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**Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) and Intersectionality:
Overview, an Enhanced Framework, and a British Columbia Case Study**

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Abstract

In this paper, we present an overview of GBA+ and its central components, as well as a case study application of the framework to the question of poverty in the British Columbia context. We begin by tracing the theoretical foundations and development of SWC's GBA+ tool, touching on the relevance of the framework given broader government goals of diversity, inclusion, and inclusive growth. Next, we consider the limitations and potential of GBA+ as operationalized in Canada, and then build on this analysis to adjust the existing GBA+ tool, with the goals of better incorporating the concept of intersectionality and rendering the framework useful beyond governmental contexts. Finally, we apply relevant elements of the adapted framework in a case study, examining the issue of poverty in B.C. from a gendered and intersectional perspective. Our main finding is that exploring the nature and causes of poverty in B.C. results in a harrowing picture, both of need and oppression, and one that government systems have been complicit in constructing. As a result, the BC Government will need to implement GBA+ frameworks within a context that includes broader reconsiderations of government process, structures, institutions, and norms, with an aim to remove discrimination and bias (e.g., heteronormativity, colonialism, misogyny, ableism). Ultimately, an understanding of both the broad context of systemic pathologies and the barriers associated with intersecting identity factors and social positions that shape individual experiences will be integral for analysts hoping to advance agendas of diversity, inclusion, and poverty reduction, particularly through the development of public policy.

Introduction

Developed by the former federal agency Status of Women Canada (SWC), gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) is a policy tool used by government officials to assess the potential impacts of legislation, policies, programs, and initiatives on diverse groups of women, men, and non-binary people (SWC, 2017). At its core, GBA+ reflects the understanding that people are not homogenous, that the impacts of policy vary as a result, and that such differential effects should be considered by policy-makers throughout the whole of the policy process—that is, during research, analysis, consultation, development, implementation, and evaluation. GBA+ is not a new concept in Canadian policy circles; however, it has re-emerged in recent years as an area of particular focus, with the Government of Canada renewing its commitment to GBA+ in 2015, and integrating the framework across government functions since then, including within key economic contexts like budgets and fiscal updates. Following this example, several provinces and municipalities have subsequently committed to adopting GBA+ within their own bureaucracies.

GBA+ is part of a “second generation” of gender mainstreaming strategies that can be characterized by a movement away from a central focus on gender, toward an incorporation of tenets of intersectionality theory (Hankivsky & Mussell, 2018, p. 303). In this sense, and in contrast to gender analysis, GBA+ rests on the understanding that multiple factors—race, class, ability, age, sexuality, and gender, as examples—intersect to shape one’s identity and experience, both of the world and of public policies (SWC, 2017). In particular, the intersectional lens brings to light the insight that it is at the confluence of various social locations that oppression, privilege, and various inequalities are produced and entrenched. Thus, the “point” of GBA+ is to analyze policy (and its effects) within the context of these intersections, and to then draw on such analysis in devising strategies to, at the very least, prevent further perpetuation of inequities and systemic oppression, but also build toward the elimination of such structural issues.

In this paper, we present an overview of GBA+ and its central components, as well as a case study application of the framework to the question of poverty in the British Columbia context. We begin by tracing the theoretical foundations and development of SWC’s GBA+ tool, touching on the relevance of the framework given broader government goals of diversity, inclusion, and inclusive growth. Next, we consider the limitations and potential of GBA+ as operationalized in Canada, and then build on this analysis to adjust the existing GBA+ tool, with the goals of better incorporating the concept of intersectionality and rendering the framework useful beyond governmental contexts. Finally, we apply relevant elements of the adapted framework in a case study, examining the issue of poverty in B.C. from a gendered and intersectional perspective.

Gender-Based Analysis Plus: Background, Context, and Purpose

A Short History of Gender-Based and Intersectional Analysis in the Canadian Context

In Canada, gender and diversity initiatives in the public policy realm date back half a century, to the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1967 and the subsequent creation of the position of Minister Responsible for the Status of Women in 1971 (SWC, 2020b). However, it wasn't until the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (United Nations, 2020) that the Canadian government formalized its commitment to mainstreaming gender analysis.

Gender mainstreaming is an internationally accepted framework for promoting gender equality through policy analysis. Specifically, it is a method for “assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programmes, in all areas and at all levels” and a “strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated” (UN Economic and Social Council, 1997, p. 24). As a result, gender mainstreaming requires that analysts consider policies and processes across issue areas from a gender-differentiated perspective; question how gender inequality is constructed and perpetuated institutionally, systemically, and socially; and develop strategies and policies that actively address and counteract disparities and biases (Daly, 2005; True, 2003; Verloo, 2001).

Following the Beijing Declaration, gender mainstreaming frameworks and strategies proliferated across organizations and nation states, albeit according to different visions of and routes to gender equality (Walby, 2005), and with varying degrees of success (for an overview, see Hankivsky, 2013). Canada’s response came through the introduction of the Federal Plan for Gender Equality and the development of an analytical tool called Gender-based Analysis (GBA) (OECD, 2018a). However, it would be another decade before GBA became entrenched in government processes, as it was not until 2007 that Treasury Board Secretariat required all submissions to Cabinet be informed by GBA (Scala & Paterson, 2017).

A central issue with the GBA approach was a prioritization of gender considerations, and as a result, a relegation or dismissal of other dimensions of identity, oppression, and need. By contrast, the concept of intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) is couched in a recognition that individuals cannot be reduced to a single identity category, nor can any one identity factor be given primacy in understanding one’s experience in the world. While GBA put gender at the centre of analysis, intersectionality is focused on the “multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005, p. 1171)—that is, on the multifaceted nature of identity, experience, and discrimination. Intersectionality also recognizes that individuals can experience both privilege and oppression, depending on social context. As a result, policy analysis must consider individual experience—whether of poverty, violence, or systemic discrimination—by examining the intersection of or relationships among myriad identity factors and forms of inequity, as well as the power structures that shape them. Building on this insight, SWC updated its GBA tool in 2011, creating GBA+, which is a modernized approach that reflects an extension of analytical scope beyond gender to incorporate considerations of the intersectional nature of identity and inequality. GBA+ is thus rooted in an understanding that

policies, programs, and initiatives have distinct impacts on women, men, and gender non-binary people; that these effects are further complicated, transmuted, and even amplified by identity factors other than gender; and that policy-making must be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to these realities.

Early attempts by the Government of Canada to implement gender mainstreaming and intersectionality were met with considerable criticism within both policy and academic circles. Further, it is clear that the federal government struggled to deliver on its commitment to address gender inequality through the application of GBA and GBA+ specifically. Some of this is rooted in a siloed approach to implementation and thus a lack of consistency in training civil servants and applying GBA across government operations (Gladu, 2016), shortcomings which are perhaps exacerbated by the existence of SWC as a distinct agency unto itself. For example, a fall 2015 report of the Auditor General of Canada (Auditor General of Canada, 2015) concluded that few federal departments and agencies had implemented GBA+ in their analysis and, for those that had, the quality of analysis was inconsistent; in addition, almost no improvements had been made since a similar issue was outlined in a 2009 report (Auditor General of Canada, 2009).

These findings parallel criticism in the literature. McNutt and Béland (2015) suggest that efforts to adopt gender mainstreaming in Canada have followed the same trajectory as initiatives in jurisdictions worldwide: though many governments have adopted frameworks to advance gender equality, implementation has not been accompanied by the requisite substantive reforms to processes and institutions. Daly (2005) raises similar issues, observing a general conservative tendency in the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming, such that approaches neither problematize the state as a site where gendered interests and power relations play out (instead, the project of gender equality is incorporated within existing institutions and processes), nor address how societal structures and values also reproduce gender inequality. Further, Eveline and Bacchi (2005) contend that common approaches to gender mainstreaming are limited by conceptualizations of gender as something people *have*, which leads to a focus on differences between men and women without interrogating the power structures that produce such differences. The authors instead frame gender as a “contingent and socially located social *process*, with specific effects of power and advantage” (Eveline & Bacchi, 2005, 501).

