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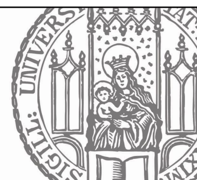

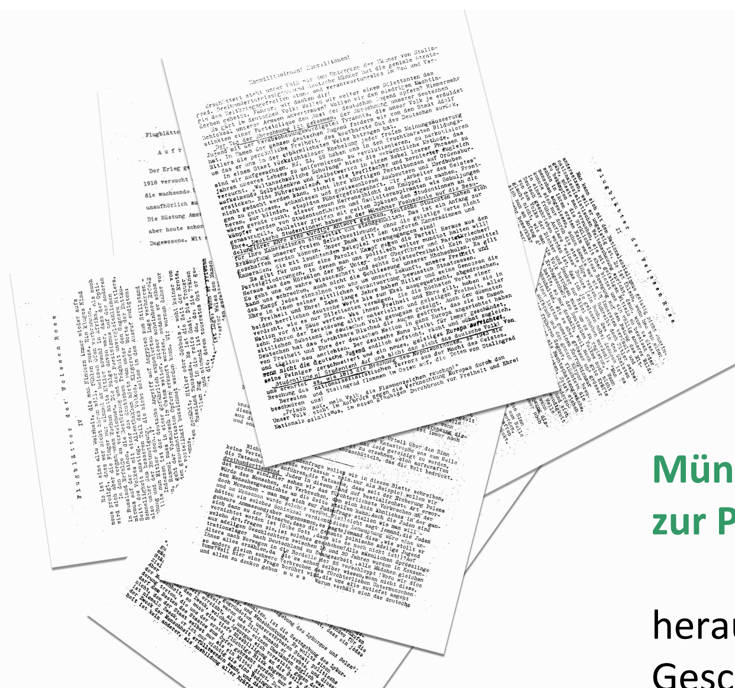

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Queering Governance: Indigenous and Colonial North America

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Queering Governance: Indigenous and Colonial North America

1. Introduction

Women and genderqueer[1] people are vastly excluded from politics. Women make up 51% of the United States population but represent only 27% of Congress (CAWP 2021). Genderqueer people are roughly 0.5% of the population but only represent 0.01% of elected officials in the USA (Victory Institute 2021; Wilson and Meyer 2021). Women and genderqueer people are not equally represented in the institutions tasked with shaping the world we live in. It is worth questioning the root of why certain genders are continuously marginalized in present-day North American governing bodies.

Governance in North America has not always been this exclusive. Before European settlers arrived in the 15th century, Indigenous women and genderqueer people held leadership roles in many communities. Their fundamental understanding of gender was different: gender was fluid. When settlers colonized, they forced their gender norms onto Indigenous peoples: gender became binary. Men dominated over women, and genderqueer people didn't fit the binary framework. This patriarchal structure manifested in the governance we know today.

This study delves into a fundamental questioning of mainstream gender norms by addressing the question: how is gender constructed in governance? By comparing an Indigenous polity to a colonial polity during early colonialism, I dismantle our very understanding of gender in governing. Then I build upon this by answering the question: what key points could be changed to move towards egalitarian governance in mainstream North America today?

In doing so, I offer several contributions. Firstly, I address the root cause of gender inequality: a binary understanding of gender that gives way to hierarchical gender roles. Rather than adding to the plethora of research that looks at gendered political processes and institutions, I question the foundation these are built upon. Secondly, I counter

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[1] Genderqueer describes a person whose gender is outside of the male-female binary. I use genderqueer as opposed to "non-binary" as it does not assume the binary as given, normal, or status quo.

Western colonial academia through my research design that centers Indigenous knowledge. Lastly, I move beyond theory and provide practical avenues for change.

The study proceeds as follows. First, I define key concepts to provide an accessible entrance into my research. Then I present my theoretical groundings: Indigenous feminist and queer Indigenous theory. After providing an overview of relevant literature, I present my hypothesis. I turn to my "most similar systems design" and explain my case choice and methodology. This leads to my analysis of the gendering process in governance in the Anishinaabe nations and the New England colonies during the early colonial period. I trace how these polities conceptualized gender, how they attributed gender roles, and how this resulted in whether or not all genders had equitable influence in governance. Using these results, I present two avenues towards egalitarian governance today. I conclude with limitations and further research endeavors.

2. Concepts

2.1. What is gender?

Before engaging in a discussion on gender, it is crucial to define the concepts I use. Gender is distinct from sex. Sex refers to a person's biological classification as female, male, or intersex based on indicators including physical attributes, chromosomes, gene expression, anatomy, and hormones (Pruden and Salway 2020), usually assigned at birth. If sex is merely "a category of bodies," then gender is "a category of persons" (Roscoe 1998, 127). Gender can be broadly defined as "a multidimensional category of personhood encompassing a distinct pattern of social and cultural differences" (Roscoe 1997, 68). Gender is often determined by perceived biological differences between bodies, but these perceptions are always based on a culture's categories and meanings (Roscoe 1998). It is a common misconception that there are two sexes (male or female) that automatically determine one's gender (man or woman). But this is not the case.

Firstly, physical differences are not necessarily fixed: a culture assigns certain features to the category "male" and certain features to the category "female." It may seem straightforward: an individual is born and by looking at their genitals, they are one sex or the other. However, sex is more fluid than one might assume and additionally, sometimes it is hard to determine a baby's sex. In the first six weeks of gestation, all fetuses develop

identically. Every human being begins as the same universal sex. Then, around six weeks, due to one's XX (female) or XY (male) chromosomes, the gonads either develop into ovaries (female) or they secrete hormones that create testes (male). But sometimes a person has XY chromosomes, meaning they are genetically "male," but don't secrete hormones at this stage, so they anatomically develop into a female (Hiort 2021). Others are born with external genitalia that appear to be neither the usual male nor female type, but in-between instead. They are intersex. There are many components that doctors use to determine sex. Humans, not nature, define where the category "male" ends and "intersex" begins and where "intersex" ends and "female" begins. The takeaway is that 1) we begin as the same, universal sex, and 2) the categories "male" and "female" are not as fixed as many may believe.

Secondly, sex isn't the only factor that determines gender. Gender is a person's own sense of who they are. It is influenced by individual and social factors. A society teaches an individual what attributes, roles, and behaviors correspond to a certain gender (Pruden and Salway 2020). An individual also creates their own understanding of this based on their own observations. This begins in early childhood (Forcier and Olson-Kennedy 2020) and is continuously reinforced by depictions of gender roles in media and advertising, for example. Additionally, children learn to identify with certain traits that parents and mentors demonstrate and model their behavior and adapt their understanding of gender based on these. As humans grow up, their gender identity may be influenced by the people they associate with, both in a prescriptive fashion, to maintain their status as a member of a group, or more individually, where we explore the breadth of possible identities to find one most comfortable. This gendering process is all bound within the limits of categories that a culture and language provides. Ultimately, the identity one chooses is influenced by external and internal factors. Individual and social factors may become more important than one's sex in determining gender. Or, for some individuals and cultures, sex is not relevant at all in their definitions of gender (Roscoe 1998).

