# "The Forgotten People:" Analyzing the Invisible, Intersectional Discrimination Against Métis Women

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## Abstract

The Métis is a group of indigenous peoples in Canada. Having experienced centuries of injustices, beginning with colonialism dating back to the 16th century, culminating with military defeats in the 1800s and the establishment of residential schools, and continuing with structural injustices in the 21st century, Métis people have long been, and continue to be marginalized and made invisible in the Canadian society. In particular, Métis women born between 1997 and 2012 face intersectional discrimination based on not only race, but also a multitude of identity factors, including gender, age, geographical location, health, sexual orientation, and lateral violence from First Nations peoples. This paper uncovers the multilayered oppression against young Métis women through a literature review and uses several theories to analyze the invisibility of this discrimination in society, including color-blind racism, collective shame, lack of understanding of intersectionality, and Mauvaise foi (bad faith). To address the invisible, intersectional discrimination against young Métis women, several suggestions and possibilities could be considered. These include amending the education system, fostering group affiliation, bringing structural changes to federal policies and funding system, and cooperating with other indigenous nations such as First Nations and Inuit.

## Introduction

"Aboriginal peoples of Canada" is a collective name for the culturally distinct ethnic groups whose members are directly descended from the earliest known inhabitants of Canada. The Canadian Constitution recognizes 3 groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. According to the 2021 census of population, First Nations make up 2.7% of the Canadian population, Métis 1.6%, Inuit 0.2% (Statistics Canada, 2021). Out of the three ethnic groups, the Métis receive the least recognition in political and social discourses.

Métis is an ethnic group with mixed European (primarily French) and indigenous ancestry. As a result of oppressive policies and the deeply rooted discrimination from settler colonialism, Métis people have long been, and continue to be, socially and politically marginalized. Within the Métis population, Métis women receive added layers of discrimination, not only based on their Indigeneity but also several other identity factors, such as gender, age, and health status. This intersectional discrimination is rooted in Canadian social structures, including the justice system, workplace, healthcare system, and education institutions.

There is considerable research written on Métis rights. Some scholars have considered how colonial history undermines Métis identity. For example, Tricia Logan explores how colonial genocide causes social, political, and racial divisions in Canada and contributes to oppressions against Métis people (Logan, 2015). Monique D Auger examines the relationship between colonial legacy, including residential schools and cultural suppressions, and resistance and resilience among Métis people (Auger, 2021).

Some scholars focused on racism against Métis people. For example, Cathy Richardson explores why the Métis identity is vulnerable to racism and discusses several responses of Métis people to racial discrimination, such as passing as White (Richardson, 2006). Carmen L. Gillies focuses on racism towards Métis students in K-12 schools and the unfair advantage associated with whiteness in the education system (Gillies, 2020).

Some scholars have examined the invisibility of Métis history. For example, Michel Hogue analyzes how historians often overlook Métis historical labor and the impact they made on the development of Canadian society, which undermine the perceived importance of the Métis past (Hogue, 2020). However, Hogue does not address the invisibility of present-day Métis people and the factors contributing to public ignorance over the marginalization of the Métis in contemporary Canadian society, opening up a potential gap for research.

Clearly then, there is considerable research written on the discrimination against Métis people. However, in addition to Métis invisibility, another key dimension of Métis rights remains largely understudied: oppression against Métis women. Most existing literature address Métis people as a homogenous group and fail to examine the different circumstances faced by sub-groups within the Métis nations, such as Métis women. Some notable exceptions include Monchalin et al., who explores the lack of access to healthcare services among Métis women (Monchalin et al., 2020), and Loanna Heidinger, who examines the frequency of intimate partner violence among Métis women in Canada (Heidinger, 2021). However, these scholars focused on reviewing only one identity factor that contributes to discrimination among Métis women, such as race or gender, and fail to offer a comprehensive analysis of the interwoven, multi-layered oppression against Métis women based on several interconnected identity factors. These sources also neglect the causes behind the discrimination based on each identity factor.

This paper will seek to offer a detailed and in-depth analysis of the various factors that create the intersectional discrimination against Métis women, including race, gender, age, health status, geographical location, sexual orientation, and relationship with First Nations, as well as reasons behind the invisibility of this discrimination to the Canadian public, providing specific evidence by reviewing existing literature in the field of Aboriginal, Métis, and Minority studies. In so doing, this paper will bring visibility to the deeply marginalized Métis women and provide

solutions to help the Canadian government better incorporate Métis women into the national political and social discourse.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section defines the Métis identity. The following section describes the Métis colonial history. The succeeding section examines the causes and the extent to which various identity factors contribute to oppression against Métis women. The subsequent section explores theories that explain the invisibility of said oppression. The final section reflects on the findings and provides policy suggestions and future possibilities for research.

**Who are the Métis?**

The word “Métis” is derived from the French word Métissage, which loosely translates into ‘crossbreeding.’ It originally referred to racial mixing and procreation in derogatory terms (Dickason, 1982). More recently, the word Métissage “has been used to denote cultural mixing or the hybridization of identities as a result of colonialism and transcultural influences” (Blackstock, 2006), highlighting the unique ethnic diversity in Métis identity. The first Métis in Canada were likely the offspring of Frenchmen from fur-trading companies in Quebec and Indian women in Huron and Algonquin tribes in the 18$^{th}$ century (Howard, 1974). Today, the majority of Métis people have migrated to Canada’s western provinces, including Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, as well as Ontario.

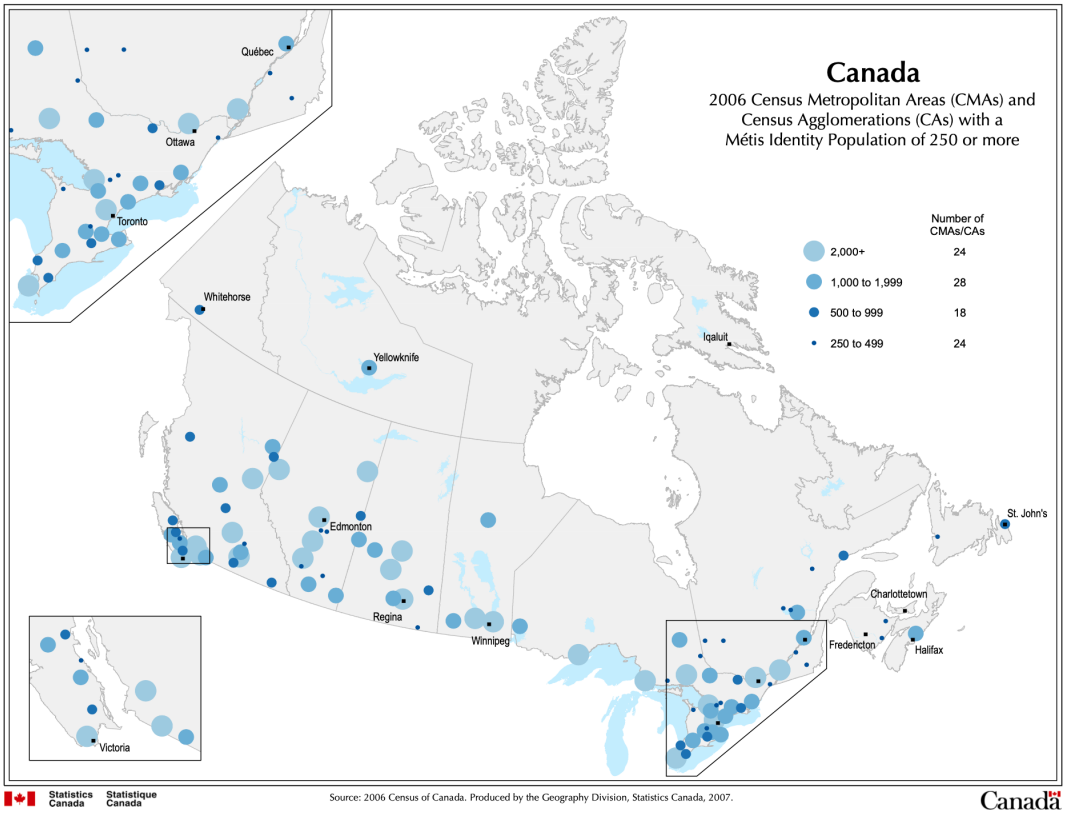


**Figure 1:** Métis Population of 250 or more indicated on the map.

Historically, the term Métis was only used to refer to people with mixed Indian and French ancestry. As stated by Louis Riel, 19th century Métis revolutionary leader, “We Métis are the descendants of Indian women who lived freely on the Plains of Western Canada and who were masters of their realm. We Métis are also the descendants of French coureurs de Bois, who worked for both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in order to make commerce in the fur trade” (The Virtual Museum of Métis History and Culture, 2013), effectively excluding people of mixed descent from Indigenous peoples and other European countries from the Métis identity.

