

Ts'eko K'awo—Leading Through Change: Aboriginal female leadership in the Tłı̨chǫ region

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Jane Glassco Arctic Fellow



**TS'EKO K'AWO—LEADING THROUGH CHANGE:
ABORIGINAL FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE
TŁJCHQ REGION**

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Holly Mackenzie-Stringer is a Dene from the Tłıchǫ Nation of the North Slave region of the Northwest Territories. Holly is an Intergovernmental Relations Analyst with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations, Government of the Northwest Territories. She has extensive experience in the public and private sector, most recently with the Corporate and Community Affairs department within BHP Billiton Diamonds Canada Inc. Holly is completing her degree in business management and intends to complete her MBA.

Community

Holly has lived in Yellowknife, N.W.T. for most of her life and has spent a significant amount of her childhood in the Tłıchǫ community of Behchokǫ. She is the grandchild of Elizabeth Mackenzie, a revered Elder in the Tłıchǫ Nation and role model to women and her people as she strove to bring a balance between the skills learned at school and those learned on the land. Using these elements to be "strong like two people" many young Tłıchǫ women credit Ms. Mackenzie's example as the reason they are still actively pursuing an education, learning more about their native culture, and going on to professional careers. Holly knows that Yellowknife is a vibrant and caring community of diverse cultures that has undergone vast changes in the last 15 years due to the growth in the public service and the mining sector. She intends to make positive changes in regard to education and the advancement of Aboriginal female leaders in the North.

Fellowship focus

Holly will examine how to develop and nurture Aboriginal women in leadership roles and how to increase participation of women in all levels of decision making within Aboriginal governance. She will also examine the barriers that exist for young women in taking on leadership roles as chiefs and in elected positions of governance.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mentor, Shannon Cumming, for his guidance, encouragement and support along this long journey of learning and personal growth. Without his support and insight, this project would have not been possible. I would also like to thank my family for encouraging me and allowing me the time to complete my research and writing. This issue was not an easy one to take on and your support was paramount. I would also like to thank my other mentor, Bertha Rabesca-Zoe, for taking the time to share her personal stories with me. I thank you all – Mahsi Cho.

Introduction

Why have the efforts of groups working towards elimination of social injustice, racial barriers and gender exclusion, been slow to create systemic change? Despite the efforts of many committed Aboriginal organizations, such as the Native Women's Association (NWAC), Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and problem-specific government initiatives, such as the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group (AAWG) on Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls, we seem to have made little progress. In fact, in some cases, racial and gender marginalization in Aboriginal communities has maintained the status quo or shown little advancement for Aboriginal women.

This research was motivated by my personal experiences and observations of gender inequality in Aboriginal communities. I am a Tłjchq woman who was raised in the North and was exposed to my Dene culture through my mother and my grandparents. My life as a child encompassed learning traditional skills when I had the opportunity to spend time with my mother, grandparents and extended family in the community Behchokò in the Northwest Territories. My grandmother, Elizabeth Mackenzie, also influenced my thoughts on the subject of leadership. Although she is no longer with me, I wanted to devote my work to this subject as she was the voice for many women in the Tłjchq community on receiving an education and getting involved in your community, while challenging the conventional theory of leadership.

My paper focuses on exploring the application of alternative feminist theories and practices and their proposed effects on ameliorating social and racial barriers for Aboriginal women; in particular, I have chosen to examine Tłjchq women in leadership within my own community and people. In doing this research, I became particularly interested in leadership styles among Aboriginal women and how it tied to our connectedness to the land, community and long-standing cultural views on gender roles and responsibilities that are still held by our elders. My paper will also look at interviews with aboriginal female leaders that have unique perspectives on the history of leadership, and arrive at a few recommendations in the form of an implementation strategy aimed at increasing the number of Aboriginal women involved in all levels of decision making within Aboriginal governance in the Northwest Territories.