Gender is not binary, which means there are not only "men" and "women." The existence of more than two genders does not require believing in the existence of multiple sexes. It requires, "minimally, a view of physical differences as unfixed, or insufficient on their own to establish gender, or simply less important than individual and social factors"

(Roscoe 1998, 127). Gender can be understood as multiple, or as a spectrum from "maleness" to "femaleness," or as something else entirely (Forcier and Olson-Kennedy 2020). The bottom line is that gender is fluid.

Gender roles are then defined as "the culturally defined duties and responsibilities that people are expected to carry out depending on their gender identity" (University of Alberta 2015).

2.2. Who are Indigenous people and settlers?

In this study, "Indigenous peoples" refers to the original inhabitants of Turtle Island, or North America, before European settlers arrived in the 15th century. Many Indigenous peoples use the name Turtle Island for the continent of North America. The name originates from traditional creation stories (Women's Earth Alliance 2016). Indigenous peoples are diverse, with various languages, cultures, and ways of living. Presently, Indigenous peoples constitute around 1% of the US and 5% of the Canadian population (US Census 2020; Statistics Canada 2016).

Colonial settlers are those who migrated from England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands and established permanent settlements in North America beginning in the late 16th century. This involved forcibly displacing the Indigenous population. Europeans invaded Indigenous peoples' territory, cultures, languages, politics, epistemics, and economies, and subsequently dominated them. This is deeply racialized and geographically and temporally continuous. This structure is called settler colonialism and is a persistent force in contemporary North America (Murrey 2020).

2.3. What is governance?

Governance refers to "how people choose to collectively organize themselves to manage their own affairs, share power and responsibilities, decide for themselves what kind of society they want for their future, and implement those decisions" (Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, n.d.). It is about power and authority: who has it and how they are held accountable. Governance differs from the term government "in that it focuses less on the state and its institutions and more on social practices" (Bevir 2012, 1).

Patriarchy refers to a society that is male-dominated: men hold the power in all spheres. In matriarchies, women are in power.

3. State of Research

3.1. Centering Indigenous Knowledge

This study draws from Indigenous feminist and queer Indigenous theory. I center Indigenous knowledge, which is cast to the margins of academia. Knowledge about Indigenous peoples that is not produced by Indigenous peoples is inherently problematic. Filtering their experiences through a Western mindset erases Indigenous realities and reproduces colonial knowledge. Indigenous conceptualizations of gender can only be understood through an Indigenous lens. Therefore, I critically reflect on where each source I include comes from as well as how my own preconceptions shape the way I perform this study.

I acknowledge my position as a non-Indigenous author. I bring with me "a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power" (Smith 1999). This is the lens through which I study. To avoid imposing my bias, I steer away from creating new knowledge on Indigenous peoples and turn to Indigenous sources for their knowledge.

All literature on Indigenous peoples I include is by Indigenous authors only. Other sources, such as journals of early settlers or articles by modern Western anthropologists, will be excluded. These early settlers tried to make sense of Indigenous peoples through their own understandings of gender; they lacked the tools and perspective to contextualize their observations. They often wrote to justify their conquest and portrayed Indigenous peoples with contempt or as overly sexual or deviant. Likewise, modern historians frequently essentialize or romanticize Indigenous peoples. Few of these primarily non-Indigenous, white men were looking to affirm Indigenous gender variance (Pyle 2021).

However, when colonial documents are placed side by side with Indigenous accounts of the past, they can shed light on historical truths (Child 2012). Therefore, many of the Indigenous authors featured in the following literature review use colonial sources in their studies. I myself do not use primary colonial sources because it is not my place to

evaluate whether they are accurate or not. On the other hand, Indigenous authors have contextualized these colonial accounts through their own lived knowledge and experience as Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous feminist theories look at "how gender and conceptions of gender influence the lives of Indigenous peoples, historically and today" (Nickel and Snyder 2019). Gender intersects with other aspects of people's identity, including race, indigeneity, ability, age, and social class. Indigenous feminisms examine how the structures of power related to these identities, such as sexism, racism, and colonialism, shape Indigenous lives. These theories have "the potential to expose and destabilize patriarchal gender roles and the structures that sustain and promote continued Indigenous dispossession and disempowerment through colonialism" (Nickel 2020, 3). Indigenous feminist theories don't solely study Indigenous lives. They can also be applied holistically as a framework of analysis across a range of fields and topics, including law, gendered violence, and political activism (Nickel 2020).

Queer Indigenous theory both critiques the limitations of Indigenous feminist theory and is a valuable extension of it. The "queer" part destabilizes gender attributions. It criticizes the assumption that feminism is only about women. It brings in the experiences of queer Indigenous people for a discussion of that includes all genders and sexualities (Driskill et al. 2011), including the ones already represented by feminist theory. Put simply, "queer Indigeneity has a place for straightness, and that's why we should center it" (Simpson 2017, 138).

It is important to note that these are contemporary scholarship. Indigenous people have produced and passed on feminist and queer knowledge for thousands of years prior to and outside of modern institutional academia. The following literature review synthesizes central themes in Indigenous feminist and queer literature to show how Indigenous gender roles changed from pre-colonialism to today.

3.2. Indigenous Conceptualizations of Gender

Before colonialism began in 1492**,** Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island understood gender as fluid. There were multiple genders and a variance in gender roles. Gender was a reflection of one's spirit, as a Cree-Métis interviewee articulates:

> This whole gender-sex thing, we had it down a long time ago, right? We didn't need, you know, second stage feminism to teach us that. […] Indigenous communities […] have for a long time understood the difference, and so the feminine and the masculine are more spirit concepts as opposed to, about your body parts. And therefore we had more gender fluidity in our communities because it's […] about spirit and roles related to spirit as opposed to, like, what parts you were born with (Kuokkanen 2020, 20).

An individual's role within their community was more important than their bodily sex. "That is, gender and gender roles were variables based on multiple societal factors such as tribal tradition" (Gilley 2011, 127).

Multiple gender categories existed. These categories included "men" and women," however were not equated with bodily sex (Barker 2017). Indigenous people did not fit into rigid gender categories. Most societies had names for individuals that were neither men nor women. Queer Indigenous theory pioneers Driskill (Cherokee), Finley (Colville), Gilley (Cherokee/Chickasaw), and Morgensen explain how describing Indigenous systems of gender pushes at the thresholds of the English language (Driskill et al. 2011). Their meanings are lost when decontextualized from their culture and translated. It is not that the terminology is untranslatable, but rather the "cultural and political fabric they represent" (Picq and Tikuna 2019, 60). Names for these mixed genders differed by tribe. In Cherokee, the term *asegi udanto* describes "people who either fall outside of men's and women's roles or who mix men's and women's roles" (Driskill et al. 2011, 6). This comes from *asegi,* meaning "strange," and *udanto,* meaning heart or spirit. Meanwhile, in Navajo, *nadleehi* translates to someone who is being transformed or is in a constant state of change (Pruden, n.d.). Currently, around 130 nation-specific terms exist for these mixed genders (Pruden and Salway 2020).

