

New Exhibit: Gender Studies Isn't New

Wednesday, September 20, 2023 by Danielle Robichaud

On June 28, 2023 a Waterloo professor and two students were injured in a hate motivated attack during a class examining gender. The attack occurred in a climate of increasingly aggressive rhetoric in the public arena rooted in bias against transgender and gender non-conforming communities. This wasn't the first-time gender-motivated violence occurred on a Canadian campus: In 1989, fourteen women were killed in an engineering class at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in an anti-feminist shooting.

Gender-based attacks often coincide with moral panics about societal change. The visibility of transgender and gender non-conforming communities has recently led to hostility against public libraries for hosting drag story-time and the banning of books that center LGBTQ2+ characters and experiences. Over time, similar punitive actions have been launched in response to campaigns to advance the vote for women, desegregation in schools and public spaces, same-sex marriage, and Land Back activism. The sentiment behind these responses is often tied to the belief that something perceived as new or different is a threat when it has, instead, always been present but talked about in different or less immediately visible ways.

Opened in 1976, one of Special Collections & Archive's foundational collections was the Lady Aberdeen Library on the History of Women. Since that time, the department has actively collected and maintained items related to women, gender, and sexuality. Drawing on those holdings, the exhibit **Gender Studies Isn't New** features archival records that reflect the persistence of gender-based study, research, and activities over time. New and longer-term acquisitions are featured as a way of disrupting the notion that the questioning and examination of gender in our daily lives is a new or unique phenomenon.

Gender Studies at Waterloo

A common misconception about gender and related studies, and the ways they are currently discussed in the media, by government officials, and by those pushing forward anti-trans and gender non-conforming narratives, is that these discussions are new. In actuality, teaching, learning, and research related to what is today called Gender Studies is both long-standing and an

area in which Waterloo has played a defining role in the development of related scholarship in Canada.

One way to understand the study of gender at Waterloo over time is to draw on archival records and collections related to the history of the University such as [undergraduate course calendars](#) and other administrative records held by Special Collections & Archives and in the University of Waterloo Archives. Doing so provides concrete evidence about how gender and related topics have been discussed and taught over time as more precise and nuanced language has been established.

The following timeline has been created to better document some of the important shifts in the study of gender at Waterloo over time.

Milestones related to gender studies at Waterloo over time

Year(s) Event

1967	Donation of Lady Aberdeen Memorial Library to the University of Waterloo's Arts Library from the National Council of Women of Canada.
1971	Women's Studies courses first offered by the Department of Sociology.[1]
1972	Introduction of the multi-disciplinary Women's Studies concentration for undergraduate students[2] and the launch of <i>The Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women</i> to facilitate contact between people doing research about women.
1976	Special Collections & Archives opens with the Lady Aberdeen library as the foundation for the department's Women's Studies holdings. Course calendar promotes Women's Studies at Waterloo as "the strongest combination of offerings on women or sex roles at any University in Ontario and probably in Canada." [3]
1970s-1980s	Language around gender begins to move beyond 'male' and 'female' with 'sex roles' first appearing in course descriptions in 1974. 'Gender' followed in 1982, eventually being used in the title for the 1984 psychology course, <i>Scientific Perspectives on Gender and Sex</i> . [4]

Milestones related to gender studies at Waterloo over time

Year(s) Event

- 1986 SOC 206 Gender Roles is first offered looking at “male role change, media images of men and women and men’s and women’s liberation.”[5]
- 1989 Studies in Sexuality, Marriage and Family is introduced at the University of St. Jerome’s College aimed at “anyone with questions about sexuality, marriage, and the family [...] whose anticipated career or current work situation requires a sound understanding of these important aspects of the human condition”.[6]
- 1993 With dedicated gender related courses in the departments of sociology, geography, history, and English already in place, the Philosophy of Women and Men is introduced by the Department of Philosophy,[7] followed by Gender Issues in 1995.[8]
- 2019 Gender and Social Justice is introduced as a successor to Women’s Studies at Waterloo consisting of cross-disciplinary courses that “seek to cultivate awareness of the experiences of people marginalized by such features as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disability, and class.”[9]

[1] [University of Waterloo 1971-1972 Academic Calendar](#), p. 463

[2] [University of Waterloo 1972-1973 Academic Calendar](#), p. 558

[3] [University of Waterloo 1976-1977 Academic Calendar](#), p. 413

[4] [University of Waterloo 1984-1985 Academic Calendar](#), p. 16:132

[5] [University of Waterloo 1985-1986](#), p. 16.152

[6] [University of Waterloo 1988-1989 Academic Calendar](#), p. 15:15

[7] [University of Waterloo 1993-1994 Academic Calendar](#), p. 16:107

[8] [Philosophy Course Descriptions 1995-1996](#)