More recently, however, debates over broadening the Métis identity have taken place across Canada. Given the Canadian government’s historically assimilationist approach to identification, its definitions of Indignity constrained who could and could not claim Métis or Indigenous identity, making Métis people reliant on externally imposed criteria for internal recognition (Adams, 2013). Recently, however, an increasing number of Canadians who do not have French heritage have been claiming Métis identity based on having just one Aboriginal ancestor. To promote inclusivity concerning the Métis identity, in this paper, Métis people will be broadly defined as all persons of mixed Indian (Cree, Iroquois, Ojibwa) and European (English, French, Irish, Scottish) heritage (Adams, 2013). The next section of the paper will explore how

European colonists and Aboriginal peoples came into contact, giving birth to the Métis nation, as well as the development of Métis resistance movements throughout the past centuries.

**Colonial History**

The first Métis communities emerged in the Great Lakes region in the 18th century. French voyageurs, explorers and fur traders intermarried with indigenous women, an arrangement known as “mariages à la façon du pays” (Teillet, 2019). The mixed-descent children of these marriages lived near one another and developed a sense of unique cultural community (Gaudry, 2009), eventually giving birth to a new nation: the Métis. During their early years of development, the Métis played an integral role in the fur trade. The two rival fur trading companies in British-Canada, namely Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company (Teillet, 2019), both relied on establishing trading networks with Métis people by intermarriage to supply furs as they engaged in a fur-trade war.

Early Métis communities also emerged in the Red River, where Métis people served as buffalo hunters and provisioners for the North West Company. However, the Red River colony antagonized Métis people and placed harsh economic sanctions on them, a notable example being the forbiddance of buffalo hunting from horseback. These policies angered Métis people and led to the first Métis resistance movement, La Chanson de la Grenouillère, where Métis soldiers confronted and killed several colonists in an attempt to evict the settlers from the Red River.

In 1821, Hudson’s Bay Company and the Northwest Company were forced to merge under the name Hudson’s Bay Company (Teillet, 2019), causing the majority of Métis people to relocate to Red River to continue their life of independence supported by fur trade. The new Hudson’s Bay Company employed a strict hierarchy based on race, with Protestant Englishmen seen as “masters" and Métis people “servants” (Teillet, 2019). In 1834, when a company officer seriously injured a Métis man named Antoine Larocque, Métis people surrounded Fort Garry, Hudson’s Bay Company’s trading port at Red River, and sang war songs and danced war dances to demand justice (Teillet, 2019). Similarly, in 1835, Métis people protested over food shortages and successfully forced the Company to loosen its stores. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Métis people continued to resist the oppressive policies of Hudson’s Bay Company by periodic protests and secured some of their rights (Teillet, 2019).

The third Métis national resistance movement took place in 1869. It is famously known as the Red River Rebellion. This movement aimed to resist the British plan to transfer Métis territory to the Canadian government without the consent of Métis people, who possessed a claim to the territory (Gaudry, 2009). As a response to this threat, a provisional Métis government led by Louis Riel was established in 1869, and they sent a delegate to Ottawa to

negotiate Red River's entrance into Confederation (Gaudry, 2009). The outcome of the negotiation was the Manitoba Act, which established Manitoba as a new province and protected Métis landholdings (Gaudry, 2009). However, the Act was never fully implemented. The troops that arrived in Manitoba were hostile toward Métis landholders, and two-thirds of the Red River Métis population departed to Saskatchewan as a result of the harassment they faced (Gaudry, 2009).

Unfortunately, as the Saskatchewan Métis community grew, their land titles were also ignored by the government. Each township was divided into odd and even squares, and Métis people were only permitted to settle in even squares, as odd squares were reserved for White-dominated corporations such as Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway (Teillet, 2019). To address their land dispossession, Saskatchewan Métis sent 84 petitions to the Canadian government between 1878 and 1885, none of which received a reply. As stated in one petition penned by Gabriel Dumont and addressed to Sir John A. Macdonald, "We [the Métis] are poor people and cannot pay for our land without utter ruin, and losing the fruits of our labor or seeing our lands pass into the hands of strangers . . . In our anxiety we appeal to your sense of justice as Minister of the Interior and head of government, and beg you to reassure us speedily, by directing that we shall not be disturbed on our lands . . . since which have occupied these lands in good faith" (Teillet, 2019). However, despite receiving the truthful grievances expressed by Métis people, the Canadian government continued to ignore Métis rights. In deep frustration, the Métis took up arms under the leadership of Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont. This fourth resistance movement is known as the North-West Resistance, or La Guerre Nationale (The National War) in Métis language. The North-West Resistance ended on May 12, 1885, with the defeat of the Métis in Battle of Batoche and execution of Louis Riel for treason, leaving an even Métis weaker political influence (Gaudry, 2009).

After the North-West Resistance ended in 1885, Sir John A. Macdonald, the Prime Minister of Canada, articulated a view that began "The Forgotten Years," a time period where Métis people were neither accepted by the mainstream society nor given status in the Indian Act, a federal law addressing the rights of indigenous peoples. As Macdonald famously asserts, "If they (the Métis) are Indians, they go with the tribe; if they are half-breeds, they are whites" (Gaudry, 2009), discrediting the Métis identity entirely. From 1885 to the mid-1900s, poverty and racism against "half-breeds" led many Métis people to deny their heritage (Gaudry, 2009).

The 20$^{th}$ century saw a resurgence in Métis nationalism, with several provincial organizations being founded to secure the land and rights of Métis people. These organizations include the Métis Association of Alberta, the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Ontario Métis and Non-Status Indian Association, and the Saskatchewan Métis Society (Gaudry, 2009), to name but a few. They collectively confronted the creation of the White Paper of 1969, a policy paper concerning the status of indigenous peoples that had not included any Aboriginal input in policy

making, as well as criticized the ongoing exclusion of Métis people from federal policy considerations (Gaudry, 2009).

During the lead-up to the patriation of the Canadian constitution, Métis people became increasingly concerned about the lack of constitutional protection over their rights. After 1973, when the courts began to recognize the legal existence of Indigenous title and land rights, the federal government was forced to deal with land claims of First Nations. However, the government refused to extend this recognition to the Métis, claiming that it had fully extinguished all Métis land rights (Teillet, 2019). As Harry Daniels, a prominent advocate for Métis rights in the Constitutional Debates, condemned, the Métis Nation's identity was "suppressed and denied by the federal government in Ottawa, which looked only to England and France for its notions of culture…We [the Métis] represent a whole nation of people who have been alienated. We have been trying for more than a century to get into Confederation" (Teillet, 2019), expressing strong demand for Métis constitutional rights. Through a series of negotiations and protests, on January 30, 1982, Justice Minister Jean Chretien announced an amendment to the Aboriginal rights clause in Section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982, which officially recognized the Métis as a distinct indigenous group: "The aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed. In this Act, 'aboriginal peoples of Canada' includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada" (Teillet, 2019), marking a milestone achievement in Métis rights.

Although the rights of Métis people became formally recognized in the Constitution, the legacy of their oppression remains today. Métis people, and Métis women, in particular, still face multi-layered injustice in both the public and private sphere, based on their race, gender, age, geographic location, health status, sexual orientation, and relationship with First Nations. Such discrimination is made invisible in social and political discourses due to several causes. The Métis battle for rights and recognition continues today. The next section of this paper will discuss the factors that contribute to the intersectional discriminations against Métis women in the 21$^{st}$ century.

**Current Situation**

As a result of oppressive policies and deep-rooted colonial legacies, Métis people have long been, and continue to be, discriminated against socially, economically, and politically.