Today, the term "Two-Spirit" is used as an umbrella term for Indigenous people of North America whose gender or sexuality lies outside of the Western male/female binary. Derived from the Anishinaabemowin word *niizh manitoag,* translated as "two spirits," it

refers to the masculine and feminine spirits in one person (Gilley 2006). Coined at the Third International Gathering of American Indian and First Nations Gays and Lesbians in Winnipeg in 1990, it allows gender-diverse Indigenous individuals to name and reclaim their identities and connect to their Two-Spirit kin (Pyle 2020, 2021). In the past, Two-Spirit people often had sacred roles in their communities, including as mediators, social workers, medicine people, and name givers (Pruden, n.d.).

All genders in Indigenous communities generally shared power. "Most tribes were egalitarian, that is, Native women did have religious, political, and economic power—not more than the men, but at least equal to men's" (Mihesuah 2003, 43). Many pre-colonial cultures developed political systems in which women had significant power and influence (LaRocque 2007, 65). Scholars categorize these nations as more matriarchal. Those nations include the Iroquois, Cherokee, Hopi, and Navajo. Other nations are deemed more patriarchal. These include the Arctic, North Athapaskan, Plains, and Creek (Maltz and Archambault 1995). Many patriarchal Indigenous nations were more egalitarian than male-dominated though. Likewise, even in matriarchal nations, men often held power in political spheres, where they were advised by women (Mihesuah 2003). Whether technically matriarchal or patriarchal, Indigenous nations "were nonetheless egalitarian and understood that all genders and sexualities had important roles to fulfill in keeping our communities balanced" (Fiola 2020).

However, it is important not to romanticize and over-generalize pre-colonial gender traditions. As the field of Indigenous feminist and queer theory evolves, many scholars call for a critical engagement with "traditions" (LaRocque 2007; Pyle 2020; Snyder, Napoleon, and Borrows 2015; St. Denis 2007; Maltz and Archambault 1995). Gender dynamics differed by nation. "When we perpetuate stereotyped, generalized roles as 'traditional,' we lose the opportunity to examine individual teachings each Indigenous nation has about gender" (Pyle 2020).

Some oral and written evidence shows that not all pre-colonial Indigenous societies had perfectly balanced gender roles (Snyder, Napoleon, and Borrows 2015). Pre-contact societies were not necessarily "uniformly balanced, accepting, and appreciative of non-gender-conforming individuals" either, Sarah Hunt (Kwagiulth) states. However, the fact that gender norms were different for each nation highlights how ontologically different

Western and Indigenous understandings of gender are (Hunt 2018). Pre-colonial Indigenous gender relations may not have been perfectly balanced, but what remains undisputed is that colonialism deeply altered them.

3.3. Colonialism Imposes Patriarchy

When European settlers started colonizing in 1492, they brought over and forced their gender norms onto Indigenous peoples. Settlers understood gender as a binary: male or female. Non-binary genders were not understood. Early modern Europeans lived out dichotomous performances of gender. Women served as caretakers of the home and had to be pious, humble, and obedient. Men had authority over their homes and families, and had to be strong, brave, and powerful (Slater 2011). European societies were patriarchal, privileging men and dominating women. Families were nuclear, where the father was both center and leader. This served as a model for social arrangements of the state and its institutions (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). As devout Protestants and Catholics, they believed that respect for a male authority was paramount to an orderly church and society. Religious wars and the Crusades in the centuries prior set the stage for how European men were to colonize North American land and convert the Indigenous peoples in the name of their king and country (Slater 2011). European countries started by only sending over their men on ships to North America.

During colonization, Europeans had to take over not just Indigenous land, but also the Indigenous peoples on that land. Settlers destroyed, removed, and erased Indigenous peoples (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). Indigenous feminists and queer theorists have amply studied how settlers used gender as "a tool of colonization" (Pyle 2020, 110). When settlers encountered the equal positions genders held in Indigenous cultures, they perceived this as a barrier to imposing their patriarchal rule. Hierarchy was integral to their system of dominance. Empowered Indigenous women and Two-Spirit and queer people represented the lived alternative to patriarchy. In order to control and dominate Indigenous peoples, "Indigenous forms of gender construction and fluidity around gender had to be replaced with a rigid heteropatriarchal gender binary and strict gender roles" (Simpson 2017, 110). Colonists did this through physical and conceptual destruction and assimilation.

Settlers introduced and reinforced their gender norms through various avenues. Leanne Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) explains the process: "the gender binary is reinforced through residential schools, the church, and the Indian Act. 2SQ [Two-Spirit and queer] people are disappeared. Indigenous women are domesticated into the role of Victorian housewives. Native men are domesticated into the wage economy and are taught their only power is to ally with white men in the oppression of Indigenous women through church, school, law, and policy" (Simpson 2017, 89).

One avenue through which settlers imposed their norms was legislation. Indigenous feminist legal theorists such as Napoleon (Saulteau), Borrows (Anishinaabe), and Snyder in Canada, as well as Deer (Muscogee) in the USA, have studied how colonization undermined women's legal and political power. The common law of England, which treated women as property of their husbands, served as the basis for American law. In early formal legal relations between Indigenous nations and the federal government, settlers refused to negotiate with Indigenous women (Deer 2019). In 1876, the Indian Act in Canada replaced Indigenous systems of governance with a band and council system under the authority of the colonial government. Indigenous women could not serve as band chief nor vote in elections. The Act also formalized patrilineality (Coburn and LaRocque 2020). It defined "Indian" as "any male person of Indian blood" along with the wife and children of that male (The Indian Act 1876). This tied Indigenous women's status to an authoritative male figure. If they married a non-Indigenous man, they lost their status. Additionally, the Act barred Indigenous women from owning land or marital property (Simpson 2017).

Settlers also introduced their gender norms through education. Residential schools in Canada and Indian boarding schools in the USA indoctrinated Indigenous children into colonial roles. In 1879, the first off-reservation boarding school opened in the USA and by 1884, Canada made attendance at a residential, industrial, or day school mandatory for Indigenous children (Pyle 2021). These schools intended to "civilize" and "Christianize" children, replacing their cultural values with European values (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012). Schools segregated Indigenous children by boys and girls. Boys' hair was cut short and girls sported bobs (Hunt 2018). Boys learned industrial and farming skills while girls engaged in domestic service (TRC 2012). The sharp division of labor

replaced the fluidity and flexibility of roles in Indigenous societies. Further, residential and boarding schools only allowed students to speak English or French and punished those who spoke their native language. By eradicating their native languages, settlers eradicated the terminology they had to express diverse genders (Pyle 2021). It became difficult for Indigenous peoples to describe who they were outside of colonial genders (Robinson 2019).

Settlers also enforced their gender norms through violence against Indigenous women and 2SQ people. Settlers normalized gender-based violence against them. They portrayed Indigenous women and 2SQ individuals negatively, including as sexually deviant. These stereotypes legitimized sexual violence by settlers and even from their own Indigenous community, when these stereotypes were internalized. The social and economic marginalization of women and 2SQ individuals, along with government policies that tore Indigenous families and communities apart, pushed Indigenous women and 2SQ people into dangerous situations including poverty, homelessness, and prostitution. Combined with inadequate protection by law enforcement, this led to a disproportionately high number of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SQ people (Jacobs 2003; National Inquiry 2019).