[9] [About Gender and Social Justice](#)

Development of Special Collections & Archives



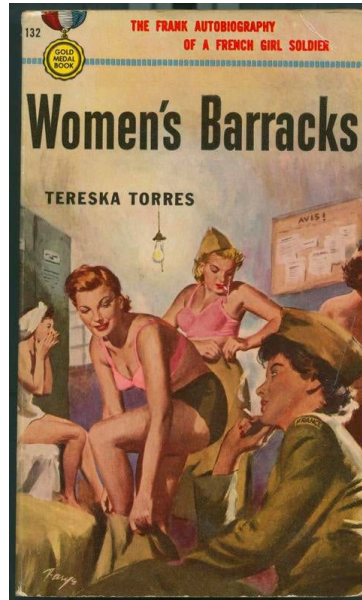
In July 1967, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) formally donated the Lady Aberdeen Memorial Library to the University of Waterloo's Arts Library. The donation followed several years of correspondence between Doris Lewis (1911-1985), Waterloo's first University Librarian, and Canadian journalist Elizabeth Long, chairperson of the NCWC's Arts and Letters Committee that was responsible for founding and growing the library, in addition to collecting the archives of women from across Canada and abroad.

Known today as the Lady Aberdeen Collection, the library and related archives was named in honour of the NCWC's first president, Ishbel Maria Marjoribanks Hamilton-Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair (1857-1939) on the 100th anniversary of her birth, in commemoration of the contributions she made to the lives of women. In addition to the founding of the NCWC, a non-partisan federation of women's organizations aimed at social reform and suffrage, she was the first patron of the Women's Art Association of Canada and played a central role in establishing the Victorian Order of Nurses, which trained and financially compensated women for services provided in rural and disadvantaged communities.

The donation of the Lady Aberdeen Collection marked a milestone in gender studies at Waterloo, which already had a growing number of courses, faculty and resources focused on the study of women. It is one of Waterloo's foundational primary research collections, influencing the establishment of what is today Special Collections & Archives in 1976. Doris Lewis, after whom the department's reading room is named, was captured by the

Kitchener-Waterloo Record, unpacking the collection boxes, which began arriving in 1966, on October 27 of that year.

Pulp fiction collections



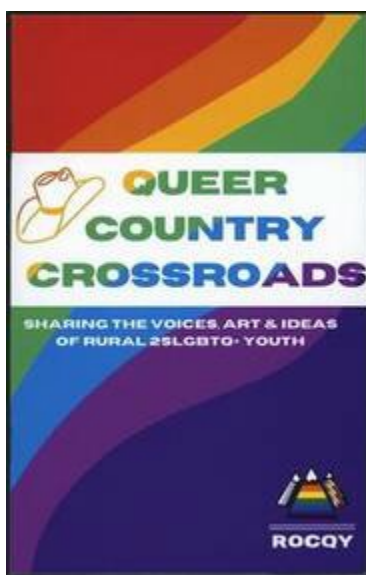
The first gay pulp fiction titles appeared on shelves in the 1940s. They were often cheap reprints of mainstream fiction that featured gay male themes, such as Gore Vidal's 1946 novel *The City and the Pillar*. The book is recognized as the first post-World War II novel whose gay protagonist is sympathetically portrayed rather than someone who is ostracized or killed off at the end of the story for defying social norms.[10]

Another important pulp publication was the 1950 novel *Women's Barracks: The Frank Autobiography of a French Girl Soldier*, by Tereska Torrès, which was the first to feature a lesbian relationship. A seminal release in lesbian fiction, more than 2,000,000 copies were sold in the first 5 years of publication and the original Baryè Phillips cover art is considered a classic lesbian pulp fiction image.[11] The novel offers a fictionalized account of Torrès' experiences living in England with four other female members of the Corps des Volontaires françaises within the Free French Forces and working in Charles de Gaulle's London headquarters. She wrote the book as "a serious-minded account of wartime situations" and an exploration of "the way in which conventional mores break down during conflict".[12] Heavy backlash resulted in the banning of the book in Canada and various American states and prompted the formation of the House Select Committee

on Current Pornographic Materials by the United States House of Representatives to address its "moral degeneracy".[12]

Inexpensive to produce and buy, these pulp fiction titles commonly reflected the experiences of underrepresented and systemically marginalized groups, like those who deviated from gender and sexual norms. Today, Special Collections & Archives maintains a range of pulp titles and formats that include those acquired as part of the [Black Experience Collection](#), the [Lesbian Literature Collection](#), and the [bpNichol Library of Science Fiction](#).