The Tłıchǵ

The Tłıchǵ people of the Northwest Territories are a Dene group with an extensive traditional territory that covers a circular area to the north of Great Slave Lake into what is now Nunavut in the northeast and almost to the shores of Great Bear Lake in the northwest. The Tłıchǵ Final Agreement is a land claims and self-government agreement that was signed in 2005. The Tłıchǵ Land Claims and Self-Government Act is the legislation approving the first comprehensive land claim and self-government agreement in the Northwest Territories and the second such agreement in Canada. After many years of extensive negotiations, the Tłıchǵ Final Agreement (TFA) gave the Tłıchǵ First Nation the power to govern their own affairs and the tools and resources needed to strengthen themselves financially through greater participation in regional and territorial economic initiatives. Furthermore, the agreement enhances the Tłıchǵ First Nation's ability to protect and promote their culture, heritage, educational curriculum, resources and lands. The area which is the subject of the Tłıchǵ Final Agreement is much smaller, stretching from the tip of the north arm of Great Slave Lake to encompass the four Tłıchǵ communities of Behchokǵ, Gamèti, Whatì and Wekweètì. In 1921, the Tłıchǵ, with other Dene groups of the Great Slave Lake and Mackenzie River area, signed Treaty 11. The Tłıchǵ are one of the largest Aboriginal populations in the Northwest Territories. The 2006 census indicates the Tłıchǵ population comprises about 3,000.

To date, the Tłıchǵ Assembly is made up of a Grand Chief elected by Tłıchǵ citizens, a chief from each of the four community governments representing the four aforementioned communities (Behchokǵ, Gamèti, Whatì and Wekweètì) and two representatives of each Tłıchǵ community sitting as councillors. The members are elected by the residents of the community. The Assembly sits a minimum of four times per year in one of the four communities on a rotational basis. The Tłıchǵ Assembly is the law-making body for the Tłıchǵ government. To date, there are numerous women employed throughout the organization in professional positions such as accountants, lawyers, or political advisors within the Tłıchǵ government; however, there has not yet been a woman chief elected to office. Although Tłıchǵ women have played a covert role in politics in the past by advising their husbands or relatives on political issues, this role has never been public,¹ because Tłıchǵ elders have stated that "women as elected leaders goes against our traditional law".² The role and importance of Aboriginal women in decision-making positions and contemporary political life has been changed dramatically by the impact of colonization and the liberalization of feminism.³

With the newly-formed Tłıchǵ government, and its visionary modern-day treaty, there is a lot of hope for change. The next generation of Tłıchǵ youth is emerging, and they have the opportunity to provide input

¹ Rabesca-Zoe. Personal communication (March 2011)

² Be'sha Blondin, Personal communication (Oct. 22, 2011)

³ Gabriel, E., *Aboriginal Women's Movement: A Quest for Self-Determination* (2011):183
www.ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/aps/1/1/gabriel.pdf.

into the current governance model to encompass gender equality principles that they feel define their own views.

Pre-European contact 1680-1850

Documented historical literature⁴ identified the Tłıchǫ people as a large group of Aboriginal people that lived in regional subdivisions in the asserted area of the Tłıchǫ Final Agreement. According to Helm, the Tłıchǫ had little to no contact with the Europeans until after 1850, and were regarded as a somewhat nomadic and “elusive tribe.” The creation of the Fort Rae settlement in 1852, and the entry of the first Roman Catholic missionary in the Tłıchǫ region in 1859, spurred a new way of life for the Tłıchǫ people as they were able to trade furs for basic supplies and tools. After 1859, the Tłıchǫ people came to know Fort Rae as the crucial trading point and meeting place for other Aboriginal groups such as the Yellowknives Dene and the Mountain Dene.

Helm’s article, *Bosses, Leaders, and Trading Chiefs among the Dogribs*, is a detailed European and Euro-Canadian account of Dene leadership, mainly in the 19th Century. The role of the “*donek’awi*” or “*trading chief or people’s trader*” carried the prime attribute of controlling the access to the most vital resources of the group or clan, which was the access to goods through trade from the Hudson Bay Company. According to Vital Thomas’s (a revered Tłıchǫ elder) account of the *donek’awi*:

“There couldn’t be any higher man; he was a great man. If strangers came, they asked for the denek’awi tent. They shook hands with him before anyone else, and he had to feed them all.”