These avenues, alongside others, led to a hierarchy with “men at the top, women in the middle, and nonconforming genders disappeared through individual and systemic violence” (Simpson 2017, 111). Across generations, Indigenous peoples internalized colonial gender norms and gender violence. Disconnected from their land and knowledge systems, Indigenous peoples replicated these norms (Simpson 2017). Their own notions of gender and sexuality have become more rigid and heteropatriarchal. Two-Spirit Métis/Anishinaabe scholar Kai Pyle describes the erasure of Two-Spirit people in Indigenous communities. “Words that might name us in the fullness of who we are, practices that we might have enacted, roles we might have held— many of these things were actively punished by both colonial powers and our own relatives, some of whom took up colonial attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. Those who remembered these things often kept quiet out of fear” (Pyle 2021). This erasure of 2SQ people through colonialism is ongoing.

As a response, Indigenous feminist and queer Indigenous theorists have focused on decolonization, or undoing colonialism. “The goal of decolonization is not to recreate as perfectly as possible the ways of our ancestors” (Pyle 2020). Not all Indigenous gender systems were perfectly balanced. Rather, Beltrán (Yaqui/Mexica), Alvarez, and Puga suggest “(re)membering” traditions. This means both “remembering cultural knowledge and re-membering, or putting back together (queering), the bodies, minds, and spirits of our Two-Spirit/queer relatives in a way that reflects our current needs and contexts” (Beltrán et al 2020, 166).

Re-membering Indigenous gender traditions is only one piece of decolonizing. The colonial patriarchy needs to be dismantled on the path to decolonizing, but this is not the end goal. The end goal is decolonization itself. This is a rebuilding of Indigenous nations, both conceptually and physically. In her book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resurgence,* Simpson calls for a “queer resurgence,” centering Indigenous women and 2SQ people in nation-rebuilding (Simpson 2017).

3.4. Further Research

The existing body of literature sparks ideas for further research. Indigenous feminists and queer theorists call for resurgence: a profound reorganizing, providing Indigenous alternatives to the destructive settler colonial state (Simpson 2017). For many, that includes reviving traditional Indigenous gender dynamics and governance. But for settlers, there is no egalitarian system to return to. Settlers are physically occupying Indigenous land and while this reality is practically impossible to change, the way settlers govern can be. Therefore, I look to apply Indigenous theory to mainstream North American governance.

An analysis of a system of governance other than our patriarchal reality can help deepen our understanding of the patriarchal system and provide avenues for constructing an alternative reality. As Tuma Young, a Two-Spirit Mi’kmaq, articulates, “an issue has to be looked at from two different perspectives: the Western perspective and the Indigenous perspective, so that this provides the whole picture for whoever is trying to understand that particular issue” (National Inquiry 2019). Seeking knowledge from Indigenous systems can help construct more egalitarian governance today.

This study also contributes a unique research design and unique methodology. There is no case study that compares gender in an Indigenous and a colonial polity in this field to-date. My methodology, in which I only include Indigenous sources when analyzing Indigenous governance, is likewise uncommon. I thereby hope to contribute accurate research in light of a plethora of misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples.

Against this backdrop, I seek to study the gendering process of governing. This can be broken down into a three-step process: first, by observing how a polity conceptualized gender, then, how they attributed gender roles, and finally, how this resulted in who has power and influence in governance. I test the following hypothesis:

A fluid, non-hierarchical understanding of gender causes egalitarian governance.

4. Research Design

4.1. Most Similar Systems Design

To test this hypothesis, I conduct a comparative case study using the "most similar systems design" (Przeworski and Teune 1970). I select two cases with very similar contextual factors but different outcomes. By limiting the effect of third variables, I can isolate and analyze the cause of the different outcomes. In order to study the cause of egalitarian or patriarchal governance, I select one Indigenous polity with egalitarian governance and one North American colonial polity with patriarchal governance. The contextual factors remain as similar as possible: the polities are of similar size, location, time period, stability, and male-to-female ratio. I seek to explain the difference in governance type by each polity's conceptualization of gender.

The dependent variable is governance. Governance will be deemed "egalitarian" if all genders have an equitable influence on decisions made. Equitable implies proportional to how much of the population a gender constitutes. The independent variable is conceptualization of gender. This will be measured by whether gender is understood as fluid and whether there is a hierarchy between genders. The hypothesis is supported if gender is fluid and non-hierarchical and all genders have an equitable say in decisions made. Conversely, if gender is binary and hierarchical and all genders do not equitably influence decisions made, the hypothesis is also supported.

4.2. Case Selection

The polities I select are the Anishinaabe nations and the New England colonies. This choice is based on ideal type and literature availability. These are the most egalitarian and the most patriarchal polity on which enough literature is available. While literature on gendered governance in colonial North America is readily available, literature on Indigenous North America is harder to find. Therefore, the scope of each polity is a group of nations or colonies because it provides a wide enough literature base. Within each polity, there is enough homogeneity so that generalized conclusions can be drawn. The contextual factors of the two polities are as similar as possible. The location and sizes of the polities are similar. The time period is early colonial, when settlers had relatively little influence on Indigenous governance. The range selected is circa 1630, marking the founding of the first colonies, to circa 1830, when settlers exceedingly took over Anishinaabe land and thereby influenced their gender systems.

Anishinaabe[2] are a group of tribal nations who inhabited the Great Lakes region that spans across present-day USA and Canada. Today it includes hundreds of thousands of people ranging from Ontario in the north to Oklahoma in the west and from Quebec in the east to Montana in the west (Pyle 2021). Translated as "the people," they include the Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, Mississauga, Nipissing, Saulteaux, and Algonquin peoples (Simpson 2008; Pyle 2021). They share similar language, cultural traditions, and system of governing. This group of nations had both evidence of gender fluidity and egalitarian governance prior to colonial influence as well as strong enough literature on these phenomena. Other nations had evidence of more egalitarian governance than the Anishinaabe, however not enough literature by Indigenous sources was available on their gender systems.

The New England colonies encompass Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. I chose this polity due to the reasons described hereafter. Three groups were colonizing North America: the Spanish, Dutch, and English. While the Dutch and Spanish colonies were still governed by their kings, the English colonies had the

[2] Spelling varies by tribe and includes Nishnaabe, Neshnabé, and Anishinini.

freedom to set up local governments and representative assemblies. The English colonies were separated into three regions: the New England, Middle, and Southern colonies. New England colonized the earliest, allowing for a longer time frame of study. They were the most stable. They had a comparatively low death rate and were self-sustaining early on, meaning they didn't need women to fulfill non-traditional roles such as farming simply for the colony survive. Their male-to-female ratio was the most even: in other colonies, men sailed over first, leading to a ratio of four males for every female in one of the Middle colonies for instance. Meanwhile in New England, the ratio was six to four in the mid 1600s (Taylor 2001, 169). Lastly, the dominant religion, Puritanism, is known for its strict gender norms. New England fulfilled the best conditions for patriarchal governance.