Zines and periodicals



As discussions about gender have evolved over time, periodicals and zines focused on and produced by equity seeking communities have captured important perspectives about the lives and experiences of those pushing for gender-based equity, inclusion, and visibility. These types of publications play a central role in supporting teaching, learning and research on and off-campus, by offering first-hand accounts and ideas that aren't always captured in traditional media or instructional materials. Holdings such as the [British Women's Periodicals Collection](#), which includes titles spanning from 1893 to 1977, along with more recent acquisitions from smaller independent publishers, like [Queer Country Crossroads: Sharing the Voices, Art & Ideas of Rural 2SLGBTQ+ Youth](#), offer first-hand accounts about lives and experiences that are critical to studying, understanding, and drawing conclusions about gender.

[10] [The City and the Pillar](#) - Wikipedia

[11] Smallwood, Christine. "[Sapphic soldiers](#)". *Salon*. September 1, 2008.

[12] "[Tereska Torrès](#)". *The Telegraph*. September 25, 2012.

Waterloo related holdings

Records related to the history of Waterloo come in many forms, including student publications, event posters, and records created by student-led organizations and advocacy efforts. A selection of these types of holdings have been included in the exhibit as evidence that teaching, learning, and research about gender at Waterloo, almost always occurs as reflection of, and a response to, broader discussions about gender happening in the world on- and off-campus.

The Glow Centre

Founded in 1971 as Waterloo University's Gay Liberation Movement, the Glow Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity (Glow) is the oldest continually-running university-based 2SLGBTQ+ group in Canada. Run entirely by student volunteers, Glow promotes a healthy attitude towards all sexual orientations and gender identities at Waterloo by providing a wide variety of peer support, social events, advocacy work, and resources.[13]

Members of what is today called Glow, those affiliated with the queer community in Kitchener-Waterloo, have produced various publications and newsletters that document gender-related advocacy in the region over time. Several of these titles, like [GLOW News](#), are held by Special Collections & Archives and the University of Waterloo Archives, however Glow predates both organizations meaning that holdings are incomplete! Those seeking a more thorough collection of records related to local 2SLGBTQ+ history are encouraged to start by familiarizing themselves with the [Grand River Rainbow Historical Project](#).

Beyond publications, Glow records were donated to the archives in 2016 and descriptions are available as part of the [Glow Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity fonds finding aid](#).

Operation Socrates Handbook



The *Operation Socrates Handbook* was published in 1973 by Dennis Findlay, Nancy Hills, Ana MacNeil, Peter McDonald, Margaret Murray, Ed Phillips, and Bob Williams, students and community members affiliated with Waterloo University's Gay Liberation Movement (WUGLM).

Funded by a federal Opportunities for Youth grant, the handbook aimed to “answer some basic questions and explore various viewpoints which affect a large part of the human spectrum of sexuality”.[14] It was intended for distribution to heads of school counselling services and the boards of education for Canadian schools. Discussions about the treatment of homosexuality within society were included along with interviews, advice on coming out to family and friends, suggested reading lists, and contact information for gay-friendly resource centers across the country.

Demand for the 4,000 copies of the handbook was high with letters from various agencies and individuals arriving at WUGLM offices expressing thanks for making the resource available. Letters to the editor of the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* were less enthusiastic. While some, like Larry Himmelman of Waterloo, lauded the handbook and questioned why school officials were “trying to pretend sex doesn’t exist”,[15] others were angry about its distribution, decrying the use of taxpayer dollars to fund the project. Gary McMillan of Waterloo called the handbook a “perverted product”,[16] drawing on Bible quotes to underscore his views. Eventually drawing nation-wide attention, Liberal Senator Raymond Perault called for an

examination into government financing to understand how the project was approved in the first place.

