

Does Gender Have a Place in Greenspace Planning? Feminist Perspectives and the Toronto Ravine Strategy

by

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Abstract

This paper addresses the intersection of gender, planning and greenspace by analyzing the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* and the planning process behind it. Through my investigation I conducted a literature review and interviewed participants of the Strategy to explore the research question, “Did gender play a role within the planning process of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*?” I determine that it has not, proven by participants acknowledging a need to plan for difference, but not necessarily for gender. I explore the nature/culture dichotomy in greenspace that emerged from my research and how this could explain why participants were unwilling or unable to see the importance of considering gender. I introduce the connection between gender, greenspace and planning and define these key terms. I also include a review of literature on feminist political ecology, gender and planning/greenspace, women-friendly design features, how urban forests are political spaces, and explore the history of the *Ravine Strategy*. I reinforce the importance of the feminist methodologies/methods that informed my data collection and provide details about how I collected my data. My results review quotes from participants, as I connect my findings to the broader field of feminist literature. I conclude with future recommendations for the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*. Through my paper I address how we need to plan for difference and address this gap in how greenspaces are planned.

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Finally, to the women who have come before me—thank you for courageously paving the way and allowing us to walk behind you.

Foreword

My interest in equity and park access is born out of both my academic experiences and my lived experience as a woman. When it was time to refine my research question, I was hesitant to write a feminist paper. I felt compelled, yet scared, because being a woman is both empowering and dwarfing. Throughout this deliberation process, I watched predominant women in planning of whom I know and whom I admire on television, get insulted and dismissed because of their gender. It soon became clear to me that I *had* to explore a feminist research question. Gender is still something that was not discussed openly in the planning world and women's access and preferences did not seem to be considered when talking about planning. I am grateful for the opportunity to draw from my experiences and combine it with academia to produce work that is both meaningful to myself and contemporary society.

This paper is one component of my Plan of Study, which fulfils several of my learning objectives. The Area of Concentration of my Plan of Study investigates the intersection of the social determinants of health, feminist political ecology, access to greenspace and urban planning, all while asking the fundamental question, "how can planners plan more accessible greenspaces in urban areas?" My paper does not address the social determinants of health, however it was a theory that was key in my understanding of greenspace and access in other components of my Plan of Study. This Paper fulfils three of my learning objectives: "To gain awareness of the range of ways that greenspaces are planned in Ontario" through studying the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* as a public policy document, "To develop deep knowledge of feminist political ecology and learn how it fits into the broader school of political ecology", a foundational feminist theory behind my research and lastly "To explore approaches to planning that integrate gendered experiences" through interviewing participants of the *Ravine Strategy* and asking questions about gender.

I would also like to acknowledge my positionality in writing this Paper. As a white, Cisgender female I write from a privileged perspective and have considered the complicated nature of intersectionality.

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I. Introduction

Simply considered, feminist perspectives are important to planning, including greenspace planning, because space is inherently gendered (Rocheleau, 1996, p. 4-5). How women enjoy, access and use greenspace is different than how men enjoy, access and use greenspace; these differences are not just biological but are strongly rooted in socioeconomic differences (Flynn et al., 1994; Fainstein and Servon, 2005; Virden and Walker, 1999). This point has been explored in literature by several fields of academia including gender studies, planning studies, health studies, recreational and leisure studies, to name a few. The idea of gender and greenspace planning has also been previously explored specifically within the context of Toronto (see Whitzman, 2002). I decided to analyze whether gender is presently considered when planning greenspace in Toronto by studying the *Ravine Strategy* which was recently adopted in October 2017. My research question that I explored through reviewing literature and interviewing several people involved in the creation of the strategy was “Has gender played a part in the planning process of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*?” I conclude that despite the fact that research suggests that we do need to plan for women and plan for gendered differences with regard to greenspace, still today not much is intentionally being done to make greenspaces more inclusive to women.

While I recognize that ravines are only one type of greenspace within Toronto’s greenspace hierarchy (see the *Parks Plan 2013-2017*), the ravines are often referred to as the “physical soul of the city” because of their significance to the City as a whole (*Toronto Ravine Strategy Draft Principles*, 2017, p. 2). This significance is also proven by the fact that the ravine system encompasses 11,000 hectares of land or 17 per cent of Toronto’s total land area (*Toronto Ravine Strategy*, 2017, p. 6), which is a substantial part of the city. The *Toronto Ravine Strategy* is the policy document to guide decision-making primarily by the City, but also to influence any decisions made by other agencies or organizations, such as local neighbourhood non-profit groups (“Friends of” groups) and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority. The Strategy outlines five guiding principles: protect, invest, connect, partner and celebrate. Each guiding principle has specific actions and strategies, while the document highlights successful case studies.

Outline of Paper

Chapter One of this Paper (this chapter) *The Introduction* introduces my research question, the significance of studying gender and greenspace planning and defines key concepts. As well, the connections between gender, greenspace and planning are established.

The second chapter *Methodologies and Methods* reveals and defines the feminist methodology behind my research. It also explains how I collected my data through conducting interviews of people involved with the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* process. This chapter establishes the importance of feminist methodology and feminist research methods to the investigation of my research question.

The third chapter *Literature Review* provides a review on literature that is pertinent to my research, which includes justifying how urban forests are political spaces, using Feminist political ecology to demonstrate how gender is related to control and access over resources, and exploring the history and relevance of gender and planning and gender and greenspace. Gender and greenspace design is comprehensively discussed, and I advocate for specific design strategies to make greenspaces more inclusive to women. The *Toronto Ravine Strategy* document is also reviewed.

The fourth chapter *Results* presents the data I collected through my interviews in the form of quotations. Data is presented under the following themes: general observations, the role of gender, nature/culture divide (“Protect” versus “Celebrate”) and challenges to women-friendly design features.

The fifth chapter *Discussion* concludes that gender was not considered in the creation of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*. I argue that this is due to the Strategy’s use of the “park user” as one solitary group of people, which does not support the dissection and unravelling of this contested term. This resulted in participants being able to understand other factors of access, but not gender. I also argue that gender was not considered in the Toronto Ravine Strategy because features which I believe would specifically address gendered access/preferences (washrooms, lighting, trail development) were not considered in the making of the strategy and are inherently challenging to incorporate into the ravines. Participants argued that these design features would compromise ecological integrity which leads to my conclusion that the prioritization of

ecological principles actually has the potential of disproportionately negatively affecting women's access to ravines and greenspace.

The sixth chapter *Recommendations* connects my research question back into the significance of gender and greenspace planning. By exploring gender and greenspace, it will become evident why and how gender can be used as a lens when planning urban greenspace and how we need to plan for difference. Through this Paper, I hope to contribute to the broader field of planning equitable greenspaces that are more inclusive to different groups of people, specifically more inclusive to women.

To set the framework for this Paper, several complicated and contested terms will be defined: gender/women (including intersectionality), greenspace and planning. My research question is directly at the intersection of these three concepts.

Gender/Women/Intersectionality

I understand gender as a socially constructed concept, one that changes throughout cultures and time. Fainstein and Servon (2005, p. 3) sufficiently defined the contemporary use of the concept of gender when they state (building on Nelson's "Feminism and Economics", 1995): "What do we mean by gender and how do we use it as a category of analysis? Gender is too often thought of as a synonym for "women". It is frequently mistakenly thought of as stemming from the essential biological differences between women and men. Sex has to do with biology, while gender refers to the associations, stereotypes, and social patterns that a culture constructs on the basis of actual or perceived differences between men and women...Gender is about roles and relationships, about differentials in power and access to resources". I agree with this definition as Fainstein and Servon discussed gender on the systemic, structural scale, rather than just the expression of an individual.

I recognize and respect that there is an entire gender spectrum, where there are not just two gender identities ("man" or "woman") but a wide range of different identities that an individual can identify with or express. Planning for gender does not necessarily mean planning for women. I want to clear that due to scope and research interests I will be discussing women and greenspace planning. "Women" meaning people who self-identify with the sociocultural associations of the "woman" gender identity. Although I refer to "women" as a unitary group, I

do acknowledge that feminist research cannot forget about the differences amongst women (Madge et al., 1997, p. 96). The concept of gender and gendered differences provides the justification that there are many different park users and in homogenizing the one “park user”, gendered considerations and perspectives are lost.

My understanding of gender is also supported by the concept of intersectionality, a concept defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her landmark article, “Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics” (1995). Crenshaw (1995), while identifying both as a woman and as an African-American, found it challenging to identify with both “feminist theory” and “antiracist policy discourse”. In her article she discussed how different socioeconomic factors (race, gender, etc.) all play a role in policy discourse. Crenshaw (1995, p. 140) argued that “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated”. It could perhaps be argued that my Paper, looking only at “women” as a category of analysis, is advocating the “single axis framework” that Crenshaw was arguing against. However, I would argue that I was mindful of intersectionality throughout my research and that future research has the potential to build upon my results in taking a more intersectional approach.

Greenspace

My understanding of greenspace has been shaped by the City of Toronto’s *Parks Plan 2013-2017* and the Plan’s definition of parkland— “Any land and land covered by water, facilities, vegetation, buildings and structures that is managed by Parks, Forestry and Recreation and used as public open space or a golf course” (p. 7). The *Parks Plan* also classifies parks into a hierarchy of: parkettes, neighbourhood parks, community parks, district parks and city parks (p.77-81). I like this interpretation as it is open, inclusive and considers a variety of greenspaces regardless of size or quality. Although the *Parks Plan* and the *Ravine Strategy* use the language “parks” or “parkland”, I have chosen to use the word “greenspace” in my research, as not everyone considers urban forests as a “park”. The relevance and importance of greenspaces in Toronto is captured in the *Ravine Strategy* (2017, p. 9) when it states “Urban greenspace is absolutely essential to the health of residents and for building liveable cities. As noted in a 2015

study by Toronto Public Health, greenspaces, like Toronto's ravines, improve the physical health, mental health and wellbeing of urban residents".