4.3. Methods

I examine each polity in three linked steps: how each polity conceptualized gender, how they then attributed gender roles, and how this determined who had influence and power in governance.

Data on Anishinaabe governance is sourced from primary Anishinaabe sources and secondary literature by Anishinaabe authors. The majority of primary written records on Anishinaabeg[3] are from early European settlers in the form of journals, travel accounts, and missionary documents, but these are excluded due to bias. They are referenced in most secondary Anishinaabe literature used in this study, but I will not directly use them. Likewise, literature from contemporary non-Indigenous authors is excluded. This significantly reduces the literature available but will allow for more accurate research based on first-hand accounts not clouded by the bias of an author socialized in a patriarchal society. I rely primarily on secondary literature from Anishinaabe authors who combine oral accounts from their Elders, traditional stories, articles from other Anishinaabe scholars, as well as written accounts from early settlers and contemporary non-Indigenous authors.

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[3] Anishinaabeg means "Anishinaabe people"

Data on the New England colonies will be sourced from primary literature by early European settlers and secondary literature by authors of any origin. Literature is widely available.

5. Results

5.1. Anishinaabe

To determine whether a fluid, non-hierarchical conceptualization of gender causes egalitarian governance, I first traced the gendering process in Anishinaabe nations. This was broken down into three steps: how Anishinaabeg conceptualized gender, how they attributed gender roles, and who had power and influence in governance.

5.1.1 Fluid gender

Evidence shows that Anishinaabeg conceptualized gender as fluid. Anishinaabeg expressed gender along "a spectrum of variance" (Simpson 2017, 131). On one end were women or *ikwe.* Anishinaabe scholar Simpson explains that *kwe* means "woman within the spectrum of genders. It is different from the word woman because it recognizes a spectrum of gender expressions." There is a "fluidity" to the use of the kwe. "Kwe does not conform to the rigidity of the colonial gender binary, nor is kwe essentialized" (Simpson, 2017, 29). Then there were the biological males who chose to function as women, called *ikwekaazo*, meaning "one who endeavors to be like a woman." They "worked and dressed like women." Next there were the biological females who functioned as men, called *ininiikaazo*, or "one who endeavors to be like a man." They "worked and dressed like men." The role of *ikwekaazo* and *ininiikaazo* "was believed to be sacred, often because they assumed their roles based on spiritual dreams or visions" (Treuer 2011, 127). Then there were men, *inini.*

This gender model emerged from their language and worldview. Gender diversity was reflected in the way Anishinaabeg spoke. In their language, Anishinaabemowin, nouns are not gendered by masculine or feminine. Rather, they are categorized by whether they are "animate" or "inanimate," that is, whether they are living or non-living (Roulette 2017). There is a group of animate beings and a group of inanimate beings. This way, living beings have equal status, and all nonliving things have equal status. Under the category of

"animate" there is "room for the male and the female, as well as all of these other shades of gender. We have the he/shes, and we have the she/hes. We have room for the idea of men with the souls of women and women with the souls of men" (Highway 2016). Their linguistic structure allowed for gender to be fluid.

This linguistic structure emerged from their worldview. Anishinaabe mythology is pantheistic. Everything is part of an all-encompassing, intangible god. In pantheism "the idea of divinity has *no* human form. It is simply an energy, a 'great spirit,' […] which is one reason why pantheistic languages don't even have a 'he' or a 'she.' In that system, we are all he/shes. As is god, one would think. Meaning to say that, within the pantheistic system" —as opposed to a monotheistic system where there is only one, typically male, God— "there is at least room for the idea of divinity in the female form" (Highway quoted in O'Hara et al. 2013). Anishinaabeg Elder Art Solomon explains that their Creator, or Great Spirit, Gzwhe Mnidoo, "is the totality of All, including male and female" (Solomon 1990, 9). For Solomon, "the creator God is both totally male, and totally female. It is within that totality, that completeness that God is… We as created human beings are both male and female. We have both qualities within us but one predominates" (Solomon quoted in Anderson 2016). Because God is genderless and is in everything, all humans have both a male and female spirit.

The Anishinaabe creation story taught respect for the feminine. In one of their creation stories, Gzwhe Mnidoo placed their thoughts into seeds and created the first woman, earth or *Aki,* a place where those seeds could grow (Simpson 2011). *Aki* gave life, creating animals, plants, and humans. Her water nourishes all living beings. Thus, "women are at the center of creation" (McGuire 2008, 69). They are the intermediary between humans and God (Solomon 1990). And so, "the feminine is not only to be respected but is looked upon as a source of power and knowledge" (Watts 2013, 28).

Anishinaabeg believed in a balanced relationship between the feminine and the masculine (Anderson 2016). Anishinaabeg most commonly describe the earth as a woman and the sun as a man. Anishinaabe writer Basil Johnston explains how "both sun and earth were mutually necessary and interdependent in the generation of life. But of the two pristine elements, Mother Earth was the most immediate and cherished and honored. In function both Father Sun and Mother Earth were different, just as man and woman are

dissimilar. The sun illuminates, the earth sustains with beauty and nourishment. One cannot give or uphold life without the other" (Johnston 1990). Other Anishinaabeg argue that their peoples ascribed those genders to their creation stories with the onset of colonialism, influenced by a Christianized relationship to earth. These Anishinaabeg reason that the land is not gendered (Simpson 2017). They maintain that "the relationships that we have to creation are not tied to certain body parts. Our relationships to creation are fluid, just like some people's gender" (Women's Earth Alliance 2016, 6).

5.1.2. Fluid, non-hierarchical gender roles

This fluid, or balanced, understanding of gender shaped their gender roles. For Anishinaabe, "there was fluidity around gender in terms of roles and responsibilities. Often one's name, clan affiliation, ability and individual self-determination positioned one in society more than gender, or perhaps in addition to gender" (Simpson 2011, 60). Anishinaabe regarded children as full citizens who had the same responsibilities and rights as adults. They enjoyed a high degree of self-determination and with this, were expected to figure out their role in society through "reflection and self-actualization, and that process was really the most important governing process on an individual level—more important than the gender you were born into" (Simpson 2017, 4).

An individual could choose what gendered role they held in their community. Anishinaabeg were a so-called "hunting and gathering society." They relied on hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering foods, moving around seasonally through their territory for food and resources (Simpson 2017). There was a gendered division of labor, but Anishinaabe accepted variety (Treuer 2011; Simpson 2017). Men and *ininiikaazo* typically hunted and trapped animals, as well as protected the group. Women and *ikwekaazo* generally cooked, carried water, tanned hides, and gardened (Treuer 2011). Women were in charge of the inside circle, making the everyday decisions and in charge of the house. Men were in charge of the outer circle, providing and protecting, making rare decisions such as relocating the village or going to war (Flocken 2013).