In a response to critics, Margaret Murray wrote her own letter to the editor pushing back on the suggestion the handbook was being forced on anyone: "It is not a sexual manual with picture illustrations. All photos are of individuals doing every-day-type things. It is a booklet verbalizing many facts about homosexuality which are very seldom voiced. It is an attempt to destroy some of the myths." [17]

A July 1973 editorial in WUGLM's Gemini II was more direct in its response than Murray: "Sensationalized journalism has distorted the real purpose of informing people about homosexuality into a plot to use taxpayers' money (homosexuals also pay taxes) to convert "thousands" into homosexuals. It is incredibly difficult to believe that people could think the mere discussion of homosexuality will have such a catastrophic effect." [18]

Fifty years on, the handbook remains relevant to modern discourse about gender and sexuality, and the social responses to both, and is recognized by the Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada project as "one of the first education-information publications of the Canadian gay movement." [19]

Radio Waterloo CKMS-FM

Radio Waterloo CKMS-FM, Waterloo's former student-run radio station, published a monthly guide variously named *Radio Waterloo Programme Guide*, *FM Guide* and *FM Times*. Each issue featured articles, concert and event listings, interviews, and a schedule of community-driven programming including shows like *Womyn's Music*, *Gay News and Views*, *Leaping Lesbians* and *Native Hour*. Issues of the program guides are browsable online as part of the [Radio Waterloo CKMS-FM collection](#) on the Waterloo Digital Library.

[13] [Glow Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity](#)

[14] *Operation Socrates Handbook*, p. 4

[15] Himmelman, Larry. "Letters: Handbook on homosexuality lauded". *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, November 24, 1973, p. 6.

[16] McMillan, Gary. "Letters: Quest of good taste". *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, November 22, 1973, p. 6.

[17] Murray, Margaret. "Letters: That handbook clarified". *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, November 29, 1973, p. 6.

[18] "Editorial". *Gemini II*, [vol.1, no.5](#), July 1973, p.2.

[19] "[Summer Waterloo, Ont. Operation Socrates](#)". Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada

Publications by Waterloo faculty

Along with teaching and research supports, the archives and collections maintained by the University of Waterloo Library, include publications produced by Waterloo faculty. Two examples included in the exhibit are publications that played an important role in advancing scholarship and instruction related to gender studies and positioning Waterloo as a leading contributor to the field.

Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women

In the inaugural issue of the [Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women](#), the editors – [Margaret Eichler](#) (Waterloo, Department of Sociology) and Marylee Stephenson (Windsor, Department of Sociology) – noted "a greater than anticipated"[19] response to a letter of solicitation about a way to communicate with people doing research on women. The "exchange of ideas on courses about sex-roles or women"[19] was identified as an area of particular interest, resulting in dedicated space for syllabi of courses being taught or developed at Canadian universities. The syllabus for Eichler's course SOC. 215, Section I - Sociology of Women, which launched in the Fall of 1971, was among the first to be shared,[20] along with the Section II syllabus for Sociology of Sex Roles and Sexism, taught by Linda Fischer.[21]

Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men

Published in 1993, the edited collection of essays [Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men](#), grew out of [Anne Minas'](#) Waterloo course Philosophy of Women and Men (first offered in 1976 as Philosophy of Women and Men, and as Gender Issues beginning in 1995).[22] Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Peggy McIntosh were among the authors featured in the text, which covered topics such as oppression, ageism, disability, and race and featured feminist and non-feminist points of view.[23][24][25]

Popular and widely used as an introductory text that offered students perspectives from a variety of authors and 'both sides' of an issue, *Gender Basics* was reprinted in 2000. Minas used the revised introduction to address the inclusion of "as many points of view as space allowed", which included the writing of non-academic authors alongside established scholars, explaining: "Mainstream writers have no monopoly on good insights and argumentation." [26]

[19] "Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women". (1972). *Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women*, 1(1), p.1.

[20] "University of Waterloo Department of Sociology: Soc. 215, Section I – Sociology of Women". (1972). *Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women*, 1(1), pp.28-29.

[21] "Linda Fischer (Sociology). Soc. 215-216 Section 2". (1972). *Canadian Newsletter of Research on Women*, 1(1), p.33.

[22] Minas, Anne. (1993) *Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men*.

[23] Damico, Linda H. (1994). "Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men. Anne Minas Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993, xiv 545 pp." *Canadian Philosophical Reviews*, 14(3), pp. 193-195.

[24] Kimball, Meredith. (1995). "Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men. Anne Minas Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993, xiv 545 pp." *Gender Watch*, 24(1/2), pp. 59-60.

[25] Superson, Anita M. (1993). "Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men. Anne Minas Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993, xiv 545 pp." *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, 35(2), pp. 412-416.

[26] Minas, Anne. (2000) *Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men*.