Planning

As stated by Hall and Tewdwr-Jones (2010, p. 1-9), planning is an incredibly general and ambiguous term which is often applied broadly to a wide range of activities. Formerly referred to as "town planning", urban planning is oftentimes referring to as spatial planning where the general objective is to "provide for a spatial structure of activities (or of land use) which in some way is better than the pattern existing without planning" according to Hall and Tewdwr-Jones (2010, p. 3). I would agree with this definition however I would also add that planning can take various shapes and forms and is not just formal and official planning and decision-making. The definition should also include city-building that is done through ordinary citizens in their everyday lives, in how people understand and interpret space. A key component in understanding this definition of planning is understanding that space is political, and is arguably, inherently gendered (Rocheleau, 1996, p. 4-5). These terms (gender/women/intersectionality, greenspace and planning) are used extensively throughout my Paper and in providing definitions, it will help illustrate how I concluded that gender did not play a role in the planning process of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* and the overall significance of gender in greenspace planning.

II. Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this Chapter is to outline the methodology and methods that informed my research and to illustrate why I chose these specific approaches to situate my Paper within the field of feminist literature. I discuss how I adopted a feminist methodology, why qualitative research methods (and interviews specifically) were most appropriate method for my data collection and specify the individual stages of my data collection, transcribing/coding and analyzing while acknowledging my limitations.

Feminist Methodology

The foundation of my methodology was derived from the chapter "Methods and methodologies in feminist geographies: politics, practice and power" by Clare Madge, Parvati Raghuram, Tracey Skelton, Kate Willis and Jenny Williams in the text *Feminist Geographies*

(1997). As I studied feminist political ecology and feminist perspectives, it became evident that since I was asking a feminist research question, my research should be rooted in feminist methodology and epistemology. Feminist methodology is a response to positivism and suggests that the researcher is perhaps not separate from the observed (Madge et al., 1997). Madge et al. (1997) described feminist methodology as rethinking categories and definitions used to formulate theories in geography, examining methods used for defining problems and considering the processes involved. Feminist epistemology, feminist methodology and feminist research practice, all defined in the “Method and methodologies” chapter of the *Feminist Geographies* text (Madge et al., 1997) were key in influencing the methodology for my research.

Madge et al. (1997, p. 87) discussing and defining feminist epistemology, stated:

Feminism challenges traditional epistemologies of what are considered valid forms of knowledge. Feminist epistemology has redefined the knower, knowing and the known. It questions notions of ‘truth’ and validates ‘alternative sources of knowledge’, such as subjective experience. Feminist epistemology stresses the non-neutrality of the researcher and the power relations involved in the research process. It also contests boundaries between “fieldwork” and everyday life, arguing that we are always in the ‘field’.

As I uncovered power relations amongst the actors involved in the creation of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*, this term became incredibly relevant. The “truths” I was questioning in my research was what made it into the Strategy (what was validated), and the “alternative sources of knowledge” that Madge et al. (1997) referred to were the different ideas and ideologies that other actors proposed during the planning process, or the mindsets that they had brought to the table.

Complementing feminist epistemology is the concept of feminist methodology. Madge et al. (1997, p.87) defined this as a methodology that is “committed to challenging oppressive aspects of socially constructed gender relations (whether these act alone or in conjunction with other oppressive relations based on race, class, sexuality, etc.). This approach recognises the social relations of research and has emancipatory goals for all those involved in the research process, leading to social change”. My research into *the Toronto Ravine Strategy* examined what

socially constructed ideas were present in the discussion and discourse around the Strategy, regardless of whether those ideas were obvious or not.

Feminist research practice, the last key term that informed my feminist methodology, is defined by Madge et al. (1997, p. 87-88) as encompassing:

...all aspects of the feminist research process, i.e. the questioning of what is knowledge, the methodology involved, and the actual techniques used to create the knowledge. While a differentiation is made between method, methodology and epistemology the way in which a method is used will be affected by the epistemological and methodological perspective. Thus, in reality these three terms are interconnected. The term 'research practice' may therefore be used to encompass all three terms and to highlight their interrelationships. When the explicit intention behind the research is feminist, then the term 'feminist research practice' may be used.

The idea of "what is knowledge" would refer to what was considered in the making of the Strategy, what information was validated and included. The methodology in Madge et al.'s (1997) concept of feminist research practices was relevant as I explored the *process* of the Strategy. The concepts of feminist epistemology, feminist methodology and feminist research practice, as defined in the cornerstone text of *Feminist Geographies* (1997) informed my research and provided me with a foundation to ensure that my data collection, analysis and written observations were conducted in a feminist matter. This was important to me, as my research question deals with feminist ideology.

Qualitative Research Methods

My research methods were deductive and followed qualitative research method practices. I chose qualitative research methods for my Major Paper as it is a method I am familiar with, and because it is a method that is consistent with both feminist research, as discussed in *Feminist Geographies*, (1997). As well, since my research question deals with research on public policy, Salter's "How to Research Public Issues" (2013) also recommends qualitative research methods. Madge et al. (1997) discussed the benefits and limitations of both qualitative and quantitative research methods when conducting feminist research. However, the benefits and qualities of qualitative research methods seemed to fit better with my research question. This is

due in part, to the fact that qualitative research methods aim to “explore the processes producing a particular event and to promote detailed understanding of socio-spatial experiences” which creates space to forefront women’s experiences (Madge et al., 1997, p. 92). Qualitative research methods allow for an in-depth analysis into social processes, where gender can be used as a category of analysis. An additional benefit of qualitative research methods is that not only can these methods give context and depth to women’s experiences, but they can also give credit to *differences* amongst women, recognizing and appreciating intersectionality, rather than clumping many women under one statistic (Madge et al., 1997, p. 92-93).

As articulated by Madge et al. (1997), feminism promotes “plurality of methods where method choice depends on what is appropriate, comfortable and effective”. Ultimately, the research methods should be appropriate to the research question, but should also meet broad feminist goals. Qualitative research methods can give space for life histories and stories, “giving a voice to those who have often been silenced by dominant discourse” (Madge et al., 1997). I wanted my research to emphasize individuals’ lived experiences with the planning process of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*.

Qualitative research methods are not only appropriate and effective because this is a feminist paper, but also because my research deals with public policy. My investigation into the planning process of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* is supported by the comprehensive policy review guide by R.L Liora Salter, *How to Research Public Issues* (2013). Salter (2013) states that policy is never just about the finished product, but also about the deliberations that went into the document. This is the justification for examining the planning process behind the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* rather than only reading the polished document. Salter (2013) states, “Finding out about the interests, motives, perspectives, inclinations and actions of all the actors will provide you with a strong inkling of why particular decisions were made, policies adopted, and laws repealed”. I identified that the best way to learn these interests and perspectives Salter discussed was through interviews. By conducting interviews, I gained an understanding of the role of participants, explored the subtleties of what interviewees say, and learned how “personal and political relations were played out” (Salter, 2013).

Qualitative methods undoubtedly do have limitations. Interviewing people in-depth about experiences can be triggering and not everyone wants to be politicized by being involved

in research. There is also always the potential of qualitative research (like any other research method) being extractive and exploitative to the researched community/individuals. Madge et al. (1997, p. 91-93) warn researchers of this academic voyeurism and suggest solutions such as being honest about: research, ethical dilemmas and outcomes of the research process. An additional limitation of qualitative research is that oftentimes it is not as accepted by policy makers, who tend to prefer “hard” or “objective” data (Madge et al., 1997, p. 91-92). Despite understanding and acknowledging these limitations, the feminist benefits of qualitative research methods prove it is the most appropriate method choice to explore my question of whether or not gender played a role in the planning process of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*.

Research Design

Dialogical processes such as interviews, are often acknowledged by feminist researchers as potentially less extractive, as they can seem more like a conversation (Madge et al., 1997, p. 92-93). Specifically with a semi-structured interview format, the interview process itself has the potential of becoming a tool where the participants can learn from their own experiences and gives them the platform to discuss things how they would like to. This can lead to the added benefit of participants using the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and become empowered (Madge et al., 1997, p. 92-93).

While interviews can offer a platform for individuals to share their stories, it is important to acknowledge that there are limitations to speech and text, where other forms of expression (art, music, etc.) are often not considered (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Despite these potential limitations, interviews ended up being an effective method of understanding the ideas and perspectives that were behind the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*.

Data Collection

Selection of Participants

Salter (2013) states in her online book *How to research public issues* that research on public issues should focus on “including individuals who have specific knowledge, were participants in meetings or involved with decision-making”. This is the rationality I used to selected participants for my research. Fortunately, many of the participants involved with the

Toronto Ravine Strategy process were publicly available online through reports and meeting minutes. I initially compiled a long list of 20 participants (from a variety of organizations) who seemed very involved with the process of the Strategy/Advisory Board. I created a list of qualifiers that were important to my research, which included; the majority of participants being women with 1-2 men participants, 1-2 participants who work for the City, at least one academic and at least one member of the public (with no organizational affiliation). This initial list of people eventually snowballed into recommendations of who else to include and the final list was also influenced by who was available and willing to be interviewed.

My decision to include men in my research despite this being a feminist paper is influenced by my understanding of feminist research the Introductory chapter in *Feminist Geographies* (1997). Rose et al. (1997, p. 3) stated that “We want to make explicit that feminist practice is not something which most in this collective take to be inherently tied to female experience: most in this collective are not of the opinion that feminism is the exclusive prerogative of women”. Rose et al.’s perspective of the role of the male experience in feminist studies, stems from the work of renowned gender theorists Joan Scott and Judith Butler, in their text *Feminists Theorize the Political*, 1992.

Materials

The materials I used in my research design include a notebook and pen, a Sony voice recorder, my laptop and NCH’s “Express Scribe Transcription Software”.

Design

The design of my interviews started with first creating a list of questions to ask my participants. There were two versions, one specifically for City staff members (because I was curious of their role as facilitators/leaders of the Strategy) and one for all other participants. Questions for the interviews were created after I had a foundational understanding of the Strategy and after I had completed my literature review. I intentionally kept questions open-ended to discourage any leading and to support the semi-structured nature of the interviews. When creating the draft questions, I applied knowledge I had previously gained completing interviews. A sample of my interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Procedure – Interviews

I conducted eight interviews over the course of one month, March 2018. Interviews were conducted in a variety of spaces, based on each participant's preference. My intent was to have all the interviews conducted in neutral spaces (i.e. coffee shops, libraries), however some participants preferred to have their interview at their place of work. The inconsistency in location is something that may have affected participants' comfort level, as those interviewed in familiar places may felt more relaxed and comfortable. The length of interviews varied from half an hour to an hour and a half.

