networks.

On ‘Ways of Knowing,’ the discussion focused on Eurocentrism in university curricula. Many students at the town hall took issue with the overwhelmingly Eurocentric discussions that are had in Queen’s classrooms. Students felt that professors often did not incorporate knowledges outside Western or European thought, especially when considering the Eurocentric textbooks that are made mandatory. Additionally, when other cultures were represented they were often tokenized. One way to frame this issue is to consider how courses rooted in European knowledges and history are mandatory, while studies in different cultures and ‘Ways of Knowing’ are wholly optional.

On the issue of decolonization, the discussion focused on deconstructing the syllabus. The Eurocentric knowledge taught at Queen’s often leave students feeling isolated as their culture and history are not represented in course material. Students who experience this must then go home and do their own research about the history of their culture. Students felt that when professors did include readings from different cultural backgrounds that they were used to fill some sort of equity checkbox while not actually stimulating meaningful or critical discussion.

Lastly, on the theme of teachers and learners, the discussion focused on the idea that teachers are also learners, and learners are also teachers. Those that attended felt that teaching and learning should be reciprocal, and there should also be a level of mutual respect in the classroom. Additionally, attendees found that students are generally underestimated in their ability to learn in new ways, and that current class schedules do not allow enough time for meaningful reflection on new knowledges gained.
On January 25th 2019, Muslim Societies-Global Perspectives (MSGP) invited Jasmin Zine, Professor of Sociology and the Muslim Studies option at Wilfrid Laurier University, to speak here at Queen’s. Her lecture, titled “Lessons from the Quebec Massacre: The Roots of Islamophobia in Canada,” addressed the negative portrayal of Muslims in popular culture and media. Here Zine describes a post 9/11 era where news is used as a tool to strengthen a damagingly dehumanizing stereotype that connects being Muslim with terrorism. According to a study in The Independent, terror attacks receive five times more media coverage if the perpetrator is Muslim. As Zine describes, this over-exaggeration of Muslim people generates fearmongering and moral panic. Furthermore, a 2006 Environics Institution poll stated that 6 in 10 Canadians feel that a terror attack by Canadians with a Muslim background is likely in the future. It is also noted here that hate crimes targeting Muslims jumped by 60% compared to the previous year. These numbers could be much larger as this does not account for those who did not report to the police.

Additionally, Zine described the panoptic experience of self-surveillance for Muslims who have to constantly adjust their actions for the Western gaze. One example Zine provides are Muslim Student Association members who do not play violent video games like Call of Duty during university socials because they do not wish to assume the ‘violent Muslim’ stereotype. There has been a tradition of surveillance of Muslim groups on university campuses and mosques in Canada. Thus, Muslims must be constantly aware of their actions to ensure that they are not validating so-called stereotypes. As a result, there is no sense of national belonging for many Muslims where they feel a collective burden of guilt for the actions of a small minority of radicals.

During the question and answer portion of the evening there were discussions on raising awareness in order to combat misconceptions through teaching pedagogies, and incorporating more inclusive courses concerning Muslims in humanities at Queen’s. Finally, Zine stressed the importance of critical media literacy where readers should question journalism by asking important questions like “what is the source?” and “who does this news piece benefit?”

Muslim Societies, Global Perspectives (MSGP) is an initiative at Queen’s that is dedicated to sharing Muslim stories and histories across communities and transnational diasporas. For more information and future events, check out the MSGP Facebook page: www.facebook.com/MSGPQU/