Through oral history, I have recounted a story from my grandmother, Elizabeth Mackenzie.⁵ She told me that after returning from residential school, she was able to speak, read and write English. These literacy skills were considered quite valuable by her father and uncles as they were out on the land for extended periods and needed supplies from the Hudson Bay Company, but they did not have the literacy skills they needed to trade effectively. Elizabeth was asked to take the supply order for her large family, travel to the Hudson Bay Company trading post in Behchokǫ with her father and uncles, and speak on their behalf to ensure that they received what was needed. It is through these educational skills and courage that Elizabeth became a female version of the *donek’awi*, and in turn, created a marked shift in how education and literacy can advance a person, especially a woman, into someone who has skills that are highly regarded and desirable.

⁴ Helm, J., *The People of Denendeh: Ethnohistory of the Indians of Canada’s Northwest Territory*. Toronto, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press (2000):293

⁵ Elizabeth Mackenzie, Personal communication (2002)

A history of patriarchy

Patriarchy can be defined as a “societal phenomenon marked by the domination of certain men over other men, all women and children. A system of ruling where power is exercised as domination over others and stems from the historical emergence of the oppression of women.”⁶ Mackay argues that in a patriarchal society, men are believed to be superior to women and “whiteness” is believed to be superior to all other races; Aboriginal women become double-marginalized.⁷

There are varied perspectives on what role women played pre-colonization, however, it is generally accepted that pre-colonized Canadian Aboriginal communities were essentially egalitarian.⁸ Further, advocates for the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) agree that prior to colonization many First Nations cultures were distinctly matrilineal and matriarchal with respect to governance and citizenship issues. Post-colonization, however, Aboriginal communities experienced a marked shift in their structure and social relations, attributable primarily to the patriarchal nature of colonialism.⁹

More specifically, MacKay believes the “effects of patriarchy introduced through colonization means that men are held to be superior to women within the same social classes and race.”¹⁰ As a result, because Aboriginal women are observed to represent the lowest rung within the social hierarchy, not only have they become subordinated to Aboriginal men, they have in fact become subordinated to all men.

Patriarchy was an integral component of colonization and became deeply entrenched at this time. With the present-day identity of Aboriginal women rooted in this history, the belief that Aboriginal women are inferior continues. MacKay argues Aboriginal women will continue to be marginalized by society and the effort to liberate themselves will be difficult,¹¹ in part because it is hard to unlearn,¹² a system that has been in place for so long.

Again, through oral history, Elizabeth Mackenzie taught me most of what I know today about what it means to be “traditional”, and she described to me that Tłıchǵ women definitely had a subordinate role, but were also the backbone of their men, and worked as a team, which is more nuanced than my literature research suggests. This “teamwork” succeeded, as they were still quite nomadic at the time. However, the changes since my grandmother’s time have been substantial, as women are now fully participating in the workforce but they are still expected to take care of the children and maintain the household.

⁶ Li, P. & Bolaria, B.S. (1994). *Essentials of contemporary sociology*. Mississauga, Ontario: Copp Clark Longman Ltd.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sayers, J., MacDonald, A., *First Nations Women, Governance and the Indian Act: A Collection of Policy Research Reports*. Ottawa, ON: National Library of Canada (2001):10

⁹ Mackay, M.C., Monture, P. (Eds.) *Canadian Women Studies*. Toronto, ON: Inanna Publications (2008):82

¹⁰ Mackay, M.C., Monture, P. (Eds.) *Canadian Women Studies*. Toronto, ON: Inanna Publications (2008):57

¹¹ Mackay, M.C., Monture, P. (Eds.) *Canadian Women Studies*. Toronto, ON: Inanna Publications (2008):66

¹² Mackay, M.C., Monture, P. (Eds.) *Canadian Women Studies*. Toronto, ON: Inanna Publications (2008):27

There is a popular statement that is used frequently in the Tłıchǵ Nation, and Elizabeth Mackenzie further developed the phrase of “being strong like two people,” which sought to describe the challenges and rewards of balancing the skills learned at school and those learned on the land. Using these elements to be “strong like two people,” many young women credit Ms. Mackenzie's example as the reason they are still actively pursuing an education, learning more about their Aboriginal culture, and going on to professional careers. However, upon further thought, balancing all the elements of being a mother, maintaining a household and a career have caused me to reflect and think differently on the words of “being strong like two people,” as not only do women have to encompass the role of provider, but also the role of mother.