I intentionally did not tell participants in advance about the connection between gender and/or feminism and greenspace, in hopes of eliciting natural and honest answers to my questions. Some participants did ask for more information regarding why I was asking about gender and what gender had to do with ravines, in which case I gave them a short explanation of how gender may influence access and/or preferences of greenspace. Ultimately, I did not want participants to answer my questions based on *my* understanding of gender and greenspace, but rather based on their own understandings and opinions. All interviews were recorded on a voice recorder so they could later be transcribed and I also took notes during the interview. Each interview concluded with a quick debrief where the participant had the opportunity to add anything they had not yet had the chance to state.

Procedure – Transcribing and Analyzing

Interviews were transcribed shortly after they had concluded to ensure my memory was fresh. While I transcribed I had to make decisions regarding punctuation, filtering, and how I would incorporate slang. I decided from the start that I would type everything verbatim, including the "ums", "likes", and duplication of words. This made coding more challenging, however it helped me transcribe faster. All punctuation used in my transcripts were assumed based on patterns of speech and breath.

After all interviews had been transcribed, I began coding and analyzing. Data analysis was based on techniques I learned from Ryan and Bernard's (2003) article *Techniques to Identify Themes*. Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 85) outlined four steps in analyzing text: discovering themes and subthemes, narrowing themes to a "manageable" number, building hierarchies of

themes, and link themes to theoretical models. My themes were derived from my prior theoretical understanding of gender and greenspace (priori themes), however I was flexible and open-minded to themes that emerged from my data. Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 89-94) outlined several signs of themes that researchers should look for when analyzing data, which I found valuable: repetitions, indigenous typologies, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data, and theory-related material. I created a data summary table which showed key themes and concepts in one column and quotes in the second column, to organize quick examples. After I coded all my transcripts once and had a working list of themes, I went over all the transcripts again to add codes I may have missed the first time.

I felt this approach to coding worked well, however if I repeated this investigation, next time I would condense the quotes earlier on in the process to make it easier for managing text. If I had highlighted repeated words in each transcript, or utilized a qualitative data analysis software like NVivo, I may have been able to analyze and process my data faster.

Limitations

During my interviews I encountered several limitations. Many participants struggled with remembering details, because the Strategy planning process had concluded about a year prior. Another limitation was that participants often got off topic and spoke about things that were not relevant to my research question or even relevant to the Strategy. A third limitation would be that some participants kept going back to the text in the Strategy, instead of discussing their opinions or perspective on their involvement, despite the fact that I stated at the beginning of each interview that I was familiar with (and not interested in) the content. I think it's also important to acknowledge that with the researcher/researched power dynamic, comes a unique set of limitations or potential limitations. There was an obvious power imbalance as I (the academic) asked questions and the participant politely answered. It was challenging to make the interview feel like a natural conversation. I often wondered if participants were telling me just what I wanted to hear, or if they were filtering their thoughts. At certain points in the interviews it seemed like participants were trying to seem very politically correct and not have a clear opinion on more contentious issues. Additionally, due to time and scope, I could only interview eight participants and thus the small sample size could have produced limitations.

Through this chapter, I have outlined the feminist methodology behind my research, including the concepts of feminist epistemology, feminist methodology and feminist research practice. I also explained the justification of using qualitative research methods and interviews, discussed in-depth the process of my data collection/transcription/analyzing and coding, while highlighting my limitations. Having a methodology and research methods that were consistent with, and enforced feminist values and ideologies, provided me with a strong foundation to analyze my research question of whether or not gender played a role within the Toronto Ravine Strategy.

III. Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the literature that I consulted as part of my research. The sub-topics of urban forests as political spaces, feminist political ecology, gender and planning, gender and greenspace planning and gender and greenspace design emerged from my Plan of Study and coursework as relevant topics to my research question. I also provide a review of the Toronto Ravine Strategy as a policy document. This chapter is meant to provide background and context to the different components of my research question and to summarize the currents of thought and practice.

Urban Forests as Political Spaces

Urban forests, like any other type of greenspace, are politically charged and affected by human processes and sociocultural influences. As stated by Heynen, Perkins and Roy in their article “The Political Ecology of Uneven Urban Green Space” (2006, p. 4), “Urban forests are too often seen as naturally occurring”. Heynen, prime academic in urban political ecology, stated that, “Urban environmental change and the interrelated complex of economic, political, and cultural processes that have primarily been responsible for producing urban environments are of growing interest to radical geographers. This is because urban environmental landscapes that result from these processes tend to favor the urban elite at the expense of marginalized individuals and groups” (Heynen, 2003 p. 981). Political ecology and urban political ecology critique who makes decisions around nature, how social production of nature leads to unevenly distributed environmental benefits (environment injustice), commodification of nature and how these produce urban forests which entrench past and present structural processes (Heynen,

Perkins and Roy, 2006). Previously, urban political ecology and political ecology have examined factors like class and capitalism, however as Feminist political ecology has confirmed, gender is indeed another sociocultural influence in how we use greenspace, access green space and perceive greenspace.

Heynen's article, *The Scalar Production of Injustice within the Urban Forest* (2003) not only discusses the breadth and depths of urban political ecology, but also brings attention to "nature/society dialectics", a crucial component when considering urban political ecology. Heynen (2003) argues these nature/society dialectics are important because "environments that are produced through urban political-economic dynamics feed back into the continued reproduction of urban environments" (p. 981). Additionally, Heynen (2003, p. 981) stated, "The ecological patterns that are produced substantially affect the quality of life in cities. While ecology is important for considering the ramifications of urban environmental change, understanding the production of urban environments necessitates an explicit focus on social processes. Humans metabolize nature, as do other living organisms. However, economic, political, and cultural processes govern human metabolization". Heynen (2003) concisely summarized how urban forests, although seemingly naturally occurring and perhaps even "untouched" are in fact produced and are impacted by social processes. I would argue that within the economic, political and cultural processes Heynen discusses as affecting human's interaction with nature, gender plays a role.

Heynen (2003, p. 995) quoting FitzSimmons (1989) stated that "Without theoretical consideration of the social construction of nature, in its geographical and intellectual manifestations, we restrict ourselves to a partial view of the real geography of capitalism". Similarly I would argue that without theoretical considerations of the social construction of nature, we restrict ourselves to a partial view of the real geography also with respect to gender. There is clearly a need to study urban forests, not just within the urban political ecology framework, but additionally, through a gender lens (i.e. Feminist political ecology).

Through Heynen's individual work (2003), as well as his work with Perkins and Roy (2006), it is evident how urban forests are particularly political spaces through structural processes, decisions about nature and the social construction of nature. This provides justification as to why ravines, managed through the *Ravine Strategy* need to be looked at

through a political critique. I argue that the structural, economic, political and cultural processes that Heynen (2003) is referring to can be further dissected and applied with a gendered lens. Gender is one of the sociocultural influences that affects our decisions, access and interpretations of greenspace, which will be further explored in the review of Feminist political ecology.

Feminist Political Ecology

Feminist political ecology took the political ecology school of thought and bridged it with feminist thought. My understanding of Feminist political ecology is derived primarily from Rocheleau et al. (1996), supplemented by Elmhirst (2011) and Mollett & Faria (2013). A sub-field of political ecology, Feminist political ecology is a conceptual framework coined by Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayer and Wangari in the landmark text: *Feminist political ecology: global issues and local experiences*, published in 1996. Rocheleau et al. (1996) bridged together several schools of feminist scholarship (ecofeminism, feminist environmentalism, social feminism, feminist poststructuralism and environmentalism) and drew parallels between scholarly fields of feminist cultural ecology, political ecology, feminist geography and feminist political economy (p. 3-4). Feminist political ecology is formed on the assumption that interests, experiences, and responsibilities of “nature” and environments” is gendered (Rocheleau et al., 1996). Rocheleau et al. (1996) linked Feminist political ecology back to political ecology in stating that “decision-making processes, and social, political, economic context, shape environmental politics and practices” (p. 4). Political ecology focuses on the “uneven distribution of, access to and control over resources, on the basis of class and ethnicity”, whereas Feminist political ecology highlights gender as the critical variable in access and control (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p 4).

Feminist political ecology informed my research through questions around who has power in deciding the definition of a “healthy” environment, and through what Rocheleau et al. (1996, p. 10) labeled, “gendered division of power to preserve, protect, change, construct, rehabilitate and restore environments and to regulate the actions of others”. Another relevant key argument that Rocheleau et al. (1996) expressed in *Feminist political ecology* is that women’s movements and rights (with regard to access) are often nestled within rights that are given to them by men (through men-led institutions, and still working within the patriarchal systems).

The response to Rocheleau et al. (1996) has been one of assimilation and retreat. Elmhirst (2011) argued that Feminist political ecology lost its momentum of flourishing as sub-field, due to being swallowed back up by political ecology and post-structuralism. Elmhirst (2011) insisted that Feminist political ecology must stand as a pedagogy on its own, to maintain a deep and outward feminist approach, in order to uphold its integrity. Feminist political ecology has also been critiqued for ignoring racism and women of colour. Mollett and Faria (2013, p. 117) suggested that this is due to political uneasiness with “stressing differences amongst women”, whiteness of researchers within the academy, and practical challenges in exploring a “messier notion” of gender. This point of intersectionality informs my research in that, although the scope of my research is not broad enough to address multiple socioeconomic indicators, these are current issues in the field of Feminist political ecology.

The majority of research conducted around Feminist political ecology is regarding sustainable development, with a particular focus on the global South. However, Rocheleau et al.’s (1996) open interpretation of “ecologically viable livelihoods”, “access to shaping resource access and control” and “the right to live and work in a healthy environment”, have opened pathways connecting the Feminist political ecology framework to issues of environmental justice and sustainable development within the global North.

Feminist political ecology is crucial to my research as it outlined the political nature of access and control of resources (greenspace) and shaped how I understand the nature/culture dichotomy through the lens of gender. It was key to the analysis of my research question because it equipped me with the tool to see how the ravines and used and managed through gender lens. Feminist political ecology justifies why we need to look at gender when managing natural resources, including planning for greenspace.

Gender and Planning

Urban planning currently is often mistakenly synonymous with building beautiful cities, grand architecture and place-making; however, it has quite the racist, classist and sexist roots. Not only was it exclusive as a profession (historically and arguably currently a profession dominated by white, middle-class men) however for many decades around the world, urban planning was utilized as a form of social control (Fainstein and Servon, 2005). Urban planning

and design have the power to create physical environments, and with that comes the creation of sociocultural landscapes, dictating how people move, what is acceptable behaviour in different places, and who is welcomed in certain places (Fainstein and Servon, 2005). Urban planning was, and still can be, used as a tool to oppress certain groups of people, including women.