In recent years, the federal government has taken steps to address these criticisms. First, a cross-ministerial GBA+ action plan was adopted in 2016 (SWC, 2018). Two years later, in 2018, SWC was expanded through legislation passed as part of the Budget Implementation Act and became the Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) (WAGE, 2018). According to the government, WAGE continues to advance SWC’s work toward more equitable economic, political, and social outcomes for Canadian women, but also accepts a broader mandate for gender equality that now includes sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (WAGE, 2018).

In addition, the Government of Canada has extended GBA+ to the budget process, and now publishes gender analyses of budgetary measures.¹ This shift toward a more comprehensive and robust application of GBA+ in the realm of economic and fiscal policy was first announced in the 2016 Fall Economic Statement, which saw the federal government commit to publishing a gender analysis of all measures outlined in forthcoming budgets (Department of Finance Canada 2016). Fittingly, *Budget 2017* included a historic “gender budget statement,” and *Budget 2018* was the first in which all measures were scrutinized using the new GBA+ framework (SWC, 2020a). Further, *Budget 2018* was accompanied by the introduction of a “gender results framework” (Government of Canada, n.d.). The recent Canadian Gender Budget Act reinforced these processes, enshrining in law the application of GBA+ as part of the budget process and setting out three requirements: reporting on the gender and diversity impacts of all budget measures, annual gender and diversity analysis of tax expenditures, and annual gender and diversity analysis of programs (SWC, 2020a). Most recently, the Department of Finance Canada included a comprehensive GBA+ of Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan in the 2020 Economic and Fiscal Snapshot (Department of Finance Canada, 2020).

Finally, GBA+ is now framed within the federal bureaucracy as a competency to be developed, and civil servants are encouraged to adapt the framework for application at all points in the policy-making process—from research and early investigation to the development of policy recommendations and the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives (SWC, 2017). Employed properly, GBA+ requires analysts to move through a series of steps (summarized in Table 1) to consider the full impact of government initiatives from the perspective of diverse groups (SWC, 2017). According to SWC, working through the GBA+ process enables analysts to check assumptions, thereby reducing bias; build an evidence base that reflects our diversity; incorporate such information in policy and program design; and communicate broader findings about gender and diversity. Importantly, the application of GBA+ can vary across functions: in a research context, for example, GBA+ involves gathering and analyzing disaggregated data, as well as engaging with stakeholders to better understand the experiences and needs of diverse people.

Why GBA+?

Though some dismiss the integration of intersectional analysis within policy-making processes as a distraction akin to virtue signalling, the importance of GBA+ as a guiding framework for research and policy analysis cannot be understated. For one thing, GBA+ is a tool for advancing inclusive growth, or growth that sees economic benefits more evenly

¹ Some have taken this as a signal that the Government of Canada has moved toward gender budgeting, a process for “integrat[ing] gender into any or all of the parts of the decision-making process regarding resource allocation and revenue generation”(Rubin & Bartle, 2005, pp. 259–260). However, when compared with GBA+, gender budgeting is more comprehensive and aimed at achieving equality of opportunity (rather than of outcomes). Given this distinction, it is not evident that the Canadian government is conducting gender budgeting; indeed, there is little evidence of such an approach in existing information or analysis, at least that which is publicly available.

Table 1*Summary of Status of Women Canada’s GBA+ Framework*

GBA+ step	Explanation
Identify issue	Identify the context for the initiative and policy issue, as well as the related gender and diversity issues
Challenge assumptions	Ask what assumptions have been made, if there is a perceived neutrality of policies, if gender/diversity implications might be obscured by assumptions of uniformity
Gather the facts: Research and consult	Get a better picture of the issue through research and consultation: obtain disaggregated data, identify data gaps, seek out multiple viewpoints in consultation
Develop options and make recommendations	Use research to inform advice, indicate how options respond to gender/diversity issues; suggest how to adapt proposal to address differential impacts, barriers
Monitor and evaluate	Ensure evaluation framework highlights data gaps, identify unintended outcomes/negative impacts on diverse groups, enable adjustments to address issues

Note. Status of Women Canada (2017)

distributed among individuals. Inclusive growth has become a fixture within economic strategies and broader policy agendas, both in Canada and internationally. For example, the final report of B.C.’s Emerging Economy Task Force (2020) cited diversity and inclusion as key features of the emerging economy, while the federal government has consistently peddled the idea of “growth that works for everyone,” both within its own borders and on the international stage.

Inclusive growth agendas have emerged as a result of the fact that recent economic gains have largely benefited the top 1% of society in terms of wealth, earnings, and opportunities—a reality that is reflective of increased inequality, and that puts societies at risk and weakens social ties (OECD, 2018b). Failure to address the ways in which inequality is magnified at the intersections of identity will likely produce inadvertent increases in inequity, as well as a resultant curtailment of short- and long-term economic growth. For example, some estimates suggest that if both men and women in Canada had identical labour market outcomes, regardless of their birthplace, personal incomes would be \$174 billion higher and 1.6 million more working-age people would be employed (RBC Financial Group, 2005). A more recent report by McKinsey Global Institute (2017) reached similar conclusions: calculations revealed that in Canada, the advancement of women’s equality has, on its own, the potential to add \$150 billion in incremental GDP, or produce a 0.6% increase in annual GDP growth.

Within contexts characterized by persistent and widening inequality, GBA+ can be applied to identify both structural and intersectional barriers to full participation in society, as well as approaches—including social and economic policies—for dismantling them. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is a case study in how GBA+ can offer insight into the intersectional implications of society-wide issues, how economic and social effects are compounded where identity factors overlap, and what policy tools are necessary to address disparate impacts. For example, it is widely accepted that women—and particularly racialized and working-class women—have borne the brunt of the pandemic, whether as a result of overrepresentation in front-line and service positions, primary responsibility for care work, or

disproportionate experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV). As a result, recovery plans will only be as effective as the prevalence and strength of initiatives related to early childhood education and care (ECEC) and labour market participation of women across sectors, as well as increased investment in supports for survivors of IPV.

Finally, gender and diversity considerations take on particular importance in the context of social and economic policy reform within liberal democratic welfare states. Withorn (1993) makes the argument that any proposed changes to welfare state policies ought to be evaluated as much in terms of women's issues as they are currently on the basis of labour market participation and other traditional areas of state concern. After swapping "women's issues" for "intersectional concerns," this point merits amplification—not least because welfare states are not neutral institutions. Rather, government systems are both reflective and constitutive of gender and other types of power, difference, and inequality (Laperrière & Orloff, 2018), and represent ideals and norms that can reproduce disadvantage and privilege, particularly at the intersections of gender, class, race, and ability, among other identity factors. Put simply, gender and intersectional issues—including higher incidence and risk of poverty—are not only the result of systemic barriers "out there," but are also constructed and reproduced by states. This insight is integral to any assessment of policy aimed at poverty reduction; it becomes even more important when intersectional equality is another outcome (however implicit) driving the analysis.