Discrimination is the differential treatment based on people's identities, such as race, gender, or age. It is motive-independent, meaning that it includes differentiated treatment based on favoritism, and sphere-insensitive, meaning that it can take place in both the public or private sphere (Matthew, 2017). Discrimination must be determined relative to comparison social groups that are governed by the same overarching political structure as the focus group

(Altman, 2011). In the case of Métis women, the comparison groups would be First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples. (Altman, 2011).

Within the Métis Nation, Métis women receive added layers of discrimination, not only because of their race but also a multitude of other identity factors. The intersectionality theory coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw recognizes that privilege and discrimination are concurrently impacted by various socially constructed categories, such as race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1991; Cole, 2009). People experience these social structures in non-insulated ways, and studies that focus solely on one category cannot account for the most marginalized (Cole, 2009). As Crenshaw states, “Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices” (Crenshaw, 1991), highlighting the lack of understanding of intersectionality in contemporary policies and social movements.

In the case of Métis women, existing literature addressed discrimination based on their race, gender, age, geographical location, health status, and sexual orientation on mutually exclusive terrains, and fail to take into consideration the layers of oppressive norms utilized by society to compound the marginalization of Métis women. The government’s incorporation of only a partial frame for discourse and failure to address the intergroup differences within Métis nations contribute to the continued discrimination and invisibility experienced by Métis women. As Audre Lorde, a black, disabled, gay cancer survivor and feminist surmised, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives” (Lorde, 2017). To isolate an issue and create a discipline of knowledge around it only is the epitome of colonizing white supremacy (Flaming, 2021). To address the complexity of discrimination against Métis women, the next section of this paper will discuss their marginalized positions in several categories and how the discrimination they receive is frequently a product of intersecting lenses.

Discrimination based on race

To begin with, similar to all Métis people, Métis women experience racism. Monchalin notes that “[T]he Euro-Canadian government defines who is and who is not an Indian based on a system of registration that has its roots in a racist, archaic blood quantum concept, meaning that the amount of ‘Indian blood’ is what determines whether one is a ‘true Indian’” (Monchalin et al., 2020). In the case of Métis people, their physical appearance is often used to measure how much “Indian blood” they have. As stated by Ian Lopez, critical race theorist, “Various minds tried to fashion practical human typologies along the following physical axes: skin color, hair texture, facial angle, jaw size, cranial capacity, brain mass, frontal lobe mass, brain surface fissures and convolutions, and even body lice” (Lopez, 1994). Physical appearances such as dark skin and black hair are often used to dictate the authenticity of indigeneity of Métis people. However, due to their partially “white” appearance, such as white skin and blonde hair, Métis people often feel “stuck in between” indigeneity and whiteness. This lack of identity is described

by a Métis woman in British Columbia: “It’s one or the other [in B.C.] … [Métis] don’t have their own identity; you’re either White or Native” (Wesche, 2013).

Métis are often excluded from both the indigenous and the white identity group, as demonstrated by treaties, land rights, the Indian Act, and the residential school system (Monchalin et al., 2019). For example, between 1831 and 1996, many Métis children were forced to attend residential schools. To get accepted into residential schools, Métis children were evaluated based on their physical attributes, such as skin and hair color (Fiola, 2015). While some Métis were turned away from residential schools for being “too white,” they were also turned away from provincial schools for being “too Indian” (Monchalin et al., 2019). As summarized by a Métis service provider in Prince George, “We’re not status, we’re not White.… I really feel that loss of cultural identity puts people at risk, and then it’s like being unidentifiable — ‘Who are we?’” (Wesche, 2013) The status of being “stuck in between” indigeneity and whiteness and lack of cultural identity manifested as government policies that neglect the Métis.

First, Métis people are excluded from many federal healthcare and welfare programs. Métis people have been traditionally excluded from Indigenous childcare programs, which only targeted First Nations on-reserve and northern Inuit communities; they have no access to non-insured health benefits available to other rights bearing indigenous peoples, receiving less than 1% of the total federal funding for indigenous healthcare; jurisdiction gives COVID-19 vaccination priority to First Nations and Inuit, excluding Métis; First Nations communities have nursing stations, while Métis communities have no programming. (MNCInfo, 2021) As described by a service provider at an indigenous healthcare center in Fort St. John, “Sometimes for Métis women they feel that they don’t have someone to turn to… [whereas] a lot of our First Nations clients can go to their Band Council.… Depending on what they need, there is no Métis system of referral available or an advocate” (Wesche, 2013), indicating the lack of social support Métis people face.

In addition, Métis people also lack insurance. While the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program grants healthcare entitlements to First Nation people, Métis people who do not have employment-related insurance have to pay for the extra costs for dental and eye care, prescriptions not covered in drug formularies, and ambulance transport (Haworth-Brockman et al., 2009). As one healthcare provider questioned, “If you are Métis and you don’t have money how are you going to access medicine?” This is supported by another indigenous healthcare provider: “If a Métis person is medevaced out of the community and if you’re not on welfare you are basically on your own,” illustrating the financial hardships Métis people experience caused by the lack of government support (Haworth-Brockman et al., 2009). Compared to First Nations, Métis people have little access to federal healthcare services and benefits.

Compounding with the exclusion from healthcare services, the healthcare institutions that do accept Métis are often not culturally safe. “Culturally safe” healthcare describe agencies that “recognize the contemporary conditions of Aboriginal peoples which result from their post-contact history” (Brascoupe & Waters, 2009) and respect individuals’ culture and customs (Wesche, 2013). However, most healthcare services in Canada do not provide a culturally safe space for Aboriginal people. For example, one Métis woman described her experience working in a hospital in Toronto: “So currently my experience in my hospital job as a nurse, I find that there is a lack of Indigenous awareness and acceptance. I have heard…some racist comments from healthcare workers about Indigenous people. And I also believe that there's not really … an accepting space … for Indigenous care” (Monchalin et al., 2020). Similarly, a Métis woman described a negative encounter with a healthcare service provider: “One of the nurses came in and said that the doctor is discharging you. I said I’m not even better yet and she said, well it’s time for you to go now, you need to get your stuff and you need to go, don’t let me call security. And sure enough she called security. Security literally came in, grabbed me behind my arms, dragged me down the hallways and threw me out the door, with pneumonia, in wintertime. And I went back in I said can I at least get a bus pass, a bus ticket? And they said this is not a charity this is a hospital. And right now I’m almost in tears...” (Denison et al., 2014) As demonstrated by the aforementioned examples, Aboriginal people in general are more likely to receive abusive and racist treatments inside the healthcare system.

Compared to other groups of Aboriginal people, Métis people are confined to poorer medical transportation methods. Only 48% of Métis people live within 100 km of a diabetes program, and only 28% live within 30 km. Métis individuals also have less frequent visits to primary care physicians and specialists compared to First Nations (Foulds et al., 2013). As commented by a Métis woman, “If I had to go [to a medical appointment in Winnipeg] I would get a warrant from the nursing station and I would go on the bus. If my daughter, who is Status, went to the nursing station with me, she would fly to Winnipeg” (Haworth-Brockman et al., 2019).

As a result of healthcare-related racial discriminations, Métis people are more susceptible to chronic diseases. Approximately 56% of Métis people aged 15 or older have been diagnosed with one chronic condition, with 28% experiencing 2 or more (Foulds et al., 2013). Life expectancy of Métis population is 5-6 years lower than that of the general Canadian population (Foulds et al., 2013).