These women had to adjust to non-traditional work roles, such as upper level management, high credential positions, and heavy equipment operators. This shift in non-traditional work roles has been most evident in the last 10 years, when the newly opened diamond mines in the Northwest Territories spurred much needed employment. Three of these mines have negotiated Impact Benefit Agreements with the Tłıchǵ government, which has transformed the life of the communities and employed a large number of Tłıchǵ men and women.¹³

¹³ Government of the Northwest Territories, *Communities and Diamonds: Socio-economic Impacts in the Communities of Behchokö, Gamètì, Whatì, Wekweètì, Detah, N'dilo, Lutselk'e, and Yellowknife 2008 Annual Report of the Government of the Northwest Territories Under the BHP Billiton, Diavik and De Beers Socio-economic Agreements (2008)*

The role of the Indian Act

In addition to the challenges presented by patriarchy, Aboriginal women are also challenged by historic and current legislation in relation to Aboriginal people. Enacted in 1876, the Indian Act is a Canadian statute related to registered Indians, their bands, and the Indian reserve system. The Act defines who is considered “Indian” and provides them with certain legal rights and limitations. Gabriel argues the Act is a colonial instrument of genocide with the insidious goal to undermine and eliminate the role and authority of Aboriginal women within their own society.¹⁴ Since 1876 there have been more than 20 amendments to the original Indian Act, the majority of which came as a result of the work done by Aboriginal women’s groups. Specifically related to the topic discussed in this paper is Bill C-31.

Passed by Canadian Parliament in 1985, Bill C-31 ended discriminatory provisions of the Act against Aboriginal women; it allowed Aboriginal women the right to keep or regain their status even after “marrying-out.” However, the amendment failed to provide equal status to the children of Aboriginal women as it did for the children of Aboriginal men who married non-native women. Additionally, the amendment also did not provide Aboriginal women membership into the communities they were born and raised.¹⁵ Despite this, amendments made to the Indian Act in 1985 are viewed as a major achievement won by Aboriginal women. However, there continues to be concerns related to the equal status of Aboriginal women under the Act. Such concerns relate to “residual sex discrimination in the Indian status entitlement provisions, access to band membership, participation in self-government or governance measures, such as the development of band membership codes, access to programs and resources controlled by band council governments on reserve and division of matrimonial real property on reserve.”¹⁶

Advocates for Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) view the Indian Act as a central source of women’s oppression in a governance context. Furthering this argument, Teresa Nahanee, a legal advocate for the NWAC states:¹⁷

¹⁴ Government of the Northwest Territories, *Communities and Diamonds: Socio-economic Impacts in the Communities of Behchokö, Gamètì, Whatì, Wekweètì, Detah, N'dilo, Lutselk'e, and Yellowknife 2008 Annual Report of the Government of the Northwest Territories Under the BHP Billiton, Diavik and De Beers Socio-economic Agreements (2008):183*

¹⁵ Gabriel, E., *Aboriginal Women’s Movement: A Quest for Self-Determination (2011):184*
www.ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/aps/1/1/gabriel.pdf.

¹⁶ Wendy Cornet, “First Nations Governance, the Indian Act and Women’s Equality Rights” in *First Nations Women, Governance and the Indian Act: A Collection of Policy Research Reports* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, November 2001)

¹⁷ Ibid.

It is under Indian Act governments that Aboriginal women have been suppressed. That oppression of Indian women's rights, in particular, comes not from the Indian communities themselves, but from the imposition of the federal machinery of government. It is mainly the white state that has imposed its laws upon the Indian community and forced Indian women to leave their communities. It is the Indian Act that has resulted in mainly men being elected to Indian Act Chiefs and Councils. It is mainly the Indian Act that has ensured that property on reserves is held by men and not by women. Clearly the Indian Act, as a law of the federal government is subject to the Charter, is discriminatory against Indian women and requires changes through legislation or litigation.¹⁸