Anishinaabeg believed "that everyone has responsibilities by virtue of his or her gender and that all responsibilities are valued" (Anderson 2016, 154). But it is debated how

rigid this division of labor truly was. Some argue that anthropologists exaggerated the division, such as Simpson, who asserts:

> Nishnaabeg 'women' hunted, trapped, fished, held leadership positions, and engaged in warfare, as well as carrying out domestic tasks and looking after children, and they were encouraged to […] express their gender […] in a way that was true to their own being as a matter of *both principle and survival*. Nishnaabeg 'men' hunted, trapped, fished, held leadership positions, engaged in warfare, and also knew how to cook, sew, and look after children. They were encouraged to […] express their gender […] in a way that was true to their own being, as a matter of both principle and survival. This is true for other genders as well (Simpson 2017, 128).

An exclusively gendered workload did not make sense in a hunter-gatherer society. Individuals needed "to have a proficiency in hunting, fishing, gathering, making shelter, traveling, ceremony, warmth, light, and feeding and clothing" themselves and those reliant on them. They couldn't restrict themselves "to an exclusively gendered workload and just expect to survive" (Simpson 2017, 128). Secondly, fluid roles ensured a more productive, sustainable society. Diverse ways of doing things, such as harvesting rice, allowed for a variety of knowledge and solutions, enabling the community to withstand any difficult times (Simpson 2017).

I conclude that Anishinaabe gender roles were not rigid, but the extent of how fluid they were is unclear. The bottom line is that Anishinaabeg were free to choose what gender role they assumed and they valued these gender roles equally.

5.1.3. Egalitarian governance

These egalitarian gender roles transferred over to their system of governance. Governance was decentralized and diffused. There was no central government ruling over all nations. The Anishinaabe system of governance was a clan system, a framework that organized the people of each village into clans. Each clan had a particular role in relation to the community, modeled after the animal world. The Crane and Loon clans were the

leadership clans. The Fish were the intellectuals. The Bear served as the village police and medicine people. The military strategists and warriors were the Marten. The Deer were the pacifists and artisans, and the Bird served as the spiritual leaders. Clans were patrilineal. Anishinaabeg were born into their father's clan (Benton-Benai 1988).

Decisions and laws were made in councils with the input of all people (Bohaker 2020). Councils met at all levels: a single village, multiple villages, and the highest, a grand council of all Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa peoples (Flocken 2013). At councils, the most important political, religious, and military leaders, alongside headmen of families, came together to make decisions by consensus (Treuer 2011). There are numerous contradicting accounts and interpretations of what each gender's role was in these councils. An analysis of all these sources led me to key findings that are best explained using an example. The description of traditional Anishinaabe governance by Pine Shomin of Odawa gets at the heart of it. He describes the grand council of the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa peoples, the Grand Sacred Fire Council:

> At this time I will explain the Wa-wa-na (real or traditional) Anishinaaybeg way of making a Sacred Legal Treaty, as described in a statement of Tradition by Sa-miyen Ki-way-quom, Thunder Clan, through A-soo-ka (Odawa History).
>
> Sa-mi-yen Ki-way-quom explained that the Traditional method of title Anishinaaybeg is as follows: There was, at the beginning, a Sacred Fire built for the purpose of the council. The Anishinaaybeg held council and discussed the issue thoroughly around the Sacred Fire. The Second Principal-An-o-gon-sit [leader] always stood to the left of the Principal-An-o-gon-sit. After four days of discussion, and after all the Principal-Headmen and Second Principal-Headmen, Clan Mothers and the Holy Man had had their say about the issue, a vote was taken. Sa-mi-yen Ki-way-quom then stressed that if one Headman voted no, the law was not passed or assented to, that was final. Decisions were made based on consensus.

> The decision was then sanctioned by the smoking of the Tchi-twa-pwa-gun (Sacred Pipe made of the Red Pipestone, or Red Pipe), which are known today as the Sacred Bundles.
>
> Many Anishinaaybeg took part in these Grand Sacred Fire Councils of the Odawa. In the region from Mackinaw City to Muskegon to the Looking Glass River in East Lansing there were sixty Principal-An-o-gon-sit, sixty Second-Principal Ano-gon-sit, sixty Clan Mothers, one Head-An-o-gon-sit, Little Thunder from the Thunder Clan and one Holy Man who must be of the Turtle Clan. In addition to the An-o-gon-sit and Clan Mothers from all these communities, all Anishinaaybeg from each community who were able to do so, attended the Council. Those who stayed home to care for their communities told their Headmen and Clan Mothers their views on the issue. In other words, no one was left out. All had their say (Shomin as quoted in Fontaine 2013).

This council consisted of various *an-o-gon-sit*, or presumably male leaders, and clan mothers, or female leaders. In attendance were the main leader from the Crane (Thunder) clan, a main religious leader from the Fish (Turtle) clan, and sixty principal and sixty secondary leaders. These were almost invariably men who inherited their position. Most literature suggests that men almost exclusively held the political and military leadership positions in Anishinaabe society during the early colonial period (Treuer 2011; McIvor 2013; Bohaker 2020). These positions were mostly inherited through paternal lineage, typically limited to the Crane and Loon clans, but later extended other clans too. Councils could also select a leader based on merit and charisma (Flocken 2013; Treuer 2011; Miller 2010). Lastly, sixty clan mothers, the female leaders, attended the grand council. This suggests that women were separated in formal politics. Some claim that men and women formed separate councils (Bohaker 2020; Miller 2010); when they met to create community policy, the leader of the women's council would present their joint opinion "to the men at their Meeting" (Kugel 2007, 170). Other sources state that the women's council alone decided on particularly important issues such as moving a village location or going to war (Fontaine 2013; Treuer 2011; Miller 2010).

Although men predominately held the political leadership positions, “this did not mean that women were excluded from the political process” (Miller 2010, 66). Leadership did not mean direct decision-making power. Leaders were spokespersons and servants to the people and had no coercive authority (Flocken 2013; Simpson 2011). They emerged as needed and when the council dispersed, their role ended (Simpson 2011; Flocken 2013). The egalitarian, diffused system of Anishinaabe governance allowed everyone to have a say. As Shomin explained, decisions were made by consensus of all *an-o-gon-sit* and clan mothers. If one person voted no, the motion did not pass. All Anishinaabeg were allowed to attend the council and those who could not told their headmen or clan mothers their views (Fontaine 2013).

Informal consultations played a significant role in governance. “Men consulted with women prior to formal council meetings, usually attended only by men. As wives, mothers, and grandmothers, women wielded power, and male leaders sought their advice and consent in many important matters” (Treuer 2011). Here, Treuer notes what one body of literature finds: that women in fact did not attend council meetings. But, there is widespread consensus that Anishinaabe women had, at minimum, significant indirect power. Anishinaabeg believed that every genders’ contribution to the family and the community as balanced, requiring that all genders’ “concerns be acknowledged in the political system” (Miller 2010, 48). Additionally, *ikwekaazo* and *ininiikaazo,* who were believed to be sacred, held special social and political roles. Early settlers observed that they were summoned to councils and no decision could be made without their input (Treuer 2011). To conclude, evidence shows that leaders made decisions in consultation with all members of society, which, by extension, includes all genders.