An Enhanced GBA+ Framework

Although the Government of Canada continues to make progress regarding its integration of GBA+ across processes and functions, both implementation issues and limitations inherent in the framework itself remain. In terms of implementation, it can be argued that GBA+ has not been embraced across policy disciplines in Canada. The most vocal groups advising the government on GBA+ have in some cases prioritized qualitative analysis over data-driven research and have exhibited what one might term a tendency to advocate rather than advise. In addition, economists have been largely absent from conversations about the structuring and implementation of GBA+. This exclusion is perhaps unsurprising, as gender and intersectional analysis, when done properly, calls into question key aspects of traditional policy-making, which can be interpreted (albeit incorrectly) as setting aside entirely certain policy tools, among them data analysis. With few economists involved in the rollout of GBA+, many areas of public policy beyond social policy, such as tax, struggle to meet inclusion criteria. On the few occasions when GBA+ has been applied to tax policy—for example, in the case of income splitting and the Canada-controlled Private Corporations tax changes—the approach not only was met with cynicism and hostility, but both opponents and proponents produced conflicting analysis, with one side relying exclusively on data and the other chiefly on anecdotes. To be sure, both traditional tools such as data analysis and critical frameworks like intersectionality are integral to effective GBA+. It is important to note, however, that for quantitative analysis to better account

for intersectionality, Canadian data that capture the multidimensionality of identity must be collected and made readily available (see Gladu, 2016, pp. 30–31).

Moreover, inconsistencies in implementation to date demonstrate that there is not a generally agreed-upon approach to GBA+ in Canada, and that a particular lack of consensus exists concerning the meaning and relevance of the “plus” (i.e., intersectionality) in the context of the framework. In addition, the integration of intersectionality within the GBA+ tool mirrors a conceptual misstep common across international efforts to integrate diversity considerations in gender mainstreaming approaches—that is, intersectionality has been incorporated within analytical frameworks in a chiefly additive way (Findlay, 2019; Hankivsky & Mussell, 2018; Hunting & Hankivsky, 2020). In practice, this means that GBA+ still prioritizes sex and gender considerations by taking these aspects of identity as the “starting point” and then adding other identity factors in a secondary sense—an approach which is perhaps most evident in the name “gender-based analysis plus,” but which can also be seen in visual depictions of intersectionality included in the government’s GBA+ training materials. This is problematic, since to integrate intersectionality properly is to abandon the inclination to assign hierarchies of importance across identity factors, in favour of holistic considerations of the myriad, intersecting, and simultaneous ways people experience institutions, power structures, and the social world (Hunting & Hankivsky, 2020). In Figure 1, we contrast SWC’s idea of intersectionality (Panel A) with our own understanding (Panel B), as informed by the literature. In addition, the visual in Panel B is an attempt to capture the multifaceted and contingent nature of identity, particularly the extent to which identity and experience are shaped by pathologies and forms of power that permeate both institutions and the social and private realms.

The GBA+ framework is also limited by the fact that it is a tool of government and by the extent to which it leaves uninterrogated the systems of power embedded within the traditional policy-making process. For example, in the GBA+ model inequality is largely framed as issue that can be addressed through existing policy tools and institutional processes, which has the effect of “privileg[ing] bureaucratic expertise and effectively depoliticiz[ing] gender relations” (Paterson et al., 2016, p. 406). As McNutt and Béland (2015) suggest, the GBA+ framework also limits focus to the causal link between policies and inequality, despite the fact that gender inequality is a structural reality that exists beyond government policy. Further, Scala and Paterson (2017) note that gender analysts within the Canadian public service are constrained in bringing intersectional considerations to bear on policy development, both since bureaucratic norms of hierarchy, neutrality, and procedure prevail, and given that performance measurement, efficiency, and effectiveness are emphasized over equity and democratic governance. Indeed, others find that the key analytical steps of challenging institutional bias and discrimination and engaging critically with community groups are not prioritized in the GBA+ process, and that the framework is more concerned with how government operates than with how it could produce policy outcomes that constitute systemic change and alter structures (McNutt & Béland, 2015).

Figure 1

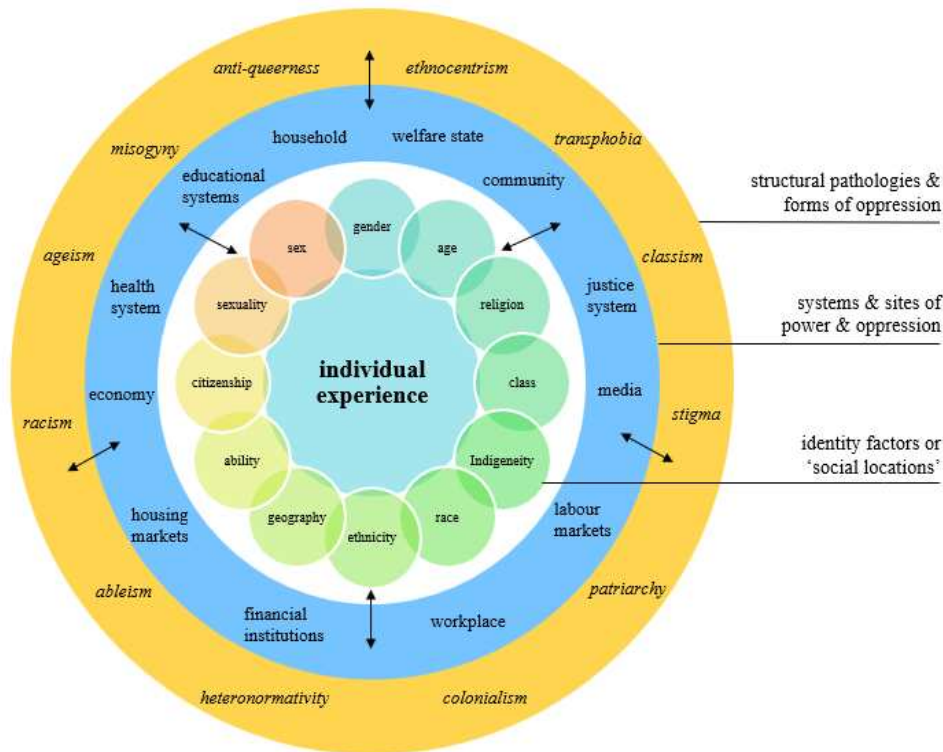
Intersectionality in SWC's GBA+ Tool Versus Intersectionality as Conceptualized in the Literature

Panel A: SWC's GBA+ tool



Note. Status of Women Canada (2020b)