Fainstein and Servon (2005) in their milestone text *Gender and Planning – a reader* discussed the evolution of the role of gender within planning, including patriarchal planning practices (such as zoning) that regulated women to private spaces. Fainstein and Servon (2005, p. 4-5) ask “what happens to planning issues when we look at them through the lens of gender?” and “how would solutions look differently if we take gender into account?” Fainstein and Servon (2005, p. 1-10) defined gender and planning as encompassing roles and relationships, differentials in power and access to resources (also see Marne, 2001 for planning as social control). Specifically, with regards to women and public spaces, Fainstein and Servon (2005) stated, “Women’s roles in the community are affected by and continue to affect their roles and responsibilities of within the household (private space)”, which implies that there is a blurring of lines and permeating the boundaries of private and public spheres (p. 117). Overall, Fainstein and Servon’s book (2006) serves as a milestone in the intersections of gender and planning, as the editors took foundational pieces and bridged them together as an overall suggestion of what planning should look like in the future.

The gendered roots of planning and the ways Fainstein and Servon advocated for looking at planning issues and solutions through a planning lens, provide justification for why gender needs to be considered with greenspace planning, and specifically with the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*. As I learned in my research, Fainstein and Servon are right—looking at the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* through a gendered lens, the planning issues and solutions change drastically.

Gender and Greenspace

I have discussed the role of gender and planning, broadly, which also applies to greenspace planning specifically. In 2009, Byrne and Wolch published “Nature, race and parks: past research and future directions for geographic research” in the journal *Progress in Human Geography*. Their comprehensive article reflected a wide range of research that had been conducted on park access and preference specifically with regard to race, gender and class.

Feminist academics and scholars have been writing about gender and greenspace since the 1990's, primarily with respect to safety/fear concerns, however Byrne and Wolch (2009) connected these ideas of gendered park access to the larger umbrella of environmental justice and equity in parks.

Research in health, leisure and recreational studies over the past 20 years has demonstrated that people use and access greenspace differently, and for different reasons (Eyler et al., 2002; Flynn et al., 1994; Ho et al., 2005; Nies et al., 1999; Phillip, 1997; Schenker, 1996; Virden and Walker, 1999). There are numerous studies that conclude that socioeconomic factors—such as race, class and gender have a direct correlation to use and access of greenspaces. Although I acknowledge that all of these factors are important in research, and that they tend to intersect and not affect individuals in isolation, the focus of this Paper is limited in scope to analyzing gender.

Research on gender and greenspace/parks covers a wide range of sub-topics including gender and recreation/leisure (see: Ho et al., 2005; Phillip, 1997; Schenker, 1996; Virden and Walker, 1999), health (see: Eyler et al., 2002; Flynn et al., 1994; Nies et al., 1999), gender and public spaces (see Marne, 2001; Ruddick, 1996; Schenker, 1996;) design and safety/fear (Koskela, 1999; Valentine, 1996 and 1990; Whitzman, 2002;). The most researched is safety and fear, and there have been a plethora of works raising concerns for the increased concerns around the safety of women in greenspaces. Schenker (1996, p. 302) while discussing gender and parks, stated, “Designed by men, these spaces reflect a mythic understanding of women’s circumstances and needs”. Schenker is acknowledging that women have different preferences and needs with regard to parks, which has been ignored for many years. This has ultimately created a disconnect in what exists in parkspace/greenspace and what women *actually* need or want in parks. This gap in what women need or want in greenspaces and how greenspaces are planned, is proof that we need to ensure gendered perspectives are included when planning greenspace. This justifies the importance and relevance of my research question of whether or not gender was considered with the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* and enforces my argument that gender perspectives need to be explicitly discussed, or else they may be missed.

With regard to gender and greenspace preferences, Phillip (1997, p. 193) stated, “It is not unreasonable to believe that [these three] sources of stratification and inequality may also be

associated with different leisure preferences and desired leisure benefits”. Additionally, Virden and Walker (1999) stated that there is not just a difference in leisure or greenspace preference, but a difference in what those spaces mean to individuals. The Virden and Walker article (1999) explores how different types of greenspace are perceived by different socioeconomic groups (race, gender). Virden and Walker (1999) discussed preference and greenspace more neutrally, stating that space is merely used differently by men and women. Virden and Walker (1999) concluded that female study participants felt that forest environments were more “threatening” (p. 235-236), which reinforces the need to study the ravines through the *Ravine Strategy*.

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman is well known for her research on gender and safety in public spaces. Her article, “Feminist activism for safer social space in high park, Toronto: how women got lost in the woods” (2002) is particularly relevant, as it focuses on High Park, a greenspace in Toronto (albeit not part of the Ravine system but closely related). Whitzman (2002) discussed the consequences of women and parks, and the many ways in which parks are not designed for women, while following the story of women fighting back to reclaim park space. Whitzman (2002) offers an optimistic, yet critical account, following the social movement that sparked after sexual assaults were occurring in High Park.

Whitzman (2002, p. 304) asked the question of who feels welcome in parks, and states that “it can be argued that women need urban parks more than men, because of lower incomes and less access to private transportation, which would allow them to “escape” the city”. Whitzman’s research on gender and High Park produced sound, practical solutions to address the sexual assault problems which included benches, telephones, light standards and directional signage. Whitzman’s work (2002, p. 300) was a keystone in legitimizing women’s issues and framing women as “actors in planning, not just victims”. Despite Whitzman’s efforts and the collaborative efforts that emerged from engaged women reclaiming High Park, Whitzman (2002, p. 309-310) admits in the conclusion of her article that safety concerns quickly fell off the radar of park planning/management due to restoration and “nature” concerns.

Through Byrne and Wolch (2009), Schenker (1996), Philipp (1997) and Whitzman (2002), with the support of other academics in related fields, I have illustrated how gender can impact both **access** and **use** of greenspace. If we continue to plan greenspaces based only on the

access and **use** for men, as historically executed, it is hard to imagine greenspaces where women feel welcome and can find enjoyment.

Gender and Greenspace Design

As already discussed in the section on Urban Forests, it is easy to forget that urban parks/greenspace, as naturally occurring as they may seem, are in fact designed by humans. From the look of the park, the functionality, what infrastructure and features are there, to sometimes what tree species will be planted/restored/removed, these are all decided by humans. In 1990, Gill Valentine, renowned feminist author, published an article in the *Built Environment* journal titled “Women and the Designed Environment”. Valentine’s article featured the findings of extensive interviews and group discussions she conducted with the women of Reading, England in the late 1980’s regarding fear and safety of women in public space (1990). The premise of her research was that fear (and subsequently safety) are very important factors which limit women’s’ everyday activities and decisions (1990, p. 288). Valentine concluded with a shopping list of 10 strategies/recommendations for planners and developers to adopt to make public spaces/places feel safer to women (1990). These strategies include:

1. **Location:** the positioning of car parks and entrances such that women do not have to walk down passageways to gain access to sites.
2. **Visibility at Doorways:** communal entrance doorways to lifts, stairwells etc. should be glazed so that women can see through them before entering.
3. **Lighting:** bright white rather than yellow lights should be used to maximize visibility.
4. **Paint Walls:** walls painted white, for example, in multi-storey car parks, improve visibility and make the space appear more open.
5. **Foot-bridges:** where possible foot-bridges should be constructed rather than subways.
6. **Alleyways/subways:** if these are absolutely necessary they should be as short and as wide as possible, with no overhanging vegetation, and provide maximum opportunity for surveillance from surrounding buildings. The entrance should be clearly visible in advance from the main pavement.
7. **Landscaping:** trees and shrubs should not be planted near pathways. Similarly, fences and walls should be minimized so that public areas are not screened from houses.

- Mounds and clumps of trees in recreational areas should be set well back from the edge because they obscure vision of the playing area from surrounding roads.
8. Ground Floor Development: where possible shops and leisure facilities should occupy the ground floor of office buildings so that alienating empty streets are not created.
 9. Fill-In: attempts should be made to clear derelict areas and to fill in gaps, empty spaces and waste areas between developments.
 10. Corners, dogleg bends: straight sight lines should be created where possible. If blind corners are necessary mirrors could be used to increase visibility. Similarly, doorways should open out on to the street rather than create indentations where people can be concealed.

Valentine's article, like most of her work discussed public spaces generally, thus not all of these recommendations are relevant to greenspace (1990). However, I believe that most of the above-noted strategies can be applied to park design and landscape architecture of parks; such as location of parking areas/entrances, ensuring good sightlines and visibility and ensure adequate lighting (especially for dusk and dawn users).

Valentine's conclusions were powerful. She explained how debilitating fear in public spaces for women can be, when she explained how fear affects and creates social norms of public spaces, "Because women cannot lead their lives if they are fearful of all men all the time, in order to maintain an illusion of control over their safety they need to know where and when they may encounter 'dangerous men' in order to avoid them. To do this they develop mental images of where violence occurs which are developed through the complex interaction and cumulative effect of first- and second-hand information sources. Through using these sources of information women transfer their threat appraisal from men to dangerous environmental contexts. Women's collective definition and avoidance of these contexts therefore creates social norms about women's appropriate use of space" (1990, p. 289).

Prior to her article in 1990, Valentine coined the phrase "geography of women's fear" (1989) which is a well-accepted concept in gender studies today. Valentine's principles on gender and safety in public spaces would eventually be built upon by Koskela. Koskela (1999) argued that gender is one of the most "crucial factors affecting fear of violence and geographical mobility in urban areas (p. 111) and that women will live a "spatially restricted life out of fear,

which in turn reminds women of their relatively powerless position” and therefore gender relations that produce urban spaces are reproduced through everyday practise of spatial behaviour (p. 112, p. 121). Valentine and Koskela’s work in tandem demonstrate how the narrative on women and safety in public spaces has shifted from fear of personal safety to the conclusion that a woman’s agency in her everyday movement is hindered by fear of public spaces, which brings to light questions of accessibility and agency. This reinforces why this work is so critical. Valentine (1990, p. 291) concluded that “...if through more thoughtful planning these features were eliminated so that the design of the environment facilitated informal social control women would feel more confident to go out”. Valentine’s conclusions were riveting. Previously public spaces were used as a tool of social control to control women, but in this quote she was recommending to utilize environmental design to control environments to promote safety for women.