In addition to racism within the healthcare system, Métis people are also overrepresented in the Canadian justice system. In Manitoba, Métis youths are admitted to probation at an average age of 15.6, compared to 16.1 for non-Aboriginal people. Their success rate on probation supervision is only 34.9%, compared to 52.1% for non-Aboriginal people and 42.8% for First Nations. The average age of first conviction for Métis children is 14.2, compared to 15 for non-

Aboriginal people (Barkwell et al. 1989). Métis admissions to open custody exceed all non-Aboriginal admissions and First Nations admissions. (Barkwell et al. 1989)

The high likelihood of entering the justice system among Métis people can be explained by several factors. First, they lack access to spiritual resources, strong family network, discretionary time and money, and federal welfare programs, which prevents Métis people from receiving adequate social support. In addition, negative media coverage and implicit bias impose associate shame and inferiority with being Métis. For example, Métis women Pauline Anderson, Billie (Marie) Robison and Norma Welsh recall the use of the racial slur "dirty Half Breed" to shame Métis individuals for their ethnic identity (Gladue Rights Research Center, n.d.). Métis women Carmen Thompson and Marilyn Richardson report that their respective Métis grandmothers did not reveal their ethnic identity because of the commonality of racial discrimination towards Métis people (Gladue Rights Research Center, n.d.). As documented by the Global and Mail, “Virtually we grew up to hate what we were. We used to watch cowboy and Indian movies and we'd be rooting for the cowboys as they killed off the Indians” (Fine & Asch, 1989), illustrating the widespread self-rejection among Métis people. According to the self-esteem model of deviance, negative self-attitudes make Métis people more likely to become involved in delinquency (Barkwell et al. 1989), further contributing to their disproportional representation in the justice system. Most importantly, Aboriginal people are more likely to receive unfair rulings in court compared to other social groups. According to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in cases of murders of indigenous people, the cause of death is ruled as from “natural causes” far too often (The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). In particular, Métis people are more likely to be charged for minor offenses compared to First Nations and non-indigenous people. According to the Manitoba Métis Federation Justice Committee, alternative measures are only used for 14% of Métis youths, which is significantly lower than that of Status Indians, and the provision in the Young Offenders Act for “no measures to be taken against youth for minor infractions” has not been used at all (Barkwell et al., 1989) for the Métis.

The discriminatory practices against Métis people persist in custody. For example, in Manitoba, there were as many as 26 youths held in cottages designed to hold 15, significantly exceeding the Canadian Criminal Justice Association’s minimum cell size standards. As suggested by Barkwell et al., “It is due to the lack of strong advocacy for Native youths that this situation has not been brought to public attention and has been allowed to continue over the years… If the majority of those locked up were from a white, middle class family background, the overcrowding would not be allowed to continue” (Barkwell et al., 1989), indicating the government’s neglect of Métis rights. In addition, Métis parents reported feeling pressured to provide clothing for their children in custody (University of Manitoba Research, Ltd, 1989), and Métis youths also reported being required to purchase clothing and toiletry articles out of allowances while serving their sentence (including used underwear), which are in fact the

institution's responsibility When the clothes of Métis people are stolen, the institutions falsely claim that they can't guarantee the security of personal possessions and force Métis youths to replace these clothes themselves. (Barkwell et al.,1989) Due to the lack of social and political power, Métis people are often exploited by justice institutions.

In addition, the Canadian prison system is largely designed for further devaluation instead of rehabilitation, which also stands true for Métis people. For example, a high proportion of Métis youths jailed are removed from their community entirely and placed more than 600 miles away in a culturally foreign environment, which expands institutional control instead of support and undermines the wellbeing of Métis people. Thus, the system cannot be considered rehabilitative in any sense (Barkwell et al.,1989).

Furthermore, there is a significant lack of education in Métis communities on official justice system interventions, including alternative measures, justice committees and community service dispositions. According to the Manitoba Métis Federation, 88.9% of delegates from Métis communities indicated they would like more information about the justice system, and 59.7% felt there was enough interest in their community or local area to warrant a justice issues workshop (Barkwell et al., 1989). Correctional and other related services have been denied or not made available to the Métis, which deprives their ability to advocate for their rights in the justice system.

Several reasons could be attributed to the racism against the Métis.

To begin with, the biracial identity of Métis people places them under further oppression. Due to their ambiguous racial identity, Métis people are often subject to mono-racism, discrimination against individuals who do not fit into monoracial categories (Guerrero et al., 2020). Métis people are often labeled as cultural misfits, unable to find acceptance in both the White and indigenous society (Reed, 2008). As University of British Columbia sociologist Renisa Mawani argues, people with "mixed" heritages were stigmatized as biologically and culturally degenerate and deviant (Mawani, 2009), and the state sought to regulate authenticity and purity by placing oppressive institutions in place. Therefore, Métis people are often excluded from both mainstream and indigenous healthcare, overrepresented in the justice system, etc.

In addition, the discrimination based on Métis identity could be explained by the post-colonial theory. Post-colonial theory "responds to the oppression from European colonialism" and explores "the unjust effects and systems put in place" (Parsons & Harding, 2011). This theory suggests that colonialism constructs a Eurocentric "us", in this case White people in Canada, versus a homogenous "other", in this case Aboriginal peoples, including the Métis, which creates a binary post-colonial society composed of Western and non-western cultures (Jaber et al., 2022), in which indigenous peoples were targets of assimilation or even ethnic

cleansing. As explained by Patrick Wolfe, “As opposed to enslaved people, whose reproduction augmented their owners’ wealth, indigenous people obstructed settlers’ access to land, so their increase was counterproductive” (Wolfe, 2006), which incentivized the long-standing assimilative policies aimed to eliminate indigenous culture. Silencing the voices and epistemologies of indigenous peoples and imposing western values onto them as a means to “civilize” led to the creation of oppressive and assimilative systems, such as residential schools, which caused intergenerational trauma and loss of culture, language, and religion among Métis and First Nations (Jaber et al., 2022). Oppressive government policies, institutions, and mechanisms put in place by colonialism create disparities in the availability of culturally appropriate health, mental health, and addictions treatment services, as well as access to decent education and jobs between Métis and non-Indigenous people, causing the former to become more vulnerable to violence and less able to leave violent situations (The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). The exploitation, Eurocentric cultural discourses, and injustices put in place by colonialism continue to marginalize Métis people in the post-colonial Canadian society.

Discrimination based on gender

Métis women are also discriminated against due to their gender. To begin with, Métis women are more vulnerable to domestic violence than First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples. As suggested by Emma LaRocque, Métis academic and researcher, although it is considerably more difficult to get precise statistics on the extent of sexual violence in Métis communities, the increasing number of victim reports indicates that sexual violence against Métis people is just as extensive as that of First Nations on reserves (Women of the Métis Nation, 2019). According to Statistics Canada, 39.0% of Métis women experienced family violence, 23.0% experienced sexual abuse, and 14.6% experienced raping. The loss of culture and community has led Métis women to tolerate or even willingly participate in verbal, physical, and emotional violence. For example, when their partners call them “bitches” or other derogatory terms, some Métis women see it as a sign of endearment (Women of the Métis Nation, 2019). The widespread acceptance over these abusive relationships have led to atrocious crimes. For instance, Nina Courtepatte, a thirteen-year-old Métis girl, was brutally beaten, sexually assaulted, and killed in Edmonton, Alberta on April 3, 2005 (Women of the Métis Nation, 2019).

The detrimental implications of domestic violence further weaken Métis women’s rights and wellbeing. At the outset, physical injuries caused by domestic violence can make it difficult or even impossible for women to look for work or attend their jobs. Domestic violence-related psychological discomfort, such as trauma, sadness, and anxiety, can also severely undermine a person's capacity for day-to-day functioning, which often causes Métis women to resort to substance abuse. Additionally, transportation to leave environments of domestic violence is oftentimes inaccessible to Métis women, especially in rural communities in the Western

provinces, where many Métis people live. Moreover, with the prevalence of extreme housing shortages in the Western provinces, Métis women who manage to escape often find themselves and their children facing housing insecurity. Furthermore, male dominance in public office prevents Métis women from advocating for change, as they are not at the decision-making table, and men in power rarely see Métis domestic violence as important enough to warrant change (Gladue Rights Research Center, n.d.).

In addition, Métis women often receive discrimination in the workplace. Across all levels of education, Métis women face higher unemployment rates than Métis men. According to the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey by Statistics Canada, employment rates were "significantly higher for Métis men (82%) than women (75%)" (Hahmann et al., 2019). The median wage of Métis women is $37117, which is lower than $58176 for Métis men (Hahmann et al., 2019). As reported by Métis women from La Ronge and other areas in Northern Saskatchewan, "The types of jobs available for women were those that restricted them to traditionally feminized work, such as caregiving/nurturing, feeding, serving or providing instruction" (Gladue Rights Research Center, n.d.). When running for public office positions such as those in the School Board, Métis women often receive few votes due to gender discrimination. Even when Métis women gained the leadership position, men often ignored, underestimated, exploited, or refused to take instructions from them (Kowalczyk, 1987).