My hypothesis is supported. A fluid, nonhierarchical understanding of gender led to egalitarian governance. Anishinaabeg understood gender as a spectrum of variance. This way, although gendered divisions of labor existed, Anishinaabeg were free to choose what role they assumed and these roles were equally valued. This transferred over to their decentralized, diffused system of governance, where all genders –although reports vary as to the specific positions they held– had an equitable influence in decision-making.

5.2. New England colonies

To determine whether a binary, hierarchical understanding of gender causes patriarchal governance, I traced the gendering process in the New England colonies.

5.2.1. Binary gender

English colonies understood gender as binary. Biological females were women and biological males were men. Gender identities outside of this binary were not accepted. The dominant religion in New England colonies was Puritanism. Puritans believed that "the woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto Lord thy God" (Deuteronomy 22:5 King James Version). Puritans enforced this in court, charging individuals such as Mary Henly, a female-assigned individual who wore men's clothing, for "seeming to confound the course of nature" (Reis 2012). Examples of gender-nonconforming people are rare in New England during the early colonial period.

This binary interpretation of gender is reflected in their language. In Modern English, language is gendered by masculine or feminine. Third-person singular pronouns are either he, she, or it. Gendered language is a product of how they perceived the world. Over time, it reinforced the perceived parameters of gender (Miller 2010). That is, "we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community pre-dispose certain choices of interpretation" (Sapir 1929, 210).

Their religion shows how they interpreted gender not just binary, but also hierarchical. Christianity is a monotheistic religion: there is one God, and God is a "He." God is anthropomorphized into a presumably cis-gendered male. Cree/Dene author Tomson Highway explains how there is a linear hierarchy in monotheism: "There's one god and he's male. Male with a capital M. Then there's man with a small m. And there's female with a small f. And finally then there's nature. So there's He, he, she, then it. In that order. One of my students asked me, 'Is there a She with a capital S on this superstructure?' There's none. There's no room for it. There's no room for the idea of She with a capital S" (Highway 2016).

Their creation story justified the subordination of women. In Genesis, God created a man first, then a woman. God made Adam, then as a "helpmeet for him," took one of his ribs and made Eve (Gen. 2 KJV). William Secker, an English clergyman widely read in New England, stated that Eve was made not of Adam's head to "claim superiority, but out of the side to be content with equality." But this spiritual equality did not mean civil equality (Ulrich 1983). Secker as well as Samuel Willard, prominent clergyman in Massachusetts, used Genesis to legitimize a hierarchy between genders. In his sermons, Willard spoke of an "Inequality fixed by the Divine Precept," "for Adam was first formed, then Eve" (Timothy 2:14 KJV). "The reason of the Woman's Creation was the supply of Man's Need and Comfort," he asserts. "There is a Subordination, and they are ranked among unequals." Further, Eve was the one who ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, causing the fall of mankind (Gen. 3 KJV). "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression" (Tim. 2:14 KJV). Willard uses Eve's susceptibility to deception to justify the submission of women. Quoting Genesis, he claims "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16 KJV). Men were supposedly made to rule over women.

Women's position was secondary to men, but at the same time complimentary. Husbands and wives were mutually dependent and had a reciprocal relationship. Secker compares them to a pair of oars rowing to Heaven together (Secker 1681). The same way Puritan ministers ordered women to submit to their husbands, they also expected husbands to respect their wives. The courts enforced this too, when necessary intervening in domestic disputes (Taylor 2001). The Puritan social order was based on a stable family.

Families were the building blocks of Puritan society. Replicating English society, men served as heads of the house. "As patriarchs, they [were] expected to govern their families as […] 'little commonwealths'—the essential components of the social order" (Taylor 2001, 173). Every commonwealth, whether family or nation, needed an ultimate ruler. New England Puritans believed that a hierarchal and patriarchal structure was necessary for societal order (Romero 2011).

5.2.2. Separate, hierarchical gender roles

As in English society, roles were divided by gender. New England colonies were agricultural societies. Each family was allotted a piece of farmland and relied mainly on their own family labor. Men and boys worked in the fields and barn, while women and girls worked in the house and garden (Taylor 2001). Men conducted hard labor, constructing, tending to livestock, harvesting hay, and cultivating crops. Women cared for the numerous children, made clothing, prepared foods, and tended to the yard. Occasionally, a woman would fulfill her husband's role if he was away or incapacitated. The wife would then assume the role of "deputy husband" until he recovered or returned (Taylor 2001; Ulrich 1983). The role of a woman wasn't tied as much to "femininity" as it was to furthering the good of her family and doing tasks deemed acceptable by her husband. This allowed women to carry out roles outside of their domestic domain, such as farming, "without really challenging the patriarchal order of society" (Ulrich 1983, 37).

The domineering role of the father in the home extended to external affairs too. Puritans understood society "in terms of a series of hierarchical relationships, in which fathers' authority within the polity and their authority within the family were homologous" (Lombard 2003, 12). In the same way that they held authority in the household, men monopolized land ownership, political rights, and legal authority. The law of "coverture" stipulated that when women married, their legal existence was subsumed with their husbands (Taylor 2001, 173). The husband and wife formed one legal entity: the husband. Married women could not executive a will without their husband's consent. They could not enter contracts, own property, vote, or hold office. Men also monopolized church affairs. Only they could serve in the ministry and hire and fire ministers (Taylor 2001).

5.2.3. Patriarchal governance

This male dominance transferred over to a top-down, centralized system of governance. New England colonies were under the authority of England. Each colony had a government led by a governor and a legislature. Most colonies in New England were royal colonies, meaning they were under the direct control of the English monarchy. England appointed their government officials. Connecticut and Rhode Island remained charter colonies, meaning England granted them a charter to set up their own government. Here,

colonies elected their government officials (Taylor 2001). Each colony was headed by a governor who was the chief law enforcement officer. The governor had an advisory council which acted as the supreme court. Then there were assemblies, made of representatives elected by property holding men. Assemblies made laws that had to be approved by the council and governor. On a local level, citizens met in town meetings to deliberated and voted on local issues (De Wolf 1890). In all levels of government, only men could participate.

Women could not be governor, a council member, or a representative. Women could not participate in town meetings. Law stipulated that "minors, idiots, lunatics, women, and aliens are excluded from taking part in the government, either as voters or as officers" (De Wolf 1890). Decisions in New England colonies were made in formal representative institutions and thus, women had no direct influence in decision-making. Women could only exert power informally. In their families, a husband's decisions in external affairs, although supreme, would include his wife's opinions and interests (Ulrich 1983). Among their female networks, they circulated news and opinions and thereby regulated the reputations of individuals, including political officers (Taylor 2001). However, these informal influences are minor. In the New England system of governance, which was centralized and where decision-making occurred in formal representative institutions, women had no direct influence on decision-making.

My hypothesis that a binary, hierarchy conceptualization of gender leads to patriarchal governance is supported. New England Puritans only recognized two genders: men and women. This binary was hierarchical: men dominated women. This translated to their separate, unequal roles: women worked in the home and men worked outside. Governance happened in formal representative institutions and only men could participate. Thus, only men had real influence in decision-making.