Panel B: Literature-driven conceptualization



Note. Authors' rendering

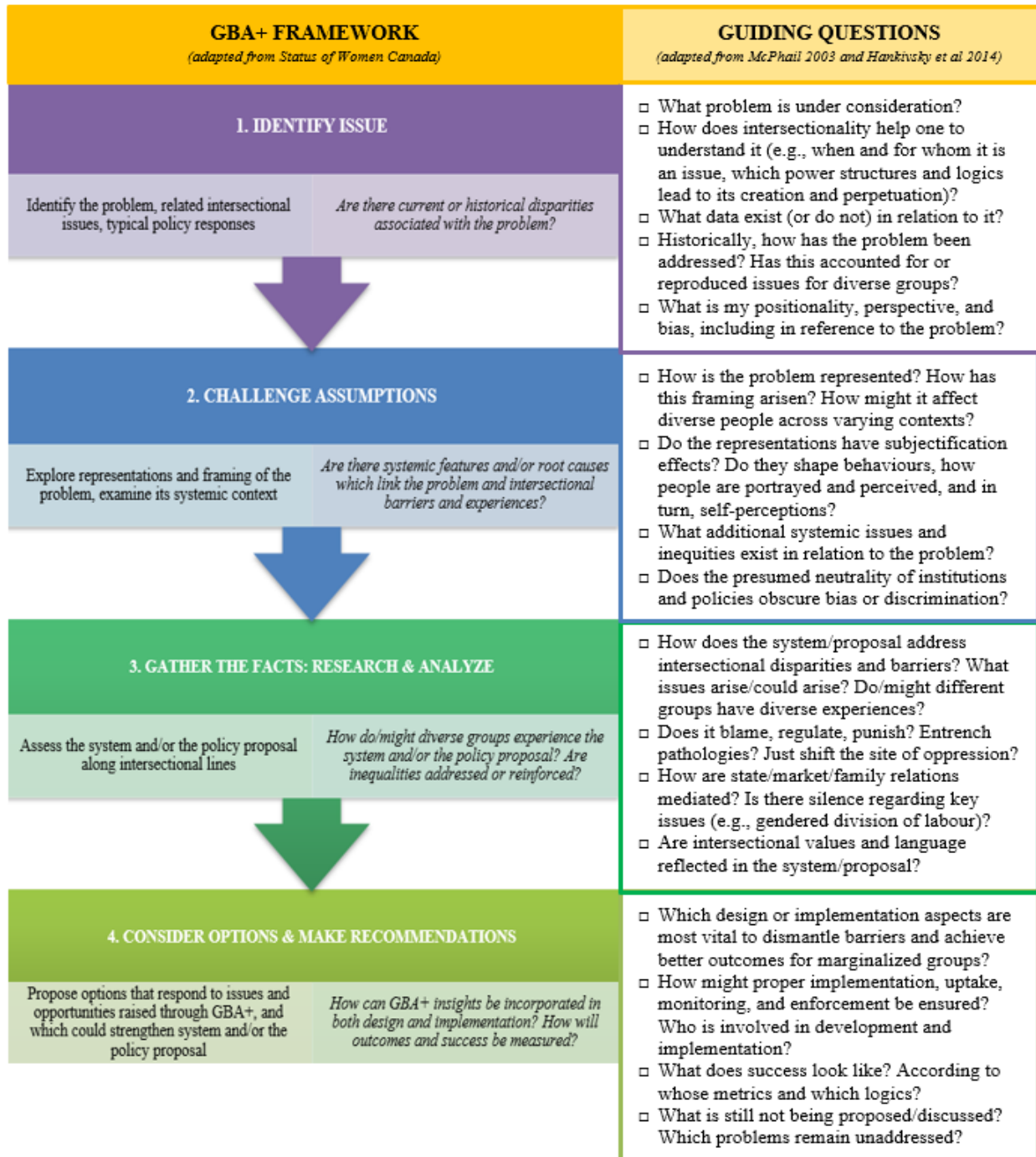
Relatedly, Paterson (2010) argues that in the context of the Canadian state, GBA+ might exhibit transformative potential but has yet to deliver much benefit, not least because of its fixation on the instrumental aspects of policy rather than its creative dimensions.² Paterson is thus advocating for a framework that also asks the analyst to scrutinize the underlying logics, assumptions, and presumptions that inform, uncontested, mainstream policy-making and government institutions; the types of actors or subjects created by both policies themselves and in the broader policy space; and what this means for inclusionary and transformative projects. This is consistent with the assertion in Hankivsky and Cormier (2011) that intersectionality applied correctly should encourage a critical reading of policy analysis, which requires the analyst to consider how problems are defined and solutions crafted and implemented, what metrics and understandings of progress and success are put in place to evaluate a policy's effectiveness, and the ways in which these choices contribute to the social construction of target populations or "subjects." It is also connected with scholarship that suggests that to think critically about the welfare state is to understand that gender and power relations not only shape the strategies available to policy-makers and the policies they end up adopting, but also that identities and structures of power are in turn transformed or reaffirmed by these decisions (Laperrière & Orloff, 2018). Engagement with such critiques during the application of GBA+ can, at the very least, draw the analyst's attention to the existence of blind spots, as well as the false neutrality of institutions, actors, and the logics and assumptions that structure policy-making and delivery. However, in the GBA+ context, there is neither substantial evidence that such transformations in approach have occurred, nor any indication that such lines of questioning are commonplace.

Thus, our presentation of an adapted GBA+ framework is an attempt to attend to several of these shortcomings, and to extend the applicability of the framework "beyond the state" to the realm of academic and community-driven policy research. Specifically, we seek to both address the tendency in the existing GBA+ tool to prioritize sex and gender as the "starting point" for analysis and to incorporate a version of intersectional analysis more in line with its theoretical foundations. We also aim to elevate considerations of institutional and systemic bias and oppression, including in the policy-making process, and to move beyond fixations on the instrumental aspects of policy. To this end, we have merged components of two frameworks for critical policy analysis—McPhail's (2003) feminist policy analysis framework and Hankivsky et al.'s (2014) intersectionality based policy analysis (IBPA) framework—with aspects of GBA+, essentially layering these additional tools on top of SWC's GBA+ model. In the adapted framework, both McPhail's critical feminist framework and the IBPA model put forward by Hankivsky et al. are incorporated in the form of guiding questions, which we introduce during each step of the GBA+ process. The layering of these frameworks is intended to make insights from critical feminist and intersectionality theory both more immediately relevant, as they are presented in the context of an existing tool, and more accessible to researchers, academics,

² Levasseur et al. (2018, p. 5) explain this productive element as the way in which policies are complicit in "producing the very problems they seek to solve, as well as the policy subjects to whom they are targeted."

and policy-makers operating outside the realm of theory. Crucially, these frameworks reflect understandings of intersectionality that are in alignment with the conceptualization offered in Figure 1, Panel B.

Figure 2
Adapted GBA+ Framework and Guiding Questions



In the framework shown in Figure 2, the left-hand column is adapted from the existing GBA+ tool, and both the overarching purpose of each step and the central question at the heart of it are highlighted. The column on the right contains the guiding questions that we refer to above. At each step in the process, these questions introduce lines of inquiry that are more attentive to intersectionality, power, and problem representations, and make more explicit the importance of exploring the creative dimensions and transformative potential of policies, in addition to their instrumental effects. Critical feminist policy analysis and intersectional policy tools are also helpful supplements to the data-driven analysis that is key to effective GBA+: they challenge aspects of policy, systems, and reality that are often taken for granted, and adjust lines of questioning, enabling analysts to consider data in different ways.

Specifically, McPhail's framework draws attention to several understudied aspects of policy, including the values and language that shape it, how it approaches the issue of gender equality, how it assigns roles along gender and intersectional lines and across the domains of the state, market, and family, and how power relations are represented, mediated, and constituted. Following this line of questioning, the analyst can move beyond considerations of the impacts of policy in a limited sense and begin to attend to issues of context, subject formation, and the social construction of problems and solutions—particularly from a gendered perspective. Further, the IBPA framework enables the analyst to pose a series of descriptive and transformative questions that get at the implicit assumptions that underlie policies, the historical and contemporary framing of policy issues, and the inherent and multifaceted power relations that shape identity and experience. Guiding the consideration of such questions are key principles for intersectional analysis, among them intersecting identity categories, power, time and space, and diverse forms of knowledge.

Connecting GBA+ With the Issue of Poverty in B.C.: A Case Study

Across Canada, governments at the subnational level have begun to announce their own commitments to adopting GBA+ as part of their policy-making and budgetary processes, though these efforts remain understudied in the literature (Paterson et al., 2016). B.C. is one such jurisdiction, where recent decisions also represent a marked departure from past approaches to gender and diversity. In 2018, Premier John Horgan appointed MLA Mitzi Dean to the post of Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity and tasked her with ensuring that the government's commitment to gender equality was reflected in budgets, policies, and programs; at the same time, a Gender Equity Office was established in the Ministry of Finance to oversee the introduction of GBA+ within the BC Public Service (Government of B.C., 2019b). Importantly, the Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equality also serves as the government's liaison with feminist and women's organizations, as well as other groups concerned with gender equality (Government of B.C., 2019b), and takes advice from and supports the Minister's Advisory Council on Indigenous Women (Government of B.C., 2019a). Canadian research focused on the implementation of GBA+ at the subnational level suggests that both the presence of advisory councils and the existence of mechanisms for sustained and meaningful

engagement with community groups and social movements support more transformative representations of gender equality (Paterson et al., 2016).