Valentine’s recommendations for urban design principles address safety and fear in public spaces, however safety and fear are not the only reasons we should plan for difference. Research conducted in fields of recreation and leisure studies provides data on how to cater to women’s needs and wants for comfort and enjoyment (see: Phillipp, 1997; Ho et al., 2005; Schenker, 1996; Virden and Walker, 1999). While important to recognize that the majority of literature around women and greenspace planning is concerned with safety, I think it is important to acknowledge that parks should not only be planned for women’s safety, but also simply for their preference and enjoyment.

Based primarily on Valentine’s ten strategies (1990), with support from the academics discussed above, I have compiled a list of three urban design features which I believe could make greenspaces more inclusive to women. These features are: washrooms, child-friendly design, and lighting/visibility. These strategies are re-visited in the Results Chapter, where I discuss the viability of adopting these into the ravines, based on my findings from my dataset.

Washrooms

Researchers are increasingly acknowledging a correlation between a woman’s comfort in greenspace and her access to a “public” washroom. In McCormack’s study (2010, p. 716), they found that park amenities like “barbeques, seating, water fountains, picnic tables and

bathrooms” were important to women and girls of all ages. Baker et al. (2000) also found that support amenities like rest rooms and drinking fountains were found to be desired by women in park infrastructure. Krenichyn’s (2006, p. 639) also confirms that while she was researching gender and parks, women mentioned rest rooms being important for spending long periods in parks, however that they did not seem to be available. While new studies are emerging linking women’s preferences to washrooms in parks, it does seem to be a topic that could warrant further investigation.

Child-Friendly Design

Whitzman (2002, p. 304) stated that “women are more likely to act as caregivers to children, seniors, and other dependants for whom regular visits to park act as a pleasant and low cost activity”. As well, Ho et al., discuss in their article *Gender and ethnic variations in urban park preferences: visitation and perceived benefits* (2005, p. 287) found in their study that “Woman's leisure is often viewed as an extension of family roles involving caring for children and household chores”. This statement is directly tied to the research that has been conducted in gender and leisure/recreation studies around women and their roles as caregivers, and how that role affects their park preferences/amenities. Ho et al. (2005, p. 287) discussed the results of a study from 1994 which found women in Chicago public parks were “more likely than men to be engaged in stationary activities associated with child care and in activities as a family member or as a member of a mixed social group”. McCormack (2010, p. 716) also found that women preferred parks that “supported children’s play such as playgrounds and trees for climbing. Virden and Walker (1999, p. 135) also highlighted in their research how different people conceive nature, that a physical design feature women prefer in urban public spaces is “ease of physical access especially when accompanied by children” which could include park infrastructure for children, but could also be speaking to trail development and ease of using parks with strollers.

I discuss design features around “women as caregivers” cautiously. As previously mentioned, planning historically has been used as tool of oppression for women, and has reinforced oppressive gender roles. Schenker (1996) does an excellent job addressing planning as a form of social control, specifically with regard to the amenities in the Golden Gate park in San Francisco. Schenker (1996) discusses how the park may have been planned with women in mind,

however only women in their roles as caregivers and nannies. It is important for me to specify that including park infrastructure for children should be a feature to help women who do have the role of caregiver, but not to imagine them only in that one role. Planning greenspace with more child-friendly amenities is only one strategy meant to help one group of women, in which women with other various roles should not be ignored.

Lighting/Visibility

Lighting and visibility are common topics when discussing safety and/or gender and public spaces, and specifically greenspaces. McCormack (2010, p. 723) discussed a study conducted by Cronan et al. (2008) which found that “park specific physical activity among (Latino) women was constrained by insufficient lighting, and fear of physical or sexual assault and theft”. A “high degree of visual access” is also defined by Virden and Walker (1999, p. 134) as a physical-design feature women prefer. Additionally, several of Valentine’s recommendations (1990) were around visibility and sightlines.

Many scholars have published research findings on design principles that could potentially benefit women, with regard to safety, or recreational preferences/enjoyment. Not all of this literature is situated around greenspace, however I believe that it still proves relevant, as many of the concerns in greenspace are similar to public spaces. Ho et al. (2005, p. 282) summarized the importance of planning parks for difference, when they state, “if park managers, recreation agencies, and leisure science researchers are to meet the needs and interests of these diverse populations, it is important to understand how the expectations and desires of men and women in such ethnic groups differ from those of traditional park users”.

As mentioned, these three design features are revisited again in the Results Chapter. After interviewing participants, I quickly learned the unique challenges to adding these design elements to the ravines creating yet another challenge to making the ravines more women-friendly, when considering gendered perspectives.

Toronto Ravine Strategy

Prior to the recently adopted *Toronto Ravine Strategy*, ravine management was conducted in a fragmented, piecemeal fashion through policies such as The Ravine and Natural Features

Protection By-law, Official Plan policies and zoning by-laws to restrict and prohibit development, and Provincial protection under Regulation 166/06 of the Conservation Authorities Act (*Toronto Ravine Strategy*, 2017, p. 12). Additionally, the ravine system was also managed through an assortment of municipal plans such as: The *Parks Plan* (2013-2017), *Strategic Forest Management Plan* (2012-2022), *Toronto Water's Wet Weather Flow Master Plan* (2003-2028), the *Natural Environment Trails Strategy Guide* (dated June 2013), and the *Toronto Parks Trails Wayfinding Strategy* (Phase I dated December 2014) (*Toronto Ravine Strategy*, 2017, p. 13). Governance over Toronto's ravine systems has also included Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's watershed and sub-watershed plans and guides.

On October 2, 2017 City Council adopted the new *Toronto Ravine Strategy*, the guiding policy document which set out principles to guide decision-making and management in the ravine network. The Strategy was praised for being an inclusive and participatory document and is self-proclaimed to be the product of extensive collaboration and partnerships (Toronto Ravine Strategy website, 2017). The creation of the Strategy involved two years of consultation involving round tables, open houses and meetings with an Advisory Board (stakeholders), Working Group (staff members) and Steering Committee (senior staff) (Toronto Ravine Strategy website, 2017).

The Strategy is a colourful, vibrant 55-page document, filled with case studies, success stories and strategies. It gives an overview of the history of the ravines, while emphasizing reasons that the ravines are an important asset. The policy document states that the purpose of the document is to “establish principles to guide decision making, help prioritize future management efforts based on consistent criteria, chart a course for future communications, engagement and balanced use, improve co-ordination between management and agencies (unlike how ravines were managed previously) and ensure that all management decisions are made with a long-term view (2017, p. 1)”. It highlights five guiding principles, which participants explained as priorities for the ravines.

1. Protect

The Protect Principle is founded on ravines being “natural” spaces. It emphasizes ecological function and resilience of the ravines and long-term sustainability of the watersheds. It is discussed in the Strategy as the overarching goal of all the work to

happen in the ravines, which was confirmed by participants expressing that it should be the top priority. Actions to fulfil the “Protect” Principle include developing/implementing management plans and Environmentally Significant Areas, ensure high quality planning and design for things like trail accessibility and invasive species management.

2. Invest

The Invest Principle recognizes that in order to maintain and increase management, financial investment is required. This principle discusses stressors on the ravines, such as population growth, increased recreational use and climate change. Actions to fulfil the “Invest” Principle include leverage investment in infrastructure, develop an ecosystem service analysis, identify priority areas and development opportunities for hubs or gateways.

3. Connect

The Connect principle addresses the spiritual or emotional service ravines can offer to park users and highlights physical access with regard to safety and sustainability. Action items under the “Connect” principle include implementing wayfinding programs, reviewing trails and access points and honouring historical ties to the ravines.

4. Partner

The “Partner” principle focuses on involving different individuals and organizations in the ravines to contribute to the ravines in meaningful and sustainable ways. Actions include expanding the Community Stewardship Program, supporting the network of “Friends of” groups, and encourage philanthropic support.

5. Celebrate

The Celebrate principle acknowledges the ravines as “place-makers”, as well as their global and local significance. Actions include campaigns and events, outreach to “particular population groups”, communicating good stewardship, and developing a communication strategy.

There was a consistent theme within my data of participants feeling conflicted over the “Protect” principle, in which they felt put nature/ecology/biodiversity first, and the “Celebrate” principle which seemed to compromise ecological integrity for human enjoyment. This conflict played a significant role in my findings and is discussed further in the Results and Discussion chapters.

The Toronto Ravine Strategy contains no content on gendered difference in park use or access and refers to the one homogenous “park user”. I was surprised as best practices in current planning include acknowledging that there is more than one “public”. Fainstein and Servon (2005) even confirmed this by acknowledging that multiple publics is a key element to feminist planning perspectives. Planning for one “public” is dangerous, reduces a variety of complex relationships to nature to one dominant narrative, and can result in exclusive spaces. This is in direct contradiction with my argument that we need to consider differences and specifically gendered differences when planning greenspaces.

The language of one “park user” is consistent with the *Parks Plan* and other public policy Toronto where one broad, umbrella term is used in hopes to apply to “everyone”. One of the City staff members that I interviewed even insisted that the language “park user” was intended to be inclusive, as it could apply to both Torontonians and tourists. However, how can we ensure peoples’ needs and wants for greenspace are included if we do not recognize that those needs and wants may be different?

In this chapter I have provided summaries of key areas of literature that were fundamental in asking my research question. I illustrated how urban forests are political despite them seeming “natural” and unaffected by human processes. I have discussed feminist political ecology highlighting how gender can affect our access and control over resources. I have examined keystone text *Gender and Planning*, by Fainstein and Servon to illustrate the role of gender and planning, and how planning questions and solutions change when gender is considered. Through Valentine, and other feminist academics I have explored a list of three design features which I advocate should be used to make greenspace more inclusive to women. Lastly, I have provided a historical account of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* and explained how the language of the Strategy impacts how the Strategy is ultimately understood, through terms like “park user”, “protect”, and “celebrate”. These sections collectively explain why my research question is important and outlines the literature that is the backbone to my understanding of gender and planning issues used to analyze my results.