Cornet notes a strong consensus of thought that Aboriginal women have been discriminated “through and under Indian Act governance structure.”¹⁹ Further, she argues that the issue lies as much with “the system of Indian status entitlement and band membership, as it does with divisions made by band councils and chiefs using these concepts.”²⁰ Therefore, any strategy to ensure equal status of Aboriginal women under the Indian Act must require an extensive review of the issues arising from Indian status and the band membership system.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Indigenous feminism

Marilyn Frye has described feminism as a theory that seeks to “describe and explain women’s situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them”, and is based on “respect for women’s own perspectives and authority.”²² Additionally, Joyce Green has described feminism as “an ideology based on a political analysis that takes women’s experiences seriously, and it is played out politically by women’s groups that generally have characteristic processes of organization and action.” But what is Aboriginal feminism and how is it being taken into consideration in today’s world? One thing is certain: currently, there is little material written about indigenous feminism by indigenous or non-indigenous women alike, and feminism is and has always been controversial, and never widely popular.²³ Aboriginal feminism is considered by some as invalid or a “white man’s theory”, and that being an Aboriginal feminist is “untraditional.”²⁴ However, it is important to understand that feminism is constantly evolving and our responses to these changes derive from the current political and social issues of our time with a goal to assert rights and equality. It is these Aboriginal women who disregard the feminist view by advocating that it is a “liberal political agenda”²⁵ and do not consider feminism as a legitimate movement against the marginalization of women.

The reluctance of some Aboriginal people to embrace feminism is not clear, however, evidence suggests that because feminism is perceived as a white woman’s movement, it does not apply to Aboriginal people. For example, Aboriginal scholar, Grace Ouelette believes that feminism is not applicable to Aboriginal women because she sees Aboriginal men and women operating in a “traditional cultural paradigm” where gender roles are complementary. However, it is argued that feminism does not have criteria about which ethnicities can embrace it, and that the underlying principle to feminism is a resistance to male control and dominance, which creates oppression and marginalization of women.

Some views on feminism believe that since Aboriginal people are affected by colonization, and patriarchy was established while assimilation was occurring, that gender inequality has become a social norm. My research has revealed that a feminist standpoint offers Aboriginal Peoples empowerment that can show both men and women how their oppression was actualized using patriarchal practices.

²² Frye, M., *Feminism: Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*. New York, NY: Routledge (2000):195

²³ Freedman, E., *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books (2002)

²⁴ Joyce Green, “Making Space for Aboriginal Feminism” London, UK: Zed Books (2007)

²⁵ Ibid.

Traditional leadership

Through each person's insight on Aboriginal women in leadership, I have encountered a common theme: You need to know yourself and your culture in order to succeed. This statement was most thoroughly expressed by my grandmother, Elizabeth Mackenzie. Elizabeth constantly challenged the assumption that education and leadership in her community had to go hand-in-hand, because in that time "Tłjchq women couldn't put their feet in that area."²⁶ Long-standing traditional roles are still practiced today, although there is a shift towards a more balanced approach to gender roles, however, this could be a slow progression that will take time to evolve.

Political involvement of women had to be accompanied by legislative changes that allowed the involvement of women in band politics through the amendments of Chapter 29 of the Indian Act in 1951.²⁷ Since then, there has been a substantial overall increase in Aboriginal women in Canada who have decided to take on a leadership and decision-making role for their community.

In contrast, Elizabeth Mackenzie's experience was a different story. Through encouragement from community members and family, Elizabeth was offered a chance to run for chief in the early 1970s for the community of Behchokò. She decided not to run because she knew in her heart that her people were not ready for a female chief, and that the hardship placed on her and her family might undermine her efforts to effectively focus on addressing community needs. This shows that while the world continues to change for Aboriginal Canadians, Aboriginal women continue to struggle with sexism, racism, self-doubt, maintaining a work-life balance, sustaining family relations and friendships, while at the same time caring for themselves.²⁸ Essentially, they continue to face the same challenges as Aboriginal women did 50 years ago.