B.C.'s approach to GBA+ follows the model developed by the Government of Canada. Specifically, it involves asking a series of questions—What assumptions are you making? Who could be left behind? Who did you consult? What data did you look at? How are you ensuring equality of outcomes?—and is to be applied at all stages of the policy process, including in identifying issues, conducting research, consulting communities, developing policy recommendations, and taking decisions (Government of B.C., n.d.). However, B.C. lags behind the federal government in its implementation of GBA+: in *Budget 2020* the framework had only a minimal presence (B.C. Ministry of Finance, 2020), while there was little indication that the tool had been applied in the development of the 2020 Economic Recovery Plan, *StrongerBC* (Government of B.C., 2020).

B.C. remains in the early stages of implementing GBA+, particularly in terms of integrating the tool across government departments and actions. Although B.C.'s poverty reduction strategy (Government of B.C., 2019c)—effectively a guide for the province as it pursues legislated poverty reduction targets—makes mention of GBA+, the strategy as currently written does not go far enough in its application of the framework to poverty or related issues. Given that the BC NDP in its 2020 election platform (BC NDP, 2020) committed to determining the best approach and path forward for reducing poverty and providing opportunities for all, it will be important for the government to continue to develop GBA+ within the context of the poverty reduction strategy. Accordingly, we take poverty reduction in B.C. as a good case in which to apply the first two steps of the adapted GBA+ framework detailed above. In doing so, we analyze the “problem” under consideration (poverty), how gender and other aspects of identity intersect and amplify it, how the issue has been framed and addressed historically, and with what consequences. In addition, we challenge prevailing assumptions about poverty and identify the systemic issues and inequities that exist in relation to it. This analysis offers important context for ongoing studies of the existing income and social support system, including that which is being undertaken by the Expert Panel on Basic Income regarding both the feasibility of a basic income for the province and how basic income principles might be used to transform the income and support system to achieve poverty reduction goals (Government of B.C., 2018a).

The Gendered and Intersectional Nature of Poverty in B.C.

Following the GBA+ framework outlined in Figure 2, the first step in the process is to identify the issue and to apply the concept of intersectionality to gain a better understanding of it. In B.C., people with identities situated at various axes of difference display greater incidences and depths of material poverty, as well as encountering systemic barriers that limit opportunity, resiliency, and social inclusion and place them at greater risk of poverty throughout their lives. In many instances several aspects of identity and disadvantage intersect. Such realities are reflected in statistical descriptions of the prevalence and depth of income poverty in B.C., in the broader academic and social policy literature, and across community and lived-experience

accounts. They are also captured in the B.C. government's *What We Heard* report (Government of B.C., 2018b), which documents the results of broad consultations on the poverty reduction strategy.

Petit and Tedds (2020c) analyzed income poverty rates and depths in B.C. by age, sex, and family type, taking the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as the poverty line, and found that the incidences of poverty among females and males have converged and now both sit at around 9% (historically, rates have been higher among females). However, their analysis also reveals that certain groups of women—single female seniors (14.5%) and single female non-seniors (32.7%) in particular—experience higher poverty rates than their male counterparts (10.5% and 30.3%, respectively). In fact, the highest poverty rates in the authors' analysis are experienced by single female non-seniors. In addition, despite being marginally lower than the poverty rate for single fathers (21.8%) the poverty rate for single mothers is still 19.5%—more than twice the overall poverty rate for women.

Persons with disabilities experience worse outcomes relative to other Canadians, including higher rates of poverty and unique barriers to full participation in society. For example, the poverty rate (MBM) for single persons with disabilities in B.C. is nearly 35% (B.C. Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, 2018). Further, those who receive long-term disability assistance in the province compose a majority—71.21% of caseloads in 2019—of Income Assistance recipients (Petit & Tedds, 2020d). Disability Assistance caseloads have also increased over time (Petit & Tedds, 2020d). Further, disability is a gendered and intersectional issue. For example, disability is more prevalent among women (24% of women live with a disability) and women with disabilities are more likely to be impoverished: among Canadians with disabilities, lone parents and those living alone are most likely to be living in poverty, and 80% of lone parents with disabilities were women (Morris et al., 2018). In addition, 34% of First Nations people living off-reserve in B.C. in 2017 had a disability, while Canada-wide rates were comparatively higher for Indigenous women across all age groups (Hahmann et al., 2019).

Poverty also persists in Canada along racial lines. In an analysis of 2016 census data, Block et al. (2019) show that 60% of racialized Canadians are in the bottom half of the distribution of economic family incomes and 20.8% of all racialized Canadians live below the poverty line (LIM-AT). While poverty rates vary across racialized groups, ranging from 7.4% among people of Filipino descent to 36.2% among people of Arab descent, women experience marginally higher poverty rates both within individual groups and across all racialized groups (Block et al., 2019). It is important to note that this analysis does not address the unequal division of income and assets within households that often occurs along gender lines, and that renders women more vulnerable. In some cases, women can be considered to be living in invisible poverty as a result, despite not showing up in poverty statistics. Furthermore, 18.3% of male immigrants live below the poverty line (LIM-AT) in B.C., while for females the rate is 19.8% (Statistics Canada, 2016). Not surprisingly, such rates increase as immigration periods become more recent, and for non-permanent residents the poverty rate is 44.9% (Statistics Canada, 2016).

For Indigenous people in B.C., poverty is particularly acute: both Indigenous persons and Indigenous women are overrepresented among those living in poverty and experiencing homelessness. Data from the 2016 census show that the median incomes of Indigenous people and Indigenous women in B.C. between the ages of 25 and 64 were \$30,480 and \$27,351, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2018). In addition, the prevalence of low income (LIM-AT) among Indigenous-identifying women (all ages) in B.C. was 26.1%—a rate that exceeds that of both Indigenous males, as well as females within the broader population (Statistics Canada, 2018). Further, 38% of all individuals captured in the 2018 B.C. homeless count were Indigenous, even though Indigenous people account for only 6% of the province’s total population (Homelessness Services Association of BC, Urban Matters, & BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2018). This results in greater reliance on income and social supports. Indeed, 2012 data concerning on-reserve dependency rates in the province show that of 153 First Nations communities (33 additional communities were not captured in the data), nearly one-quarter (23%) had dependency rates in excess of 37% (Hillel, 2020). More recent data from 2015/16 indicate overall dependency rates of 3.7% off-reserve and 17.4% on-reserve in B.C. (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018).

Despite human rights and legislative advancements in recent years, LGBTQ2S+ persons in Canada continue to experience marginalization, a higher incidence of poverty, and social and health inequities; such disparities are heightened at the intersections of identity, particularly among Indigenous, racialized, youth, and older LGBTQ2S+ persons (Kia et al., 2020). Though there are limited available data capturing this issue, particularly data on levels of need at the intersections of queer/transgender identity and other factors, analyses suggest that between 25% and 40% of homeless youth in B.C. identify as queer or transgender (B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition, 2018). Another survey of youth experiencing homelessness in B.C. revealed a high prevalence of intersection between Indigeneity and queerness among homeless populations: 53% of youth identified as Indigenous, and among them 34% identified as part of the LGBTQ2S+ community (Saewyc et al., 2017).

The statistical picture captured in the preceding paragraphs is consistent with conceptualizations that link poverty and economic insecurity to various forms of discrimination. In addition, risk of poverty and marginalization is often exacerbated where multiple identity factors intersect. In the next section, we consider the systemic factors and barriers that produce vulnerability and need for diverse people.