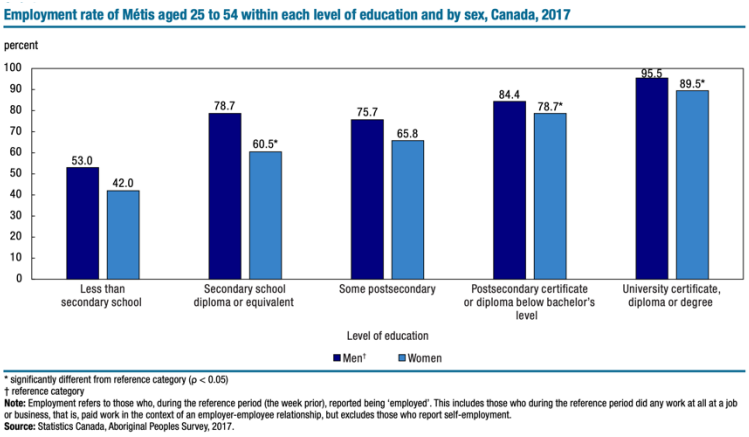


**Figure 2:** Employment rate of Métis aged 25 to 54.

**Median wage and salary income among employed Métis aged 25 to 54 by highest level of education and sex, Canada, 2017**

| | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| | dollars | |
| **Total median wage and salary income** | **58,176** | **37,117** |
| Less than secondary school | 39,727 | 25,393 |
| Secondary school diploma or equivalent | 52,516 | 30,519 |
| Some postsecondary | 51,427 | 27,178 |
| Postsecondary certificate or diploma below bachelor's level | 63,687 | 36,563 |
| University certificate, diploma or degree | 71,104 | 57,842 |

**Notes:** Employment refers to those who, during the reference period (the week prior), reported being 'employed'. This includes those who during the reference period did any work at all at a job or business, that is, paid work in the context of an employer-employee relationship, but excludes those who report self-employment.
Median wage and salary income is obtained from administrative data linked to the 2016 Census of Population with the reference period of the calendar year 2015. It refers to gross wages and salaries before deductions for such items as income taxes, pension plan contributions and employment insurance premiums, excluding income from self-employment.
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2017.

**Figure 3:** Median wage and salary income among employed Métis aged 25 to 54.

The discrepancy in payment between Métis men and women forces many Métis women to engage in sex trade, as their limited education precluded alternative work (Wesche, 2013). As suggested by a study conducted by the PACE (Prostitution Alternatives Counselling and Education) society, out of 183 women in the Vancouver sex trade, more than 30% were Aboriginal women (including Métis), although Aboriginal people make up less than 2% of the city's population (Women of the Métis Nation, 2019). Some Métis women experience a "double life" due to engagement in prostitution: "[You] spend, like, quality time with [your family], do things that normal people do. But when it starts to get dark you're getting ready and you're out there and you're hustling. You're trying to make money for the next day, just to get by.… That's how it is. It's really hard.… It helps me get food for my kids' lunches and do things with them; be there when they have a field trip coming up or something" (Wesche, 2013), illustrating how financial hardships compel Métis women to engage in undesired careers.

The discrimination against Métis women in the workplace plus the cycle of fear and instability created by unstable work such as prostitution also damaged Métis women's mental health. According to Statistics Canada, the number of Métis women reporting excellent or very good mental health was lower than men in both permanent and non-permanent work.

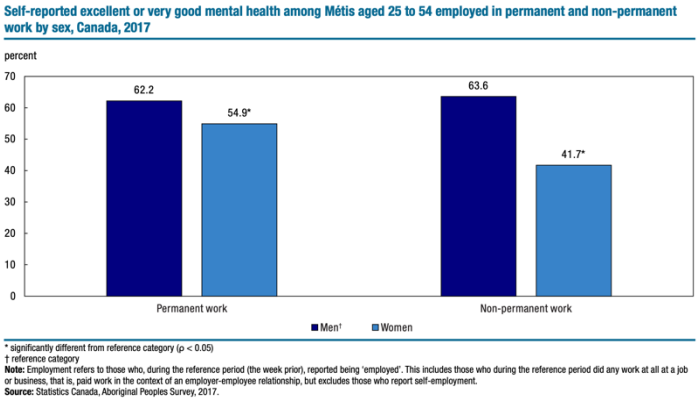


**Figure 4:** Self-reported excellent or very good mental health among Métis aged 25 to 54.

The gender discrimination against Métis women is rooted in the patriarchal Canadian society and capitalist modes of production. In a patriarchy, masculinity is most closely associated with being human, while femininity is relegated to the marginal position of "the other," such as "mother, domestic laborer and consumer" (Johnson, 2005). The concept of power is narrowly defined as "power over," which is the ability to control and dominate others instead of the ability to cooperate. To have "power over" is characteristically defined as "masculine" and desirable, while to lack such power is characterized as "feminine" and weak. This gave rise to the notion that men should work and women should stay home because they needed protection from men, regardless of their true ability and needs (Johnson, 2005). This association between

women and domesticity blocked access to education and job opportunities, and the belief that women are “weak” increased the vulnerability to domestic violence among Métis women.

Discrimination based on age

In addition, Métis women experience discrimination based on their age. In the workplace, beliefs such as “young workers are disloyal” or “young workers prefer to work with young instead of old colleagues” are prevalent (Bytheway, 1995) and create negative stereotypes surrounding young workers, justifying the lower wage given to young Métis workers (Blackham, 2018). Young people without abundant work experience face challenges gaining employment and are often given less responsibility in the workplace due to being perceived as “untrustworthy” (Snape and Redman, 2006). Employers are also less willing to commit to training young workers due to high costs, and often link employment benefits to length of service (Blackham, 2018), causing young workers to receive less benefits than older workers regardless of their performance. As described by a Métis woman in her twenties, “I had no rights in the workplace as a young adult” (Flaming, 2021). She was required to work long, irregular hours because of the assumed high health and energy levels of young workers, which made her “desperate to perform as a good worker” and worsened her fatigue and depression (Flaming, 2021). Participation in Métis organizations is also lower for young Métis people. 20% of Métis aged 35 or older are members of such organizations, compared to 12% for Métis between 15 and 34 years of age (Statistics Canada, 2010), indicating possible age discrimination in the entry selection process, favoring old Métis people, who are seen as wiser and more experienced.

Discrimination based on health status

Health status also serves as a key factor of discrimination among Métis women. Due to engagement in sex trade, a high proportion of Métis women contracted HIV, which led to stigma and discrimination on multiple levels.

On the family level, many Métis women experience discrimination from family members who tried to distance themselves from them and barred them from contact or sharing possessions (Woodgate et al., 2017). As described by a Métis woman who was diagnosed with HIV at age 29, “People don't want to talk about it, so yeah it's really hard. Like even your own family members sometimes, like I have a sister who doesn't like me to touch anything or share anything, like she still doesn't know stuff [about HIV] you know” (Woodgate et al., 2017).

On the community level, stigma and labeling caused Métis women with HIV to lose social connections and become excluded from their community. As a Métis woman shared, “You get the stares, you get the looks; get punched out once in a while for it” (Woodgate et al., 2017). Within healthcare institutions, Métis women with HIV are subject to harsher treatments. One

Métis woman had her son forcibly taken away from her at birth because she was HIV positive: “Yeah, cause I had gotten my, my son ‘M’ taken away and I had done everything right through my pregnancy, I didn't use, nothing, I went for prenatal care, everything. I took my meds, I went to treatment, everything and they still took him away and the reason why they took him away was because I was HIV positive and my son wasn't” (Woodgate et al., 2017).

There is also a general lack of understanding of the health trajectory of HIV patients and lack of consideration for the wellbeing of HIV patients and their children within the indigenous child welfare system. As shared by one Métis woman, “I'm having a hard time with [child welfare] about that cause my worker, like this is my sixteenth [worker] and then every time they read my file they question me. My last worker he kind of got my kids and me together because he wanted me to explain to my kids that I'm dying and he was already trying to plan my funeral, then trying to make me write a case plan if something happened” (Woodgate et al., 2017). The lack of care and respect towards Métis women who contracted HIV is detrimental to not only the wellbeing of the patient, but also parent-child relationships, as the child of HIV-positive Métis women often learn exaggerated or falsified information on HIV and, as a result, grow increasingly fearful of the disease.