The art of blending traditional Tłjchq culture and modern politics is no easy feat and is evidenced by the slow progress of Tłjchq women that serve as councillors or chiefs. In the June 2005 leadership election for the chief of Behchokò, the Tłjchq electorate voted in 27 male councillor positions out of a possible 28 seats and saw all four chieftainships go to males.²⁹ Madeliane Chocolate, who finished second in the balloting for chief of Gamètì, said the election was a "step backwards" for gender equality in Tłjchq politics. Chocolate further states that "Tłjchq women have traditionally played second fiddle on the political scene, something that often causes their concerns to be overshadowed."³⁰

²⁶ Elizabeth Mackenzie, Personal communication (Sept. 23, 1996)

²⁷ Voyageur, C., *Firekeepers of the Twenty-First Century: First Nations Women Chiefs*. Toronto, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press (2008):11

²⁸ Voyageur, C., *Firekeepers of the Twenty-First Century: First Nations Women Chiefs*. Toronto, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press (2008):130

²⁹ Raven, Andrews, Tłjchq's Next Steps. *Northern News Services* (June 27, 2005) Retrieved from http://www.nnsi.com/frames/newspapers/2005-06/jun27_05el.html

³⁰ Ibid.

Recommendations

My research and findings over the past year have taught me a lot about the struggles faced by Aboriginal women. In order to increase the number of Aboriginal women in decision-making roles within governance structures, encourage women to run for elected office, and develop leadership skills, I recommend the following approaches:

1. An implementation plan to ensure full and equal participation of First Nations women in governance (both Indian Act and self-government structures) could be achieved through provisions of the Tłıchǫ Final Agreement and the applicability and implementation of the *Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA)*. However, my research suggests a more pragmatic approach focusing on community-based initiatives is likely to have more success in creating conditions for social change in the Tłıchǫ communities.
2. At the community level, Aboriginal governance structures can ensure Aboriginal women are full and equal partners as leaders by viewing them in relation to men, rather than in isolation. The Culturally Relevant Gender Application (CRGAP) “recognizes the need for gender-based analysis that encompasses the interconnected relationship between culture and gender.”³¹ The CRGAP is intended to achieve three desired outcomes: equity in participation, balanced communication, and equality in results.

In order for Aboriginal women to implement skills learned through formal and informal education, employment, and their home lives, the CRGAP advises that Aboriginal women would benefit from funding parity. The CRGAP defines the funding parity as the requirement to compensate Aboriginal women for childcare, transportation, food, and compensation for time away from work. CRGAP argues that without this, Aboriginal women will continue to disengage in economic development initiatives, political decision-making processes, leadership activities, and the “political economy of everyday life”. To effectively reach out to these women, a variety of methods should be considered, such as training workshops that are provided in locations where these Aboriginal women live, work and raise their families.³²

According to the CRGAP model, balanced communication considers these four elements: what is being communicated; who is communicating it; to whom it is being communicated; and from whose perspective it is being communicated.

Allowing Aboriginal women the opportunity to become the drivers of information regarding their unique needs, circumstances and realities is an effective tool in removing the historical imbalances in communications. Furthermore, “communicating information accurately will create more

³¹ “Culturally relevant Gender Balanced Application Protocol (CR -GAP)” <http://www.nwac.ca/sites/default/files/imce/CR-GAP%20Context%20AUG2010.pdf>

³² Ibid.

appropriate responses by society, and reduce apathy to the often alarming realities surrounding Aboriginal women's lives."³³

By achieving "equity in participation" and "balanced communication", the role of Aboriginal women becomes central. Similarly, "equality in results" builds accountability and strong governance with Aboriginal women's roles defined and central. "Equal outcomes can be achieved through translation of knowledge; new evidence-based knowledge over time will bring about desired shifts in societal attitude."³⁴ Moreover, ensuring there is a place for Aboriginal women's roles within governance and decision-making structures, while at the same time valuing their unique perspectives, will increase the possibility of achieving equal outcomes.³⁵

3. The Canadian Research Institute for the advancement of Women (CRIAW) provides tools and research to organizations taking action to advance social justice and equality for all women. In 2006, its vision was Intersectional Feminist Frameworks (IFF), which focuses on alternative approaches to women's societal and economic equality.