Systemic Barriers to Financial Security, Opportunity, and Inclusion in B.C.

Step 2 of the GBA+ framework presented in Figure 2 is to challenge assumptions and uncover structural hurdles to economic security and participation. Systemic barriers both within and beyond the income and social support system exist for people of diverse backgrounds, and contribute to risk of poverty, shape experiences of poverty, and limit escape from poverty. Understanding what systemic barriers look like for diverse groups can help to challenge assumptions about the context of gendered and intersectional poverty in B.C. and can ultimately

enable a better assessment of both the effectiveness and the transformative potential of alternative models.

Though many of the poverty statistics outlined above focus solely on income poverty given an established poverty line, they underscore the extent of economic insecurity among diverse groups. Various factors impact one's financial security—income, savings, assets, and financial capability, to name a few—and deficits in these areas often result from or intersect systemic factors and institutional barriers. These same barriers, which are in many cases interlinked, limit opportunity, constrain participation, and create dependence for persons with diverse identities. In addition, such barriers are often reinforced by policies and programs, including those that compose the income and support system in B.C. In this section, we provide basic insight into several key contexts and pathologies that limit opportunity, economic security, and well-being for diverse people.

Paid employment

Over the past century in Canada, the labour force participation of women has increased significantly. The gender pay gap has also narrowed consistently (Baker & Drolet, 2010), including in the private sector (Schirle & Sogaolu, 2020). Yet in 2018, female employees in Canada still earned only \$0.87 for every dollar made by men; B.C. had an even higher gender wage gap—the highest of all Canadian provinces—at 18.6% (Pelletier et al., 2019). Such divisions widen when gender intersects other aspects of identity. Building on extensive Canadian scholarship that points to large and persistent gaps in labour market outcomes for Indigenous persons and visible minorities, Schirle and Sogaolu (2020) estimate earnings gaps in the private sector along gender and intersectional lines. The authors observe the largest gaps between Indigenous women and Canadian-born white men, but also note substantial divisions between all racialized groups and white men, despite adjustments (Schirle & Sogaolu, 2020). In Canada, women are also overrepresented in part-time, low-wage, and precarious work, and jobs that are perceived as traditionally female also tend to pay less (Fox & Moyser, 2018). This is particularly true for immigrant women, who represent a large proportion of front-line and service workers.

Economists point to various supply- and demand-side factors that contribute to the kinds of work men, women, and diverse groups have access to and take on, not to mention whether they engage in paid work in the first place. That such inequalities and constraints remain means that diverse people are limited in their capacity to ensure their economic security through paid work. The impacts of this extend beyond earned income: they also influence access to supports such as Employment Insurance and parental benefits, as well as the ability to amass sufficient retirement savings and other assets, all of which are important contributors to financial security, well-being, and resilience over the life course. For example, in 2016 the net worth of lone mothers was less than half that of lone fathers (Fox & Moyser, 2018). The salience of this point is apparent when considering the well-being of senior women living alone in B.C. today, who experience the highest poverty rates of any senior group. This is presumably a result of the fact that such women are less likely to have participated in paid work—or if they did, earned less—

and thus have little or no access to Canada Pension Plan benefits or private retirement savings of their own (Ivanova, 2017).

Unwaged Care Work and Reproductive Labour

Gendered responsibility for unwaged care and domestic work has a direct impact on the labour force participation of diverse groups, and thus influences their economic security. Analyses indicate that patterns in male and female labour force participation and human capital development over the lifecycle are highly gendered and thus are often distinguished by engagement (or not) in reproductive labour and unpaid care work (see Fortin, 2019, for a discussion). As shown by Fox and Moyser (2018), Canadian women still perform 61% of all unpaid work, despite key shifts in family contributions along economic lines. Women also often continue to engage in more of this labour, even when they are employed full-time—what some have termed the “second shift.”

In addition, female responsibility for reproductive labour means that, in the absence of flexible work environments, strong labour laws, and good benefits, women experience heightened chances of both weakened labour market ties and financial vulnerability. As McKay et al. (2016) show, existing maternity benefits available to women through the Employment Insurance system are often inaccessible to lower-income mothers, as such individuals fail to qualify based on too few hours in the workplace. Recent economic analyses (Agopsowicz, 2019) also indicate that a motherhood penalty exists with regard to wages following childbirth, for young mothers in particular.

Given these persistent imbalances, much of the feminist literature on gender equality centres on interrogating the gendered division of labour between men and women and across the traditionally public and private realms, as well as on envisioning paths toward recognition of the unpaid and undervalued care work of women that results from this division (see, for example, Laperrière & Orloff, 2018; McKay & Vanevery, 2000; Uhde, 2018; Zelleke, 2018). Undisrupted, this reality contributes to situations in which mothers face significant choice constraints as they navigate and combine earning, caring, and other aspects of life, constraints that limit economic security and the ability to participate fully—and as one wishes—in society. Indeed, as female workforce participation rates have increased, liberal democracies have taken varied approaches to account for the care work that was previously performed full-time in the home. Although market approaches have dominated in Canada—which some contend have produced prohibitively expensive systems that price out many women and families, but which also fail to adequately compensate educators—public funding for and subsidization of ECEC has re-emerged on the agenda in several provinces as a potential way to expand access to quality, affordable care (Anderson et al., 2020) and thus remove constraints to female participation in paid work.

Patriarchy, Power Imbalances, and IPV

Another systemic barrier to long-term resilience for women is the prevalence of gender-based or patriarchal violence. At their least harmful, patriarchal societies produce power

imbalances within and beyond the household that limit the bargaining power and agency of women; at their most dangerous, they result in gender-based violence, including sexual assault, IPV, and financial and psychological abuse, all of which have immediate and long-term consequences for survivors in terms of health and well-being. Experiences with abuse also impact economic security: survivors of IPV experience more disruptions over the course of their careers (Showalter, 2016), which results in lower incomes, higher job-change frequency, and more part-time and casual work (Wathen et al., 2014).

Risk levels in this area are only exacerbated at the intersections of identity, as violence against women is closely connected with other factors, such as culture and structural inequality (Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016), as well as financial insecurity and class (Postmus et al., 2018). Recent Canadian literature on the prevalence and risk of intersectional IPV finds that women with disabilities, older women, and immigrant women are more vulnerable to IPV and that belonging to more than one “group” exposes a woman to the cumulative effects of IPV (Sasseville et al., 2020). In addition, experiences of IPV vary within different groups of at-risk women: IPV affects, to a greater extent, women who have recently immigrated from non-western countries, women between the ages of 50 and 64 (compared with older women), and women with severe disabilities (Sasseville et al., 2020). In B.C., living in poverty also increases the likelihood of an individual returning to an abusive relationship (Klein & Pulkingham, 2008, 15). For example, many Indigenous women—including trans and Two Spirit women—living in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver stay in or return to abusive relationships in order to survive (Martin & Walia, 2019).

Violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada is a particularly pressing concern: such groups have been murdered or have gone missing at a rate four times higher than their rate of representation in Canada, while 25% of homicide victims in Canada are Indigenous women and Indigenous women are eight times more likely to face abuse (Martin & Walia, 2019). When violence is not fatal, it is often a pathway to homelessness and severe health issues. For example, Indigenous women experiencing homelessness are often survivors of violent victimization, and as one analysis found, this is a key aspect of their pathway to homelessness (Bingham et al., 2019). The same study—a gender analysis of persons experiencing homelessness in Vancouver and Winnipeg—revealed that among Indigenous participants, female gender was predictive of PTSD, the presence of multiple disorders, high suicidality, substance dependency, and reports of violence. In addition, Indigenous women (including trans and Two Spirit women) living on reserve who face abuse have limited access to local resources: 70% of northern reserves do not have emergency shelters for women fleeing violence, and thus survivors must choose between remaining in an abusive situation or leaving their community (Martin & Walia, 2019).