In addition to HIV, obesity also contributes to discrimination against Métis women. As described in an autobiography of an overweight Métis woman named Flaming, there is a lack of accommodation for obese Aboriginal patients within healthcare environments: “There was nothing in the CancerCare offices environment that indicated either Indigenous, fat patients or groups were welcome from the typical armchair seating to the reduced number of chairs in the consultation room” (Flaming, 2021), indicating that healthcare institutions often neglect the needs of obese individuals. Besides the physical healthcare environment, Flaming also described the discriminatory attitudes of the healthcare providers toward her mother, who was also an overweight Métis woman: “Mom's oncologist was clearly associating her body size with endometrial cancer when she described the additional risks associated with surgery for someone with Mom's body size - as if Mom even deserved to have cancer for simply having a body which did not warrant holistic care” (Flaming, 2021). Such dehumanizing aspects of the healthcare system can be defined as “structures of indifference”, wherein disabled and chronically ill Indigenous peoples are “waiting to die” because of their systemic poverty (McCallum and Perry, 2018).

Discrimination against the health status of Métis women could be attributed to prejudices. As observed by Rachel Hurst from Disability Awareness in Action, “There has been a long, long history of the negative portrayal of disabled people. In western folk tales the wicked witch or evil person is always portrayed with a crooked back and using a stick. Tribal societies talk about the disabled person as being bewitched, possessed of evil spirits. Religions emphasize disabled people as bearing the burden of sin” (Hurst, 1992). For decades, disability and diseases have

been viewed as inherent “defects” or “losses” that should be “cured” by medicine and science (Neufeldt, 1995). This belief continues to manifest in institutions in the contemporary society. For example, employers oftem perceive workers with disabilities as less productive and more costly to train compared to those without disabilities, and favor the latter in the job-hiring process (Johnson and Lambrinos, 1985).

The belief that disabled people are defective gave rise to social and physical barriers that prevent disabled people or people of poor health status from functioning as full members of society (Neufeldt, 1995), which can be seen in the marginalization of HIV positive Métis women in communities and healthcare institutions. The mindset that disabilities are inherent and that disabled people are “deserving” of the “deficits” caused chronically ill Métis women to receive inadequate support within the healthcare system. The stereotype that being thin is a prerequisite to being “attractive” caused obese individuals to be socially penalized for being “unattractive” (Cawley, 2004), less intelligent (Sarty, 1978), less successful in social relationships (Dion et al., 1972), less mentally healthy (Young and Powell, 1985), and frequently ridiculed as being lazy, stupid, and ugly (Staffieri, 1967). Thus, obese Métis women receive an additional layer of oppression due to the numerous prejudices associated with obesity.

Discrimination based on geographical location

Besides race, gender, age, and health status, the remote geographical location of Métis communities creates additional disadvantages. The vast distances from isolated Métis communities to major cities in Saskatchewan and Manitoba make transportation for medical purposes a prime issue for Métis women. Many cannot afford safe plane travel and are forced to take long-distance buses despite poor health conditions. In addition, the Prairies and northern Ontario, where the majority of Métis people live, see limitations in resources compared to the south. As described by a Métis woman with multiple sclerosis (MS), a chronic disease affecting the central nervous system, “The geographic location that allowed me to access MS medication and go into remission is now the same location that limits my mobility, simply because the municipal government permanently closed the only swimming pool for hundreds of kilometers. I have given myself hypothermia trying to ease my MS symptoms in the cold northern lakes in northern summer months” (Flaming, 2021). The lack of swimming pools and other facilities in the North prevents Métis women from accessing the same resources and services available to people living in the South, which further harms their physical and mental health.

In addition, Métis women living in remote locations have less access to government support services, such as the police. Native Women’s Association of Canada found that the majority of disappearances and deaths of indigenous women and girls occurred in the western provinces, while the crime rate is significantly lower in urban areas in densely populated provinces such as Southern Ontario. The lack of access to support services further increases Métis women’s

vulnerability to violence and organized crime. The social segregation Métis women experience is due to the social hierarchy separating urban and rural areas. Métis women living in rural areas are often perceived as inferior “outsiders” with low socio-economic status, which justifies the decreased allocation of resources, including swimming pools and employment opportunities, to Métis communities in rural areas.

Discrimination based on sexuality

Moreover, sexual orientation adds an additional layer of oppression to Métis women. LGBTQ2S+ Aboriginal youths are often victims of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Hunt, 2016). A national high school survey found that over 67% of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal LGBTQ2S+ youth report feeling unsafe at school. Half the students report hearing homophobic comments in school on a daily basis, with an additional 10% reporting hearing homophobic comments from teachers (EGALE Canada, 2011). Métis youths who identify as LGBTQ2S+ receive discrimination from both students and teachers in school, which harms their self-esteem and wellbeing.

In addition, lesbian, gay and bisexual youths are highly over-represented among the street-involved Aboriginal population. Homeless youths are also more likely to report sexual exploitation than heterosexual street-involved youths (Saewyc et al., 2006). Several risk factors commonly associated with LGBTQ2S+ Aboriginal youths, including childhood sexual abuse, homophobia, and transphobia, contribute to a sense of isolation and self-rejection, making them increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation (Hunt, 2016).

Moreover, support services provided to street-involved youths often follow a heteronormative model that fails to take into account the realities of Two-Spirit youth, as seen, for instance, in discussions about STD prevention that are restricted to the availability of condoms and birth-control pills. The lack of support programs that acknowledge their sexual identities further impairs the health of street-involved LGBTQ2S+ Métis adolescents (Hunt, 2016).

The discrimination against LGBTQ2S+ Métis folks could be attributed to the patriarchal culture rooted in Canadian society, which defines male and females as the only two distinct genders. Transgender identity or gender-fluidity are seen as unnatural, so are same-sex attractions, which emerged from stereotypical perceptions of genders, such as that every woman “wants a ‘real man’ who knows how to take charge of things, including her” (Johnson, 2005), discrediting the legitimacy of lesbian relationships. Because heterosexuality is perceived as the only natural and acceptable sexual identity in a patriarchy, LGBTQ2S+ Métis folks often face marginalization in Canadian society.

Discrimination within Indigenous Groups

Furthermore, Métis women also experience lateral violence from First Nations. Lateral violence is discrimination that "occurs within oppressed societies and include[s] bullying, gossiping, feuding, shaming, and blaming other members of one's own social group as well as having a lack of trust toward other group members" (Bailey, 2020). Lateral violence often homogenizes social groups and disrespects diversity between and within Indigenous communities (Bailey, 2020). Ignoring differences within the broad indigenous community leads to tensions among different indigenous groups, namely the Métis and First Nations.

Lateral violence against Métis women from First Nations is often caused by bloodism, discrimination based on blood quantum, which has its roots in colonial classification systems (Middleton-Moz, 1999). First Nations, who have "pure" indigenous blood, are often placed higher on the hierarchy of indigeneity, while the Métis, who are of mixed indigenous and European ancestry, are placed lower. This hierarchy can be further explained by the reversed notion of the "one drop rule," which is defined by Wolfe as: "[A]ny amount of African ancestry, no matter how remote, and regardless of phenotypical appearance, makes a person Black. For Indians, in stark contrast, non-Indian ancestry compromised their indigeneity, producing "half-breeds," a regime that persists in the form of blood quantum regulations" (Wolfe, 2006). Contrary to Black people, the mixed ancestry of Métis people makes them more vulnerable to discrimination.