Recognizing gender-based analysis has raised awareness about women's inequality relative to men. CRIAW argues a "gender-only" lens that primarily looks at differential gender impacts or discrimination between women and men, fails to account for the complexity of women's lives."³⁶ Therefore, IFFs consider how other factors, including socio-economic status, race, gender, sexualities, ability, location, and aboriginality "combine with broader historical and current systems of discrimination such as colonialism and globalization to simultaneously determine inequalities among individuals and groups."³⁷

At the community level, implementing IFFs allow Aboriginal women to become more effective leaders and recognize how systems of dominance, patriarchy, and colonialism reinforce each other to maintain power over the dispossessed and marginalized. Therefore, successful strategies must be "fluid" and representative of the diverse and complex legacies of dominant ideologies, while implementing social change from multiple entry points."³⁸

4. The use of a program such as Equal Voice could act as a catalyst for young women seeking elected positions in their community. Equal Voice is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that aims at getting more women elected to every level of government in Canada. Its mission is "to promote the election of more women to all levels of Government and ultimately, change the face of Canadian politics." Equal Voice also launched an online campaign school called "Getting to the Gate", which is

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Intersectional Feminist Framework (IFF)"

http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/Intersectional%20Feminist%20Frameworks_CRIAW_e.pdf

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

a guide to the requirements and demands of running for public office from the Band Office to the Prime Minister's Office. "Getting to the Gate" is an online learning tool that teaches First Nation women public relations skills, determines their platform, sponsorship/budget skills, and effective campaign strategies. This program is user-friendly and would be more effective if the conference travelled to Canadian cities to reach out to young women across Canada. It may have the most impact on reserves or smaller communities.

5. Learned leadership through mentorship: It has been said that a good strong leader can be identified by the following attributes: "Their people skills, belief in lifelong learning, demonstrated community involvement, willingness and ability to lead by example, a vision, worthy values, skill as a communicator, and the ability to think outside the box."³⁹ To lead by example is the greatest influence a person can have on the younger generation. This is even more relevant if the person is an Aboriginal woman juggling a career, a husband, and children, while still providing a loving and nurturing home. An individual can be taught leadership skills by having exposure to mentors and role models from the community who take their knowledge and expertise and share it with others.⁴⁰ There is a lot of evidence that the youth of today are ready to engage with leaders and want the opportunity to participate and be a part of decision making. All too often, the younger generations are overlooked, and opportunities are missed for them to attend regional leadership meetings and partake in treaty and self-government negotiations.⁴¹

An effective mentorship program that monitors and gauges success would be best implemented as a mentorship model in the communities. Additionally, a formal written agreement between the mentor and mentee might further solidify the commitment and length of term. I have had ample feedback from other mentors and mentored youth that indicates both parties would mutually benefit from a program that includes leadership workshops, roundtables, and strengthening communication.

³⁹ Anderson, K., Doyle-Bedwell, P., Hartley, E., Jacobs, B., Leclair, C., Lindberg, T., Maracle, S., Barman, J., Huhndorf, S., Perreault, J. & Suzack, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Leading in an Upside-Down World: New Canadian Perspectives on Leadership*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Shield Communications Corporation.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Government of the Northwest Territories, *Creating Our Future Together: In Search of a Common Vision for the Northwest Territories* (2010) Retrieved from www.creatingourfuture.ca

Conclusion

It has been my observation that in the Tłıchǫ region, women are more educated and involved in many community leadership positions; however, the political and business leadership is still dominated by men. My research suggests that many modern day Aboriginal societies are still heavily influenced by patriarchal hierarchies. Gabriel states that “As women of our nations, our obligation to present and future generations is fundamental to the success of our self-determination. However, Indigenous feminists know that decolonization will only succeed if Indigenous men work alongside of us.”⁴²

My last 12 months of research has taught me a lot about the struggles faced by Aboriginal women. Thanks to the work of past and present Aboriginal women leaders, I am encouraged knowing there will be many great women in leadership roles to come. I hope that there will be a turning of age with the new generation of youth, who are poised to take on the conventional ideological theory of leadership.

⁴² Gabriel, E., *Aboriginal Women’s Movement: A Quest for Self-Determination* (2011):186
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