Systemic Discrimination

A key theme in the B.C. government’s *What We Heard* report is that poverty and discrimination are linked (Government of B.C., 2018b). Indeed, the pathologies of patriarchy, racism, ableism, anti-queer prejudice, transphobia, and colonialism inform both societal norms

and institutional design, and produce contexts within which people experience constraints, bias, and violence on the basis of their identity. Such is the case with access to housing, workplace discrimination, police brutality, and interactions with the justice system. It is impossible to ignore the impact of these factors on economic resilience, opportunity, and well-being; yet such discrimination persists across all institutions and societal contexts, and is reinforced at the individual level.

Government systems and public institutions are themselves complicit in reinforcing and perpetuating gender bias in particular, which ultimately limits their effectiveness in reducing poverty. For example, McKay and Vanevery (2000) note that there is an inherent gender bias in the traditional operation of social security and income support systems, which are largely androcentric and composed of a series of ethics and policies that limit women's choices. In particular, productivist ethics that reinforce the gendered division of labour and devalue care and reproductive work are deeply embedded within the system of income and social supports, particularly in program eligibility rules and work search requirements.³ That such systems of social provision truly came to be in the post-war era means that they were first constructed upon traditional ideas of family and gender roles—that is, upon the notion that it is the primary responsibility of men to earn and women to care. The traditional male breadwinner model organized functions across the state, market, and family in a way that meant women and children were considered dependants and care work was relegated uncompensated to the domestic realm. Several waves of feminism later, systems have been tweaked to reflect changing notions of the family and of the woman's role in society. However, Lewis (2002) argues that these recent transformations—and recalibrations of the work/welfare relationship and a shift to the adult worker model, in particular—have asked women to bear the main burden of restructuring, as they have come without the policy changes necessary to address unpaid care work.

In addition, patriarchal, racist, and colonial logics shape the way diverse groups experience the state. For example, many survivors of IPV and sexual assault in B.C. noted they were reluctant to report instances of abuse to police as a result of socio-cultural attitudes, such as culturally entrenched skepticism about sexual assault, as well as concerns about the impartiality and fairness of the justice system, which were often informed by experiences of problematic treatment by police, judges, and other professionals employed in the system (Prochuk, 2018). As Hertz et al. (2020) explain, government staff often make subjective assessments about poverty among Indigenous groups, which leads both to First Nations children being apprehended at a greater rate than non-Indigenous children living in similar

³ It is important to note that the strong link between pursuit of paid employment and benefit eligibility that is characteristic of the current system draws bounds around the definition of work, not just in a way that devalues care work but, as importantly, delegitimizes alternative ways of earning an income (e.g., sex work) and other forms of productive labour (e.g., participation in informal economies and volunteer work). For example, Martin and Wallia (2019) note that while many Indigenous women living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside are viewed as "unemployed," they remain engaged in purposeful work as child-care providers, outreach and peer-support workers, and gardeners, while also participating in various street and traditional economies, such as bartering and vending, and beading and carving.

economic conditions and the self-extrication of Indigenous persons from the system entirely, due to lack of trust. As one Indigenous woman, Veronica, put it, “The welfare system would give you money, but it was also used to track you into the child welfare system and then the kids and grandkids would get tracked for life” (Martin & Walia, 2019, p. 152).

In B.C., Indigenous single mothers and their children are among the most impacted by deep poverty. This reality cannot be understood without considering the distinct gendered impacts of colonialism, dispossession, and the extent to which settler policy directly and systematically dismantled traditional matriarchal structures, including the central role of Indigenous women as custodians of culture (see Martin & Walia, 2019; Kubik et al., 2009). The government-led erasure of Indigenous female identity, coupled with a systematic murdering of Indigenous women and girls that has gone largely uninvestigated by law enforcement agencies, continue to impact outcomes for Indigenous women—and all Indigenous persons—across generations. This legacy of institutional oppression and violence places severe limitations on the state’s capacity as a trusted agent of support and provider of well-being.

Overlapping Identities and Pathologies

When considering the existence of vulnerability and economic insecurity along intersectional lines and within the context of systemic barriers and pathologies, it is important to consider both the ways in which multiple identity factors intersect and the extent to which overlapping norms and pathologies render various aspects of identity particularly salient. Take, for example, experiences of poverty and need among queer Indigenous mothers. While women with children generally face lower rates of poverty than do women without children—potentially due to the range of benefits and supports targeting parents, including the Canada Child Benefit—logics of colonialism embedded within government institutions complicate access to support for Indigenous mothers in particular. In some cases, Indigenous mothers may be more hesitant to access supports—including when compared with Indigenous women without kids—given experiences of heightened scrutiny by government and higher rates of child apprehension as a result. Such decisions can have the effect of undermining financial security and place such women at greater risk of poverty.

Furthermore, in such situations individuals confront the effects of overlapping forms of inequality, and are forced to contend with numerous pathologies—heteronormativity, colonialism, and misogyny—all of which shape one’s experience in distinct ways, but also intersect to produce particular forms of exclusion and disadvantage, across contexts. That is to say, while an Indigenous woman must face both colonial and racist logics, as well as misogyny and patriarchy, such situations are complicated further for queer women, for example, given the persistence of heteronormativity and anti-queer prejudice, which might have particular manifestations in Indigenous communities.

In addition, such women often contend with competing and overlapping discourses regarding the way in which they are expected to move through the world. For example, queer Indigenous women encounter conflicting expectations regarding how they might structure their lives: on the one hand, they face gender norms regarding responsibility for caregiving and

unpaid labour, while on the other, racist, colonial, and heteronormative discrimination informs a judgmental questioning of their ability to provide “good” or “suitable” care. Thus, as a result—and in addition to facing higher rates of poverty—such groups face higher risk of social exclusion, both broadly and in their communities, and a more fraught relationship with institutions (e.g., the social assistance system) when they do seek support in meeting basic needs and accessing basic services. These intersecting social locations—and the contexts of power in which they are produced—ultimately undermine one’s ability to secure a livelihood.

Frames and Representations of Poverty in B.C.

In both the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act (2018) and the *TogetherBC* poverty reduction strategy (Government of B.C., 2019c), poverty is represented first and foremost as a lack of income. For example, the targets legislated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Act—the key metrics by which the province will gauge its success—reference incidence and depths of poverty based on the MBM. Thus, the central focus is on reducing income poverty, either through tweaks to the current system of income and social supports or the introduction of a new approach, such as a basic income.

However, the guiding principles outlined in the strategy—affordability, but also opportunity, reconciliation, and social inclusion—demonstrate a broader understanding of the problem of poverty (Government of B.C., 2019c). The B.C. government’s decision to note GBA+ considerations in the act and the strategy reveals even more: for the province, poverty has gendered and intersectional implications. And though gender and diversity might not be considered problems on their own, when considered in the context of poverty such markers of identity are rendered problematic—at least to the extent that they are associated with greater barriers to opportunity and self-sufficiency, as well as higher reliance on the income and support system. It is likely that this connection between certain identity factors and dependency colours societal images of poverty and those living in poverty, contributing to discriminatory generalizations and stigmatization on the basis of identity. It may also shape the strategies individuals take on and the identities they emphasize to navigate systems successfully.

These problem representations are significant for several reasons. First, such framings stress that poverty is a result of systemic pathologies which erect for various groups barriers that limit opportunity, entrench discrimination, and produce intergenerational trauma, to name only a few impacts. By extension, they signify that the poverty reduction potential of policy reforms should be gauged not just by their capacity to reduce income poverty in the short term, but also by the extent to which they might foster transformative change within and beyond the system to *prevent* and *reduce the risk of* poverty. Third, such understandings of poverty are in marked opposition to those which have guided the design and implementation of B.C.’s system of income and social supports, and are inconsistent with attitudes and culture, both within government and across society. Such factors, if they remain uninterrogated, place significant bounds around the potential of social and economic policy reform, no matter how transformational the initial policy proposal.