IV. Results

This chapter describes the results from my interviews by highlighting quotes said by participants. I have organized my data into the following themes: General observations, the role of gender, “Protect” vs “Celebrate” and greenspace design features (from earlier chapter). These themes all support my conclusion that gender did not play a role in the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*, in that although participants acknowledged a need to “plan for difference”, participants did not think that this applied to gendered differences. This seemed to be due to two potential reasons: participants possessing a nature/culture dichotomy mindset where they viewed nature as separate from humans, and due to negative opinions on human intervention in the ravines.

General Observations

There were no observable differences in responses between the women and men participants, however I did find it interesting that the two men participants utilized storytelling and personal experiences noticeably more when answering questions, than the six women participants. Several themes emerged while coding and analyzing the transcriptions from my interviews. The most predominant themes from my interviews include:

- Participants did not think gender should play a role in the Ravine Strategy/ravine use, however acknowledged that there are different types of access
- Challenges and negative attitudes towards design features that I previously advocated for (washrooms, trail management and lighting)
- “Protect” versus “Celebrate” or “Nature” versus recreation. Participants showed symptoms of a nature/culture worldview where they discuss “nature” as a space with humans removed, and “humans” as a homogenous unit which they were not able to dissect.

Other themes I noticed, which I will not be discussing further include:

- Emphasis on expert-based or scientific knowledge for creating the Strategy
- Hierarchy of parks/how contested the idea of “wilderness” is – relative, scale
- Challenges with bureaucracy and red tape
- Ambiguity in what the goals of the Strategy were

- Importance/role of education, youth and culture
- Detrimental effects of dog walking

Role of Gender in the Ravine Strategy

Halfway through each interview, after the participant described their role in the Toronto Ravine Strategy and their ideas about nature and greenspace, I bluntly asked if they thought gender did/or should play a role in greenspace planning. The general consensus was that gender did not play a role in the Toronto Ravine Strategy, and most of the participants did not think it was relevant.

Participant One stated that they did not think gender was thought of during the planning process of the Strategy—but suggested it could be due to the fact that many participants on the Advisory Board just happened to be women:

P1: *“Yeah it's interesting that you bring that up because I'm just thinking now that the majority of the working group were women and my it's surprisingly my background and forestry before the staff I work with are predominantly women.*

*Forestry as a whole is there's a gender imbalance there you know forestry... Operation staff are the guys that go out and do the maintenance tree maintenance on streets in and parks and stuff like that but our natural environment section is very heavily the gender imbalance is the other way that it's almost entirely women and in the Strategy most of the people in the working group probably 75% were women, it was a bit different and the interdivisional steering committee was a bit different ... yeah I don't know if that we really think of I've never other than the fact that we are underrepresented in forestry as a whole ... **I don't think gender is really considered an issue** and like the forestry women are pretty tough to so maybe that's part of it that they're not they don't necessarily conform to gender norms right ..., The working group and maybe it's just me in particular came at the Ravine Strategy as thinking about the **resource first and the users were sort of fitting them into the resource** but protect was the main the main thing that we kept hearing the value and just enabling these spaces and no we have we understand you want to be there and we can figure out ways to get you there but let's make sure that however we're doing that maintains that natural... **But yeah I don't think gender was necessarily thought of** but maybe that's because of the gender in the room too.”*

Participant One claims that gender wasn't thought of because most of the Advisory Board members were women, however she did not elaborate on whether that meant that gendered perspectives were considered or discussed. Additionally I thought it was interesting that after I had asked about gender, Participant One answered that the Strategy thought of the "resource" first, highlighting the "Protect" principle as the number one priority. The way that Participant One discussed "resource first" and "user second", without specifying the need to recognize diversity in park users, specifically in terms of gender, gave me the impression that gender was a secondary thought, if that. In fact, many participants highlighted the importance of the "Protect" principle first, with Participant Two (City staff member) confirming that this priority also came down from the Steering Committee. Regardless, Participant One specifically stated that gender was not thought of in the Strategy planning process and that it was not considered an "issue".

Participant Six did not think gender was an issue within the Canadian context and discussed culture and gender norms in her home country of China:

P6: [when asked if gender has a role in greenspace planning] *"Um, I feel its less of a problem in Canada... Because in my home country which is China, usually girls are told not to do so many outdoor activities—you should learn, learn ballet or do knitting at home—but here I feel everyone is educated the same way, or not, I shouldn't say educated the same way, you're allowed to develop in whichever pattern you like... Would I consider gender? Consider gender....I...I can't think of anything we should consider in terms of gender...."*

Participant Three did acknowledge that gender was a lens that affected daily interactions, however did not think "sweeping statements" could be made with respect to gender. Participant Three's response made it seem like they interpreted gender and greenspace with respect to recreational preference, rather than access or safety. Participant Three also caught on to how contested the term "gender" can be:

P3: *"Um, I mean I think our gender...um...is a lens that affects...um the way we interact with the world on a daily basis... And the way we use parks and ravines is probably included, uh within that lens of interaction and use um, but I would not be comfortable making any sweeping statements about how women use ravines versus men, like that would be a mistake.*

Well...I mean... I thinkI think...there's such a spectrum of how each person embraces their own gender and so you know, some women may have interests that

are traditionally seen as more masculine and some men may have interests that are traditionally seen as more feminine does this fall under the idea—that parks are evolving? Um, I don't I don't know...I really hesitate uh, I hesitate to make any kind of sweeping statement about how men or women use ravines."

Participant Five was the only participant to raise the topic of gender and greenspace without being asked. When I asked about access, they raised their concern with strollers and accessibility.

P5: *"It's a very steep slope into the ED Seaton Park. And the unpaved trails and I'm talking about on the right and left side, so this is the one which goes into the park and uh, I think that access has to be re-engineered **because it's very steep and even when you are taking down the young kids, especially when we used to go down with the school children, I, I felt like it is not really good enough** and uh, most of the, our work is uh mostly with **the women and women have children and with the strollers and all, there's not at all accessible...***

With the strollers, so I think that needs to be re-engineered so I don't know how its going to be, but I ..and ...one of my ideas is on the right side of the, the slope or the road, you know there's a very thick aluminum railing but there is still the space um, on the right side and that could be used like a, as a...not really a steep slope but like a steps which are [shows with hands] not really like the steps, but the very closely...with less gap, so even the strollers can come down."

When I asked Participant 5 later in the interview if they had anything to add about gender and the ravines, they said:

P5: *"You know, honestly speaking, um ravines are mostly the quiet places where you don't have a lot of movement, because they are just considered that way. But again, if you animate those spaces and you know, in a very, creative ways and innovative ways of planning, things in the ravine, in these greenspaces, so, that could be helpful especially for the women who, and, but I think it will be, it is, what I have noticed is the **women, if they want to go down the ravines, they can go in groups, like two or three, that would be supportive for them.***

Yeah, if they feel like it is, yes I do consider that thing, um, because when, they're a little hesitant to going down alone, by themselves."

Participant 4 brought up that gendered preference in greenspace activity was discussed in the Strategy planning process. When discussing what different stakeholder groups wanted with

the ravines, they expressed that 50% of the cycling group involved did not want increased cycling infrastructure in the ravines.

P4: [Discussing cycling in the ravines] *“Well now do you want to take a guess, just for fun at what 50% of the membership didn't want that? Predominantly women.”*

When I explicitly asked Participant Four about what they thought about planning greenspace and gender, they responded,

P4: *“I definitely think there's a historical regard for that being the case. I don't think that there's any biological predisposition to it. I don't think it defines our boundaries in terms of what any individual might be capable of or incapable of, but yeah I think historically there has been cultural phenomenon that has led to certain people viewing nature in aggregate, viewing nature with similar habits and in similar ways. But I don't I don't see that ...again if we're talking 50 years, I don't see that as the future of our interactions with the spaces I can say my daughter's gender has had virtually no role in what her interactions with the these spaces are. But I mean there are there are things that I'm sure will impact her future use... Right or wrong, me alone in a ravine at 11 o'clock at night doesn't concern me. Her alone in the ravine at 11 o'clock at night fills me with a sense of dread and I'm not sure whether that's the parent in me or whether that's the recognition of a gender, or I don't know right. But you know I was raised like by a single mother and my grandmother, my wife is an amateur boxer, like my life is filled with strong women so those discussions don't necessarily unfold the same way in our house as perhaps they do in other houses. **But yeah I think we need to treat these spaces rather genderless, which is to say that everybody should feel comfortable in the spaces** everyone should feel safe in the spaces it's... I don't think it's reasonable to... I think the most threatened of us should to find the level of safety. I think the most disadvantaged of us should define the level of access I think... we need to lower the bar not raise it when it comes to these things right, so in that regard I think I suppose I suppose that if in any particular group felt that their viewpoint could be a catalyst for improvement well then I'd love to hear the view from that perspective. But on a personal level, I can't say I've experienced much that was different for the men I know, from the women I know, involved in these things. Now that said, I can say that the work I do in the ravines, a rough guess 60 to 70% of the volunteers are women so perhaps there is something there in terms of how men feel about nature versus etc. but I know an equal number of men who are... not an equal number but I do know a great number of men who feel every bit as passionately and intensely and participate every bit as much as the 70% of women that I see right, so so yeah... I don't know*

if I feel strongly one way or the other so, except maybe that bike issue which as I brought it up because it's one of the only obvious gender-based issues that I have encountered. I but I mean I'm always open to having my mind expanded on it, perhaps it's just my own limitations, you know."

Similar to Participant Six, Participant Four also brought up the importance of culture. I thought it was interesting as well that Participant Four brought up the topic of strength and cultural perceptions of gender when I asked about gender. Participant Four brought up gender later on in the interview as one of a "myriad of things" that affect our attitude towards natural spaces and that evolution, because "(they're) all just people interacting with people and other places, right?". I also found it interesting that Participant Four, along with Participant Eight, answered with referring to the gender of the volunteers they work with rather than park users. It seems that when I brought up gender and greenspace their minds gravitated towards the gender of the stewards of the park, rather than who uses it.

P8: *"Well mother nature has been anthropomorphized as female, um, I kind of think if climate change was Godzilla, people would care more about doing something about it, like a monster you could see, **I have more women volunteers than men but I do have a good number of men**, and I do have all different races and ages and ...so our volunteer group is everyone and parents will bring their babies and toddlers and...so it's sort of nice thatlet me see what can I say....I think gender, personally, from observing, I don't think it's that big of issue. In terms of whether people care about nature or not or whether they do something about it or not, because I've had male speakers, female speakers, I just I don't know, its um, I don't have any examples of where that's important..."*

"But...I just wonder when you were talking about what I said about Mother Nature, if nature was considered male, I just wonder if people would think that they can just rough shot over it...like would they feel the same way you put it on a pedestal but you ignore it?"