5.3. Queering Governance

Using these findings, I turn to the question: what key points could be changed to move towards an egalitarian system of governance in mainstream North America today?

Results showed that a fluid understanding of gender leads to egalitarian governance. No matter the system of government, if gender is treated as binary, there will

be no fully egalitarian governance. No new structure of government in the USA and Canada can solve gender inequality. Finding the right starting point to fix gender inequality is crucial. A top-down approach that changes the government's structure and rules will not be effective without addressing the root cause: the gender binary. A bottom-up approach will address this root cause.

At the base lies our conceptualization of gender. Results showed that this is deeply engrained by religion and language. New England Puritans believed in a God-determined inequality between sexes and gendered their language. Anishinaabeg believed in an all-encompassing, gender-neutral God and did not gender their language. But fundamental beliefs and linguistic structures are difficult, if not impossible, to change. They can only be challenged to a limited extent, so this is not the most compelling starting point for change, as this would require reframing of the terminology available in the English language.

If we move up a level in this bottom-up approach, we arrive at the categories we create based on our understanding of gender. Creating strict categories naturally leads to a hierarchy between those categories. New England Puritans believed in two strict categories of gender which led to one dominating the other. Men ruled over women in all spheres of life. Oppositely, Anishinaabeg did not believe in strict gender categories and therefore there could be no hierarchy based on gender alone. This allowed all genders to have equally-valued roles in all aspects of life. It is possible to model this in today's world. Deconstructing gender categories is the most potent avenue towards egalitarian governance. This does not require challenging everyone's fundamental beliefs, but rather, it requires allowing every person to live out their gender freely. Each person should express their gender however they wish. They should be able to attach as much or as little importance to gender as they want. It is the closest to the root cause of inegalitarian governance that we can get while still being feasible to change. This change can be defined as creating the best possible conditions for each person to live out their gender freely and not be bound by binary categories. In other words, queering our society. I present two key points to change: 1) removing political/legal barriers to all diversity in gender self-identification, which sets the grounds for 2) elimination of a binary gender categorization, moving towards a fluid gender expression.

Remove legal barriers to living out one's gender identity. A basic level of rights and protection from discrimination is needed for people to live out their gender freely. If genderqueer people experience discrimination in employment, housing, education, healthcare, and more, it makes it hard to express one's gender. This begins with allowing people to choose and change their gender markers in identification documents, based solely on self-identification. It extends to eliminating discriminatory laws and adopting nondiscrimination laws for genderqueer people. Currently, the nondiscrimination statutes in the majority of US states do not specifically protect people from discrimination on the grounds of gender identity (Conron and Goldberg 2020). Further, anti-genderqueer legislation has surged in the USA in 2021. These bills prevent access to gender-affirming healthcare, prohibit participation in sports consistent with one's gender identity, and allow religious beliefs to be a justification for failing to provide services to genderqueer people (ACLU 2021). In Canada, two-thirds of genderqueer people reported avoiding three or more public spaces out of fear of harassment or outing (Trans PULSE Canada 2021). For Indigenous genderqueer and Two-Spirit people, this number reached three-quarters of the population (Merasty et al. 2021). Basic rights and protections against discrimination cannot be overlooked if we want to allow every person to express their gender as they want. This sets the framework for eliminating the gender binary because it allows for legal recognition and protection of people who identify or are exploring self-identification options beyond the status quo binary already in place. This leads to the next key point.

Eliminate categorization by gender in society at large. If we dismantle gender categories, we remove the possibility of hierarchies arising between those categories. And if all genders are equally valued, everyone has an equal say in governance. As Nagoshi eloquently puts, "what would a gender-equal world look like? I was and am still acutely interested in de-gendering the world. Life with gendered differences in my mind is a 'separate but equal' status of second-class citizenship. In today's gender struggles, why are we trying to obtain a separate but equal status? It does not work. The dominant groups win, and the non-dominant groups lose" (J. Nagoshi, C. Nagoshi, and Brzuzy 2014, 132). Eliminating categorization has many facets. It begins with removing gender markers in legal documents and registries unless absolutely necessary. It is rooted in how we raise our children: there is no need for big gender-reveal parties, giving babies gender-specific toys,

nor signing kids up for different sports given their gender. It means ending the categorization of boy's and girl's clothing sections in stores. It eliminates the segregation of students by gender in school. It extends to using gender-neutral language, including gender-neutral pronouns. It engages in educating journalists and media in gender-inclusive language and sensitive reporting on genderqueer people. By chipping away at these categories, we can move closer towards a society more accepting of diversity in self-identification of gender, ultimately leading to egalitarian governance.

These two key points provide examples for how a bottom-up approach should be used to create a more egalitarian governance. They demonstrate how a few changes in current policies and practices sets the ground for this. These examples are non-exhaustive and provide a framework to build off of. Results from the first research question demonstrated that egalitarian governance starts with gender fluidity. It logically follows that we need to queer gender to queer governance. That is, queering governance starts with queering society.

6. Conclusion

This study tested the relationship between gender fluidity and governance. I theorized that a fluid, non-hierarchical understanding of gender leads to egalitarian governance. Using the "most similar systems design," I compared an egalitarian Indigenous polity to a patriarchal colonial polity. My hypothesis was supported. Anishinaabeg understood gender as a spectrum, allowed individuals to choose their gender roles, and all genders had an influence in decision-making. Oppositely, New England colonies understood gender as binary and hierarchical, men and women had separate and unequally valued roles, and only men had an influence in decision-making. Changing the inegalitarian governance system in North America today requires a bottom-up approach that starts with dismantling our categorization of gender. This involves creating the best conditions possible for every individual to live out their gender identity freely and not be bound by categories. These categories lead to hierarchies. And those hierarchies lead to inegalitarian governance. I propose removing legal barriers to gender fluidity and eliminating categorization by gender in society.

A limitation of my study was the lack of Indigenous sources available on the early colonial period. Literature on Anishinaabeg was at times vague and contradictory, rendering it difficult to find out the precise roles each gender held in society as well as who participated in governance. Therefore, those conclusions are not as strong, but the evidence sufficed to deem the system of governance as egalitarian.

The greatest value this study has provided is pinpointing what we need to change to allow women and genderqueer people to fully participate in governance. Research surrounding gender in political science to-date mainly looks for gender equality for women, but doesn't address the root cause of this inequality nor include genderqueer people. Gender research in political science is also heavily focused on the political structures, rules, and processes. While it is important to address structural inequalities, the solutions don't lie solely within our political system. They lie in society. And the answers have always been there. Indigenous peoples of North America have embraced gender fluidity long before colonial settlers arrived. We should look to revive and center those Indigenous knowledges.

Future research can build on the bottom-up approach I provided. I encourage scholars to expand on the two avenues of change recommended and specifically focus on ways to remove gender categorization in society. This could be in the form of writing comprehensive guidelines for queering society. By chipping away at gender categories, we can move closer to the egalitarian society that once existed in North America.

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