What Are the Current and Historical Policy Responses to This Issue?

In B.C., as is the case across liberal democratic welfare states, an extensive web of income and social supports has been erected to address poverty, and many of its features have been designed with the intention of responding to aspects of the intersectional vulnerability and need described above. However, this system is itself problematic, both in its inability to fulfill its poverty reduction mandate, and in its complicity in perpetuating poverty and exclusion among particular groups.

General critiques of income support systems centre on the inadequacy of support, the complexity of the system, embedded work and savings disincentives (e.g., claw-back or phase-out rates, asset tests), and the ways in which they result in stigmatization and create dependency. As Petit and Tedds (2020b) show, B.C.'s current system of income and social supports is no different: it is large and complex, with numerous points and methods of access as well as confusing eligibility definitions. These aspects presumably impact program uptake, particularly for the most vulnerable. In addition, benefit levels are low when compared with the poverty line, especially for single adults (Petit & Tedds, 2020c). It is thus unsurprising that single adults experience the highest poverty rates in the province (Petit & Tedds, 2020c).

Further, income support systems that make benefit receipt contingent upon participation in employment-related activities exacerbate the struggles of lone mothers who depend on the system for support, reducing the financial reward of engaging in paid work and complicating how they combine earning and caring (Evans, 2009). In addition, Petit et al. (2020) note that persons with disabilities must continuously confront dehumanizing and stigmatizing processes to prove their eligibility, which is often adjudicated arbitrarily by a caseworker. When disability intersects other identity factors, such as gender and Indigeneity, access becomes further complicated by additional systems of power, such as patriarchy and colonialism. Canadian analyses of pathways off social assistance also reveal that immigrants, women, and lone parents face significant barriers to, and thus have decreased odds of, exiting government programs (Smith-Carrier, 2017).

As we note above, there is a deep disjuncture between the reality of poverty and the system that has been constructed to alleviate it: the representations of poverty that seemingly inform the design and administrative elements of the current system reflect neither a progressive nor an intersectional understanding of the issue. Specifically, and as Hertz et al. (2020) outline, rather than promote opportunity and inclusion, B.C.'s system of income and social supports both erects front-end barriers that make access difficult and undignified for all but the most self-sufficient and empowered individuals, and creates mid-stream barriers to opportunity and self-sufficiency for those who are able to navigate it. These issues are amplified at the intersections of identity. For example, the subjective nature of eligibility adjudication provides caseworkers and doctors with the power to apply personal and moralizing interpretations of crisis, disability, and good parenting, all of which are shaped by dominant paradigms and thus marginalize and delegitimize difference. In addition, the system is particularly inflexible and often punitive for individuals at transition points—whether aging out of care, moving to old age supports, or becoming a parent—which is reflective of programs

designed with a neutral policy subject, rather than an intersectional population with diverse and variable needs, in mind (Hertz et al., 2020).

It has been well documented in the literature that systems of social provision are also steeped in histories of surveillance, sanction, and control (for a discussion in the Canadian context, see Maki, 2011), and that the design of such systems (work search, claw-backs, asset limits, etc.) limits users in developing a path out of poverty. The result is a perpetuation of perceptions of vulnerable populations as dependent, lazy, and poor decision makers. Scholars note that social assistance policy in Canada has historically reproduced and normalized inequality and poverty among Indigenous populations in particular, including through characterizations of Indigenous people as lazy, undeserving, and passive recipients of income support (Taylor-Neu et al., 2020). Moreover, the penalizing of disadvantaged populations through panhandling bylaws and other regulatory mechanisms, as well as ticketing and policing of public space, criminalizes poverty and homelessness, and contributes to additional representations of impoverished neighbourhoods as “disorderly spaces” and homeless populations as disruptive and in need of “taming” (Chesnay et al., 2013; Wittmer & Parizeau, 2016). These will be important issues to confront in any analysis of the system and proposed reforms, and are taken up in more detail in Petit and Tedds (2020a).

The B.C. Government has taken some early steps to address some of these systemic barriers to financial security, opportunity, and inclusion in B.C. For example, in 2017, the government modernized the definition of a spouse and aligned that definition across a number of benefit programs. In particular, it moved to align the definition of a spouse similar to that in the Income Tax Act, by increasing the cohabitation period from three months to 12 months. In addition, the B.C. government launched a comprehensive engagement process in 2019 to understand the experiences of poverty by the Transgender, Non-Binary, and Two-Spirit + (TNB2S+) communities. This built on the engagement related to the Poverty Reduction Strategy consultations that occurred in 2017 and 2018 when a gap in participation and data collected from the main public engagement process was identified. The results of this consultation emphasize the systemic pathologies and the barriers associated with intersecting identity factors and social positions that shape individual experiences and which not only result in poverty, but also reinforce poverty (Aaron Devor Knowledge Services, 2020).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have provided background on the GBA+ process, the core concepts of gender mainstreaming and intersectionality that inform it, its operationalization in the Canadian context to date, and its limitations and potential. In addition, we have incorporated relevant aspects of two critical frameworks for policy analysis—McPhail’s (2003) critical feminist policy analysis framework and Hankivsky et al.’s (2014) intersectionality based policy analysis framework—to put forward an adapted GBA+ tool. Our objective in adjusting the existing GBA+ process was twofold: first, to create a framework better suited to policy research and analysis beyond the bureaucratic context, and second, to integrate the concept of intersectionality in a

manner that better reflects core aspects of the theory. We concluded by conducting an analysis of poverty and need in B.C. according to the first two steps of the adapted GBA+ framework, and have, as a result, offered insight into the issue of poverty in the province from a gender and intersectional perspective.

Our analysis of both the academic literature and government initiatives reveals that though the concepts of gender mainstreaming and intersectionality have been on Canadian governments' radar for some time, much work remains to be done to bring them to bear across the many aspects of the policy-making process. In addition to finding ways to integrate the concept of intersectionality in a manner that does not always prioritize gender as the primary focus of analysis, one of the biggest hurdles facing governments is the fact that the honest application of such theories requires a degree of self-awareness and self-criticism on the part of government officials—indeed, on the part of governments writ large—that is unlikely, particularly given existing bureaucratic processes and customs. Moving forward, governments might consider couching the implementation of GBA+ frameworks within broader reconsiderations of government process, structures, institutions, and norms, with an aim to remove discrimination and bias (e.g., heteronormativity, colonialism, misogyny, ableism).

Finally, the act of exploring—even in a basic sense—the nature and causes of poverty in B.C. from an intersectional perspective results in the production of a harrowing picture, both of need and oppression, and one that government systems have been complicit in constructing. In particular, our analysis reveals the extent to which poverty is not simply the result of limited income, but is produced (and entrenched) along several dimensions of discrimination and marginalization—a fact that renders various groups more vulnerable to poverty on the basis of their intersecting identities. Moreover, one's identity further complicates interactions with and experiences of government systems and other institutions, given deeply entrenched pathologies; this, in turn, exacerbates poverty and marginalization in many cases. At the same time, such examinations of vulnerability and need cast light on the sheer resiliency of diverse populations in the face of systemic discrimination and violence, within and beyond the state. Ultimately, an understanding, both of this broad context of systemic pathologies and barriers, and of the intersecting identity factors and social positions that shape individual experiences, will be integral for analysts hoping to advance agendas of diversity, inclusion, and poverty reduction, particularly through the development of public policy.

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