Participant Eight thought that gender was not an issue and similar to Participant 4 related the question to the group of their volunteers. Later in the interview, Participant 8 continued,

P8: *"Um, I guess...I'm just trying to think of different activities people do can be separated by gender too. And I don't know but I suspect that a lot of the more impactful types of activities tend to be more male, because not that women don't like to ride bicycles fast..."*

Participant Two did not think that gender was not an “issue” like many of the other participants, and suggested it “probably was”, however similar to Participant Three, Seven and Four, discussed it was probably about people’s backgrounds more generally. Participant Two stated:

P2: *“I’m sure it (gender) does. I haven’t thought much about it... I think, I mean I think, you know, definitely, I think your own background influences what you think and I, I do, to start with that I guess, I do find that, I’m a landscape architect, so is Garth, and I find, most landscape architects they have, they’ve developed a strong connection to **nature in their childhood**. It’s definitely there and I think that is really necessary for all of us, right, but I do find proportionately, if you interview any landscape architect, you’ll find that’s there, it’s definitely in their past. And it’s still... just a good healthy thing anyway. Um, women, and... certainly men do too, but maybe it’s some men, I think women do have a connection about the importance, like, and its more an intuitive connection to nature...”*

Participant Seven, when I explicitly asked about the role of gender and the ravines, responded:

P7: *“Uh, I think anything can be relevant. I mean it kind of depends on what you mean. I’d need a better definition of gender...”*

After explaining a little bit about gender and safety as an example, Participant Seven continued:

P7: *“That was actually brought up in one meeting about safety. and **uh women biking and running down here and stuff**, so...I recall that being brought up by someone but very uh, there was a brief discussion that got.... not heated but ...I mean the idea, there’s kind of an idea, an insinuation that uh, safety, making these places safe is more important than keeping them wild, or keeping them healthy. Right? So that’s a big, and I mean, and it wouldn’t just be safety it would be...for gender.... cause you can have safety for trees falling off, like that’s a genderless kind of thing. Is this safety discussed in the strategy? Yeah I mean, and then there’s the gender of the plants which is a big issue, like the gender of nature which is...so some trees are dioicous, ash trees there are male and female, so in urban forestry, uh and urban planning, landscape architecture actually, the, so one of the main rules, kind of traditional landscape architecture in urban forestry is not to use female plants, like female trees especially.*

Yeah 'cause they tell you not to plant female trees cause they produce fruits and then the fruits are messy and fruits attract pests so why would you want a female tree? From a human perspective.

Its very easy to make excuses or reasons to not have female plants. now this is mostly applied to trees, because a lot of the female trees flower, with a lot of herbaceous plants and shrubs and a lot of plants are actually, most plants are kind of dioicous anyways, there's not many that are male and female but you know, especially things like ginkgo, like never plant a female ginkgo, right?"

Participant Seven started to discuss the conflict between safety and keeping spaces "wild".

Participant Seven later adds:

P7: *"So you know there would be an example of you know, as **humans often do, putting themselves before nature**, you know, so, but yeah I mean in terms of gender and nature, I guess that's something that, I don't have a lot of experience with and I haven't really.... I mean yeah, I guess I have a hunch that it would be both important and interesting. but it could also maybe be um, made to be too much...I wonder...you know... like, can you give me a like a good solid example of something like that?*

Yeah I mean I often wonder about that kind of stuff and...haven't thought about it other than, to make sure everyone has opportunity to get out and do this stuff. Instead of try to pick groups and...and yeah...."

Participant Seven was very reluctant to answer statements about gender and kept asking for more information and definitions from me. I thought it was interesting and different that when I asked about gender and greenspace they answered with regard to gender of the plants (this could however be due to the fact that Participant Seven is a scientist). Participant Seven, similarly to Participant 4 (interestingly the two men interviewed), both stated it should not be about gender but equal opportunities for everyone.

A city staff member involved with the Strategy stated in their interview, *"Access is just a huge priority, right?"* and yet later admitted that they had not considered gender in the planning process of the Ravine Strategy. Physical access for differently abled bodies is acknowledged by Participants Four and Six. Participant Four stated:

P4: *"So while I agree that we need to have we need to make these places accessible I do not agree that the starting place is making them accessible. I think the starting*

*place is finding great places where they can have meaningful interactions where there would be a great ...be great value to coming and enjoying yourself there for the afternoon these are the places we should be prioritizing. The idea of getting every trail ready for every kind of user to use it, it's just it doesn't seem relevant to me it seems like we can be doing a much better job by spending the money elsewhere, **but I also understand the need for the AODA and these regulations.**"*

Participant Six also mentions planning for differently abled bodies, when they highlight the challenge between planning for accessibility and protecting nature:

P6: *"To me its quite accessible right now but I know some people, some communities talk about building a ramp in the ravines, **so that wheelchairs can access there too, but its another tough balance between protecting the nature and making it more accessible.**"*

Access with respect to socioeconomic barriers and "equitable access" was acknowledged by Participant Two, who said:

P2: *"Um, but it's you know, **it's the communities where there's more affluent communities where there have already been efforts**, um, you know, by local councillors and more affluent residents, to create, um, you know, better wayfinding, better access to the ravines, those are going to be the more vocal constituents often... So you know creating that, um, kind of equitable access was another really important discussion...."*

Participant Eight acknowledges the different types of accessibility when they state:

P8: *"Um, there's an issue I guess about, you mean accessibility, so there's **accessibility in terms of if you can get somewhere without a car or not and then there's accessibility about whether you can go somewhere.**"*

Additionally, Participant Five, who was very much in favour of increased accessibility, advocated:

P5: *"Yeah...and...these are the greenspaces they should be more accessible, welcoming greenspaces for people to use it.... **You know, honestly I feel the access to the ravines, should be friendly access...**"*

Conclusively, on the topic of gender, six out of eight participants stated that gender was not "an issue" or did not have a role to play with planning for the ravines. Out of the two

participants that did not argue my suggestion that there is a correlation between gender and greenspace, one participant suggested it “probably” was a matter of concern and the other participant embraced gender-based solutions for ravine access. Four out of the eight participants stated that it was not more so about gender as it was about people’s backgrounds, generalizing factors affecting access/preference/safety.

I found it particularly interesting that (for the most part) participants collectively did not see the relevance of considering gender in the Strategy, and yet there was a general consensus that acknowledged and validated other factors affecting access such as socioeconomic barriers and physical barriers for differently abled bodies. We should pay attention to AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) guidelines and income differences, but not gender? My results seemed to be in conflict—do we plan for difference or not? Safety was also acknowledged as something important, and yet participants thought gender was not relevant? I believe that a major factor in participants not being able to see the importance of gendered perspectives, is the fact that participants demonstrated signs of possessing a “nature/culture” dichotomy mindset, where they interpreted the “human” aspect as genderless. This possible explanation is explored in the next theme.

Nature/Culture Divide (“Protect” versus “Celebrate”)

Several participants mentioned in their interviews the conflicting priorities with two of the *Ravine Strategy* guiding principles; “Protect”, with a focus on ecological integrity and biodiversity, and “Celebrate”, getting people out into the ravines for events and activities. It became evident to me part way through my data collection, that based on how people discussed greenspaces as “pristine” and “untouched” and with humans removed, there seemed to be a nature/culture dichotomy worldview present, at least in how participants were answering my questions. It was clear that in many formal and informal discussions around the *Ravine Strategy* there was an ongoing battle between protecting the ravines and allowing/encouraging recreational uses. Participant One (City staff employee) discusses the feedback from consultation in that people seemed more concerned with preserving nature and less concerned with events and infrastructure:

P1: *“um....and...in all of the consultation we did, the idea of nature and natural spaces, um, was what we heard back most often....so people were less concerned.... **like they’re more concerned with preserving the naturalness of these spaces**, less concerned about animating and you know, having events and uh infrastructure in these places, but more preserving them for what they feel is wilderness.”*

Furthermore, Participant One demonstrates a worldview/perspective of the human/nature dichotomy and concerns for the prioritization of nature:

P1: *“Um, yeah, for me wilderness is um, spaces where the impact of man is less visible, um (or people- less visible) um, in my....I’ve recently switched jobs but I was working with the [inaudible] programs group in the urban forestry and as a group of colleagues, often talked about how people in Toronto don’t actually know what a natural forest looks like...*

*...again because of my forestry background I um, **some of the concepts of animating and celebrating, to me make me a little nervous** ...um...and I understand the idea that you get people into these spaces for other reasons, you, they learn to value these spaces, but ...”*

If Salter (2013) was correct and that participants’ perspectives and worldviews could shape public policy, I further investigated the nature/culture theme. Participant Three discusses the conflicting priorities in the Strategy when stating:

P3: *“Because um, you know there were, there’s, there are sort of competing, um, concerns that are, require a real you know, balancing act, like , you know greater community engagement, a greater focus on community engagement, or um, accessibility, you know, or, not accessibility **but like ravine access, may not necessarily go hand in hand with an emphasis on ecological integrity.**”*

The conflicting priorities are mentioned again by Participant Four who frames the issue as nature vs recreation:

P4: *“I know from my own dealings with the public that my opinion of what needs to happen in our ravines is a minority opinion and that the majority of people very much view our the ravines as recreational areas that are there for human enjoyment and the only value that they have is to be enjoyment of citizens that today in and of themselves have no reason to exist if they are not enjoyed.”*

*There is a definite need and a great civic importance for there to be parks, for there to be outdoor recreational areas and for those outdoor recreation areas to take advantage of green infrastructure- trees, that kind of stuff. I ... **we should take an ecosystems-based approach, an ecological approach a habitat-based approach, to dealing with the ravines.** But that's different than parks and I'm all for parks don't get me wrong I think parks are great but there's not the same thing."*

Participant Eight also seems to understand the conflicting priorities as nature versus recreation and was even frustrated because she thought that the recreational purposes were and continue to be prioritized over protecting the "nature":

P8: *"In fact it would be nice if all nature, ravines, **could have a situation that really protected nature**, but I know its not going to happen. Because, people want to ride their bikes fast through it and they want to have trails that are paved so they can do stuff and they want to have this and that....although in the ravine strategy they would say that protecting nature is number one, from experience it never is... so if you could think of it [nature] as something that is intrinsically of value and not just a place to plunk yourself, doing something else, that there's very little area left for wildlife."*

"I just think greenspace is incredibly important and I really want as little as possible to be developed."