Due to the Métis being placed lower on the hierarchy of "Nativeness", they are often seen as outsiders by First Nations. For example, as recalled by a Métis female healthcare provider, "There was those supposed friends [who are First Nations] that are like… 'You're not a hundred percent Native', that whole hierarchy of they're there and you're down here" (Monchalin et al., 2020). Similarly, another Métis woman reported "feeling uncomfortable identifying as Indigenous claiming her own 'White privilege,' but also for fear of not being seen as legitimate as an Indigenous person" (Van Bewer et al., 2021). This lack of "authenticity of indigeneity" led to First Nations students bullying and gossiping about Métis students in schools. For example, Sally, a First Nations student, described that when a Métis citizenship bus comes to campus to help Métis people obtain their citizenship, there is cynicism from other Indigenous people in regards to this initiative: "I've heard things like 'Did you see that Métis bus? And now they're Indigenous?'" (Van Bewer et al., 2021), demonstrating how the Métis identity is seen by other indigenous peoples, primarily First Nations, as inferior and unauthentic.

Lateral violence also occurs within the healthcare system. For instance, a Métis woman describes her experience of hearing racist comments from First Nations co-workers: "I don't like [an Indigenous specific health and social service in Toronto] at all…I just don't like the environment… I've heard people saying something about some Métis lady … I don't think it's Métis based at all. I think it's just more First Nations…" (Monchalin et al., 2020). Another Métis

woman found herself in a similar situation: “I never feel comfortable at [an Indigenous specific health and social service in Toronto] at all. When I was working at [another Indigenous specific health and social service in Toronto] and I had to bring stuff, you … get some of these staff giving you weird looks … you can just feel it” (Monchalin et al., 2020), indicating the hostility towards Métis people from First Nations. Sometimes, passing as white, which is a common practice among Métis to avoid racial discrimination and assume “white privilege,” is seen as an act of betrayal by darker-skinned indigenous peoples such as the First Nations (Jaber et al., 2022), creating resentment in the Métis-First Nations relation.

The causes of lateral violence can be explained by the post-colonial theory. As stated by Jane Middleton-Moz, “When a powerful oppressor has directed oppression against a group for a period of time, members of the oppressed group feel powerless to fight back and they eventually turn their anger against each other” (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2011). Because indigenous peoples in Canada have been oppressed by colonists for decades, those that gained power in contemporary society, such as First Nations, abuse other indigenous groups, such as the Métis, in similar ways that the former have been abused by White colonists, leading to a cycle of violence, or “internalized colonialism” (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2011). As summarized by Bombay, “As oppressed people it is not surprising that we oppress our own people out of anger and frustration... I recall the words of a leader when he reflected, “We—our people—have become our own worst enemies.” He was right.” (Bombay, 2014).

**Why are the Métis and the discrimination against them invisible to the public?**

After examining the intersectional discriminations against Métis women, this section of the paper will explore why this discrimination remains invisible to the Canadian public. According to a knowledge test on indigenous peoples administered to 2,899 university students in Ontario, the average score was 24.28%, with only 14% score on the Métis nation (Schaefli et al., 2018). Social structure and institutions in Canada serve to overlook, silence, or dismiss knowledge produced by and for Métis populations. This lack of awareness retrenches the oppression against Métis people (Schaefli et al., 2018) and can be explained by several theories.

To begin with, the systemic ignorance of structural injustices at play in government jurisdictions, healthcare systems, identity definitions, and land claims are cultivated in the education systen, through what is covered or taught and what is omitted (Schaefli et al., 2018). For instance, the Ontario provincial K-12 curriculum, which is the primary source of knowledge for most students, remains deeply inadequate in covering knowledge on the Métis (Schaefli et al., 2018). For example, Métis woman Laura-Lee (Bellehumeur) Kearns described her experience with the lack of awareness over Métis identity:

> “I thought they (Métis people) were people from the 16th and 17th centuries

—the offspring of the coureurs de bois and “Native” women.
No Indigenous group was ever mentioned again” (Adams, 2013).

Although Kearns identifies as Métis, she learnt very little about the Métis in school, causing her to believe that Métis people were “people from the 16th and 17th centuries” and irrelevant in today’s society. It was not until she grew older that she realized the integral role Métis people play in Canadian society. The education system cultivates modes of rationalization that legitimize indigenous assimilation and oppression through selective textbook content and lack of inspection over the mindset of teachers and teacher educators (Schaefli et al., 2018). As the Truth and Reconciliation Committee states in its 2015 report, schools, colleges, and universities are responsible for fostering historical consciousness and respect to indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The invisible, systematic discrimination faced by Métis people also bears resemblance to the theory of White Innocence coined by James Baldwin. As stated by Baldwin, “They (White Americans) have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it” (Baldwin, 1962), condemning the denial of history practiced among White Americans. Similarly, although Métis people constitute a significant portion of Canada’s population and are essential to the functioning of the Canadian society, they remain invisible to non-Métis Canadians who claim that colonization took place hundreds of years ago and they hold no responsibility over it. Non-Métis peoples internalized history and claimed to be merely following sets of rules established in the system, which everyone has to follow. Both White Americans and non-Métis Canadians claim to be innocent. However, as described by Baldwin, “Many of them indeed know better, but as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed and to be committed is to be in danger” (Baldwin, 1962). Therefore, to avoid the potential danger associated with action, non-Métis Canadians claim to be ignorant of the systematic oppressions against the Métis.

In addition, the ignorance of Métis rights can be attributed to color-blind racism, which incorporates an ethnic denial manifested in discursive strategies that serve to maintain White racial hegemony (Hayes, 2017). Color-blind racism argues that neither race nor racism are relevant in today’s society (Hayes, 2017), which makes Métis issues largely irrelevant in society. The dominant social group, in this case White people, determine when a minority presence becomes absent. In other words, most White Canadians choose to live as though they do not see the Métis. Color-blind racism enables White people to justify the current gaps in educational attainment, wages, chronic health disorders, and wealth between them and the Métis through the ideology of individualism, without thought to historical context (Robertson, 2015). Thus, the political and social inequalities experienced by Métis women becomes their own fault, and the ignorance about unfair treatments of Métis women are seen as legitimate and justifiable.

Also, due to the discrimination they receive in the healthcare system, justice system, and workplace, many Métis people choose not to disclose their identity in the public sphere or pass as white instead, which diminishes the representation of Métis people in Canadian society. The public sphere is a realm of social life in which private individuals assemble to form a public body to freely discuss societal problems, and access is guaranteed to all citizens (Habermas, 1989). In contrast, private spheres such as family and home are social realms where individuals enjoy a degree of authority (Habermas, 1989). Due to the fear of discrimination, Métis people may choose to conceal their identity in the public sphere and only disclose it in the private sphere, causing Métis people to be largely invisible in the former. For example, Métis woman Helen (LePage) Bradley, senator for the Métis Nation of Ontario, describes how her parents did not disclose their Métis identity to her:

> “Remember the Indian list?
> They couldn’t go into hotels,
> The Indians were getting bad names because of that
> That’s why
> I think
> They didn’t want us to let on that we had native blood in us” (Adams, 2013).

Because of their relatively marginalized position and invisible status in the public sphere, Métis people are often unable to advocate for their rights and bring visibility to themselves, which creates a cycle of retrenched discrimination.

Additionally, the public lacks understanding of intersectionality when addressing discrimination. In mainstream discourse, race and gender are often seen as separate and isolated identity categories. However, the violence that Métis women experience is shaped by not only their race or gender, but also other identity factors, including age, geographical location, health status, sexuality, etc. In the case of Métis women, while the racial oppression they face is sometimes discussed and condemned by the public, the discrimination against their gender, age, health status, and geographic location are often overlooked and thus remain invisible to the public.

Moreover, people choose to ignore the presence of Métis people due to collective shame. Shame involves “a totalizing judgment of the self that has failed to live up to certain expectations” and a lingering belief that “an apology is never enough to undo the harm” (Locke, 2007). While shame may motivate behavioral changes, for large-scale and particularly traumatic shame, such transformation is often impossible (Locke, 2007). Due to the powerlessness of not being able to undo the harm, instead of owning up to the discrimination against Métis people, non-Métis people may collectively choose to disregard the oppressive colonial history and the discriminatory institutions still in effect today, in order to enjoy a life free from shame. By treating

Métis people as invisible subjects and silencing them in political and social settings, people in the mainstream Canadian society can hide the collective shame they experience.

Furthermore, the invisibility of Métis rights can be attributed to Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of Mauviase foi, or bad faith. According to Sartre, people often lie to themselves to spare themselves from short term pain, but suffer from long-term psychological impoverishment. Bad faith rests on the assumption that human beings are aware of their freedom and power to change at least themselves or features of their condition (Beckles-Raymond, 2020). Thus, framing the oppression against the Métis as unavoidable, a common practice adopted by non-Métis people, is a sign of bad faith since it denies people's ability to alter aspects of their circumstance that support racism. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes a café waiter who is "play-acting" at being a waiter and denying his freedom of pursuing other options in life (Reynolds and Renaudie, 2022). Similarly, non-Métis people may reduce Métis people to ostensible identities such as "half-breeds" and "unsophisticated" in the same way that the café waiter institutionalized himself as a café waiter, and reassure themselves that the systematic oppression against Métis people does not exist, and that even if it does, they have no other option but to obey the system, thereby sparing themselves from guilt and the responsibility to perpetuate change.

**Suggestions and possibilities**

To address the invisible, intersectional discrimination against the Métis that has been presented in this paper, several suggestions and possibilities could be considered.

First, the government should amend the Canadian education system to foster historical consciousness and mutual respect towards Métis people. Because the education system is the main source of knowledge for most students, it should cover accurate and comprehensive information on Métis people. Local ministries of education, schools, colleges, and universities should be held responsible for identifying and confronting the prejudices and misinformation about the Métis embedded in course content, administrative decisions, and the mindset of teacher, faculty, and staff (Schaefli et al., 2018). Provincial ministries of education should also work to actively incorporate contents related to Métis history, identity, and culture, as well as information about systematic oppression and intersectional discrimination against the Métis into textbooks and course curriculums to shed light on these invisible oppressions. Schools should also establish programs that empower Métis women. For example, the federal government could work with secondary schools and universities to help Métis women build self-esteem and discover with more career options apart from sex trade and domestic work, thus empowering them emotionally and financially to have the ability to leave violent situations.

Second, Métis people could use group affiliation as a psychological strategy to reinforce their ethnicity (Hayes, 2017). The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls interim report points out that indigenous people's loss of self-determination is a root cause of the invisible violence they experience (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls). By becoming aware of the individuality and originality of their ethnicity and culture, Métis people can distance themselves from their oppressors and create new social rules that suit themselves and challenge the existing social ontology (Hayes, 2017). This process constructs social belonging and ethnic legitimacy, thus mitigating the negative effects of the invisibility experienced by Métis people.

Third, Métis people could cooperate with First Nations and the Inuit to constitute a more powerful voice in the Canadian social and political system to defend indigenous rights. Currently, the intergroup conflicts between indigenous communities diminish the collective power of indigenous peoples in Canada. While all indigenous groups are battling a post-colonial administration to secure rights for their community, it is nearly impossible to prevent severe intergroup violence. However, "Beginning to see the differences between contemporary Indian and Métis communities as distinct branches of the same root might bring about the possibility of working together for common goals" (Lawrence, 2004). An alliance between the Métis, First Nations, and the Inuit could mitigate the lateral violence against the Métis and create a stronger voice to combat oppressive institutions and defend indigenous rights.

Fourth, policymakers should implement structural changes to the funding system to invest more money and resources in Métis communities. Examples include setting up federal committees and introducing frequent investigations on Métis women to understand their needs, and building resources around those needs; establishing justice education workshops in Métis communities to help Métis people advocate for their rights in court; investigating the systemic racism within the justice system, especially courts and prisons in Western provinces, and allocating funds for federal supervision and reform; including Métis people in federal indigenous healthcare programs, including providing them with healthcare insurance and the same priority in vaccination as First Nations and Inuit; establishing HIV education workshops to teach members of the Métis community, particularly Métis women, about HIV prevention, to reduce contraction risk and the stigma surrounding HIV; providing free diversity, equity & inclusion training for healthcare workers that work in indigenous healthcare clinics to help them become sensitive to the needs of Métis patients and build a culturally-safe environment; allocating federal funding and resources to Northern Ontario and the Prairies, such as establishing health clinics around Métis communities; providing equal and safe medical transportation for all indigenous peoples, ideally transporting patients with plane instead of bus over long distances; initiating financial support programs for Métis women to increase their enrollment in higher education; providing staff training in education institutions to raise awareness on protecting Métis rights and combating misinformation; incentivizing companies to hire more Métis women

by providing funding for free training programs for young workers, enhancing federal supervision to ensure equal payment across all genders, scheduling mandatory diversity, equity & inclusion training for company employees, and encouraging companies to include Métis women in their recruiting and leadership teams; etc. Overall, because Métis women experience several added layers of oppression, the Canadian government should allocate more funding to Métis women to address their needs, which are comparatively more urgent than other minority groups in Canada.

Lastly, conversations are important to bridge the gap within the Métis community and with other indigenous groups. Because Métis people, especially Métis women, have been collectively oppressed for generations, it is important to initiate conversations around the oppressions they faced, foster common understanding of the status of Métis people in society, and collectively formulate solutions on rebuilding a resilient Métis community. Through conversations within the Métis community, gaps can be bridged between the young and the old, people of different genders, and people living in different geographical locations, which helps construct a collective, powerful Métis identity. Similarly, the federal government could provide funding for Métis people to connect with other oppressed groups around the world, such as the Maori people of New Zealand and the Saami of northern Europe, to learn from each other's struggles and adopt useful strategies for community building and rights advocacy to tackle the intersectional oppression the Métis experience.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed how Métis women are victims of discrimination based on not only their race, but also their gender, age, health status, geographical location, sexual orientation, and relationship with First Nations. The intersectional discrimination Métis women experience stemmed from colonialism, mono-racism, patriarchy, and prejudices, and are made invisible in the public sphere due to purposeful omission in the education curriculum, White innocence, color-blind racism, collective shame, and Mauvaise foi. Métis people experience an added laryer of oppression within the already marginalized indigenous community in Canada, while Métis women are further disadvantaged in the Métis community due to their gender, age, and several other identity factors. Although Métis women only constitute a small minority in the Canadian population, according to the intersectionality theory, the invisible, multilayered oppression they face resembles that of people belonging to diverse social categories, such as indigenous peoples outside of Canada and other minorities. Thus, this paper also highlights the potential intersectional discrimination experienced by other minority groups, which is often an overlooked dimension in anti-oppressive studies. The suggestions and possibilities to address the oppressive social structures covered in this paper are also applicable to other racial, gender, and age minority groups.

In today's society, diversity, equity, and inclusion have become increasingly important in political and social discourses. However, while heavy emphasis is placed on protecting the rights of Black, Asian, Hispanic, and First Nations people in Canada, the voices of the Métis remain silent. Through the analysis on the invisible, intersectional discrimination against Métis women, it is lamentable to conclude that 259 years after colonialism ended in Canada, we are still dealing with the dark side of history today. However, hope and possibilities of change remain. Feminist and civil rights movements have acquired great success in the 20th century and continue to thrive today in the Black Lives Matter and MeToo campaigns, and the 21st century has seen significant improvements in LGBTQ2S+ rights. If actions are taken, the same improvement could be seen with the Métis. English philosopher Francis Bacon famously affirmed that "Knowledge is power." To build a world where people live without fear and embrace each other regardless of race, gender, or age, we need to first beome aware of the discrimination that marginalized communities such as the Métis still face. As stated by James Baldwin, "We (the oppressed) cannot be free until they (the oppressors) are free" (Baldwin, 1962). Métis people, especially Métis women, cannot be free until non-Métis people are freed from the dark side of history by understanding that the legacies of colonialism and patriarchy still exist today, in institutions such as the healthcare, education, and justice systems, as well as in interpersonal interactions at home and within communities.

In addition to learning about the invisible, intersectional discrimination against Métis women, it is of equal importance to think about the actions we can take as individuals to bring visibility to Métis women and help protect their rights in both the public and private sphere. Suggestions and possibilities include petitioning the federal government to amend the education system and funding system to foster historical consciousness and invest more resources in Métis communities; encouraging Métis people to use group affiliation to reinforce their identity, and form minority alliances with First Nations and Inuit; fostering conversations within the Métis community and between the Métis and other minority groups around the world, to provoke mutual learning and understanding; and so on. The road towards Truth and Reconciliation is long; becoming aware of the intersectional and invisible oppression against Métis women is a good beginning.

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