Participant six was one of the only ones to address the "Protect" versus "Celebrate" concerns explicitly and discussed how challenging finding that balance is:

P6: *"They have 5 principles such as invest, celebrate, protect, and the two other I can't remember, but we feel that, **if you don't do it properly then celebrate and protect are in conflict with each other because if you want more people to get in there but how are you going to protect this fragile ecosystem?"***

Participant 1 (City staff member) confirms that the protect principle is the main priority and fitting in peoples needs and wants came secondary within the Strategy:

P1: *"Perhaps [the Working Group/Advisory Board] came at the Ravine Strategy as thinking about **the resource first and the users were sort of fitting them into the resource but protect was the main the main thing that we kept hearing the value and just enabling these spaces and know we have we understand you want to be there and we can figure out ways to get you there but let's make sure that however we're doing that maintains that natural...**"*

I concluded two things from this theme of results. First, that in the opinion of the participants I interviewed (who, as expected are probably more pro-biodiversity given their involvement with ravines), ravines should be spaces that are less impacted by humans, as participants mostly advocated for less intervention, less recreational uses and more emphasis on biodiversity and ecological integrity. Second, participants showed symptoms of a nature/culture worldview perspective which perhaps blinded them from being able to see the complexities and messiness of the “human”. Heynen (2003) and Heynen, Perkins and Roy (2006) highlighted the importance of acknowledging the role of humans in “nature” and how “nature” is not actually untouched space. This idea that is crucial to making decisions about nature and greenspace was completely contradicted within the data from my participants. I address the aforementioned two conclusions further in my *Discussion* Chapter.

Challenges to Women-Friendly Design Features

This section will revisit the list of design features for greenspaces which I advocated earlier in this Paper as being women-friendly for safety, accessibility and comfort. After asking participants about these features (child-friendly design, washrooms, lighting/visibility) and whether they were discussed it became clear that participants thought these types of greenspace “developments” were indeed challenging in the ravines and/or had negative opinions about “development” happening in the ravines. Additionally, through interviewing two City staff members, it also became clear how inherently complicated it is for these design features to be included in ravines. Below I discuss participants’ thoughts and opinions on the following three design features: child-friendly design, washrooms, and lighting/visibility.

Child-Friendly Design:

Child-friendly design was discussed in interviews with participants within the context of trail development/design needed for strollers. Participant Eight boldly state that the ravines should be left as “natural” spaces, even at the cost of accessibility:

P8: ***“But unlike people who say that all trails and all parks should be paved so that people in wheelchairs and baby buggies can access it, I don’t believe that. I think the experience of going to nice natural places, is important and that there should be some of them paved, but the very act of paving .destroys an enormous amount of***

area and invites invasive species, as soon as you have the trucks that come in and the machines and equipment...”

I found it very shocking and almost offensive that Participant Eight thought that “nature” was more important than making spaces more accessible by wheelchairs or strollers. This is due to the fact that through my literature review I identified the direct correlation between greenspaces being child-friendly and women being able to visit. On the other end of the spectrum, Participant Five, leader of a women’s organization and the only participant to bring up gendered concerns, stated:

P5: *“It’s a very steep slope into the ED Seaton Park. And the unpaved trails and I’m talking about on the right and left side, so this is the one which goes into the park and uh, I think that access has to be re-engineered because it’s very steep and even when you are taking down the young kids, especially when we used to go down with the school children, I, I felt like it is not really good enough and uh, most of the, our work is uh mostly with the women and women have children and with the strollers and all, there’s not at all accessible...With the strollers, so I think that needs to be re-engineered so I don’t know how its going to be, but I ..and ...one of my ideas is on the right side of the, the slope or the road, you know there’s a very thick aluminum railing but there is still the space um, on the right side and that could be used like a, as a...not really a steep slope but like a steps which are *shows with hands* not really like the steps, but the very closely...with less gap, so even the strollers can come down...Yeah that’s one of my ideas when I look at it, but I think that needs to be...again...structured or re-engineered I think that slope, no, that’s totally bad.”*

Participant Eight is advocating for less trail development, whereas Participant Five is advocating for trail development as a solution to women’s access. It is clear to me that Participant Eight, like most participants and people involved with the Ravine Strategy, did not seem to be aware of how considering gender could affect how we plan for these greenspaces. If I had the chance to conduct this research again, I would explicitly ask participants on their opinion on child-friendly design in the ravines. It may not have been something participants advocated for, but perhaps if they understood the link between child-friendly design and women-friendly design they would have different opinions.

Washrooms

Washrooms were only discussed when I asked city staff members, Participant One and Two simply said it wasn't a matter to be discussed in the Ravine Strategy:

P2: *"It's not that detailed, it's a strategy... at this....level...its thinking very broadly and high level about the whole city and the washrooms is... they're probably doing facilities...I think there's a facilities master plan somewhere which might take on that as a...as a layer right? And some of those facilities would be in ravines."*

Participant Two's response to the question about washrooms made me wonder if the *Ravine Strategy* was not the place to discuss washrooms, then when was? I reviewed the *Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan* to determine if washrooms as a women-friendly design feature were discussed. I was pleased to read that the Plan emphasized the importance of gender-neutral washrooms, and incorporating more washrooms for increased access, however disappointed that the direct correlation between gendered perspectives and washrooms was not illustrated. Participant One emphasized the logistical challenges in including washrooms in the ravines:

P1: *"Umm washrooms we kind of stay away from because they're notoriously problematic and in flood planes right, maintenance is a big issue the cost is enormous because you've... it's not, the infrastructure is not there right? ... Like the cost associated with washrooms is millions of dollars like either just initially or in maintenance because of the timing...so yeah washrooms would be..."*

Once again I was disappointed that those in charge of leading the Strategy were unaware of the benefits bringing washrooms to the ravines could have for women and gendered barriers. Although I understand the Ravine Strategy is only one document amongst a regime of greenspace planning documents for the City, I think as potential opportunities to discuss gender, it deserves to be discussed even for high-level visioning documents.

Lighting/Visibility

Lighting/visibility was another design that seemed to be negatively received by participants in interviews. Participant One (City staff member with a background in forestry)

stated that common practice is to not light ravines due to wildlife concerns and at the risk of providing a false sense of security:

P1: *“The **guiding principle would be that we don't light ravines um partly because of the impact upon wildlife** but also the... I can't remember the acronym but the idea of like **lighting entrances or leading people into a space that may that may give them a false sense of security** especially if you can't maintain the lights and as you know like our daylight changes too soon so like the timing of that is problematic yeah it's better to leave the ravines to sort of be the spaces they are than lead people into the space that may not it may not be the experience they expect like as far as their comfort him if we give them lighting and then at some point to light goes out they're in the middle of darkness right...”*

Participant Six noted that lighting was an issue while her class was conducting research in the ravines:

P6: *“Oh right lighting is a problem in the ravine, we noticed that most of the lamps didn't work at night.”*

Participant Three discusses the conflict between lighting the ravines for safety and compromising biodiversity:

P3: *“Yes, so one of the, one of the um, more difficult uh, questions within our discussion was around the use of **street lights in the ravine and from a safety perspective, it's a no-brainer, of course you'd want some lights down there**, it would extend use, it would um, I think make some people who might hesitate to use the ravines, feel more comfortable taking long walks in the evening, if they knew there were lights, but the problem is, is that, um there's research that indicates that **artificial light is not great for uh- the biodiversity in the ravines...** Um, and so there was a lot of debate about, you know, **do we prioritize biodiversity in some areas and public safety in other areas?** Or, you know what is what is an appropriate response here knowing that, community engagement is a big priority but so is um, you know, **enhanced biodiversity and ecological integrity?**”*

Participant Three's answer of saying we need to prioritize *either* safety or biodiversity, once again reminds me of the nature/culture divide that seemed to be present in almost all of the interviews. I have illustrated through direct quotes from interviews with participants, that gender did not play a role within the Toronto Ravine Strategy. It is evident that participants believe that the ravines are matter of nature *or* recreation, with the two seemingly incompatible. Along the

similar lines of putting “nature” or ecology first, participants also advocated for less human intervention in the ravines. Given that all three of my design strategies for making greenspaces more inclusive to women involve human intervention or alteration of the “nature”, my strategies were negatively received. I will now further dissect these results and how they relate to my conclusions around gender and the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*, and gender and greenspace planning in general.

V. Discussion

While revising my research question “*Has gender played a part in the Toronto Ravine Strategy?*” it became clear to me how contested this research question is. It seems too complicated to be simply answered by a “yes” or a “no” and instigates further investigation into all the different parts gender *could have potentially played* and made me question whether or not this research question is even relevant.

With regard to the planning process of the Strategy, on the surface level, participants did not think that gender had played a role within the planning process of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy*. Some participants even boldly argued that not only did it *not* play a role, but that it *should not* play a role in planning greenspace. Some participants gave it more thought than others, however all eight participants seemed uncomfortable with the question and brushed the question off or changed the topic after answering my question; “*Some people think gender has a role to play in planning greenspace- what do you think?*”. Only one participant said she *supposed* that gender did have some sort of role to play in planning greenspace, however the discussion did not last long as she quickly changed the topic. Participants seemed to think that gender was not an “issue”, and/or to plan for diverse communities, we should *not* focus on this one specific factor and/or that preferences in greenspace could not be generalized based on gender. The absence of gender within the deliberations and planning process of the Strategy, the language in the Strategy itself of one “park user” and participant answers including that gender should not be a factor when planning greenspace, makes me conclude that gender did not play any role at all.

Conversely, the absence of gender within these discussions seems to be perpetuating existing prevalent ideologies around gender—such as gender being taboo to talk about, that the

existing framework how we see greenspace and access (which arguably has gendered roots) should not be challenged, and that planning for “all peoples” should not look at gender specifically. By not acknowledging the differences in gender, with regard to access and preference, we are pretending that these differences do not exist and it is impossible to take an equity approach. It homogenizes the current political situation instead of calling out these injustices for what they are, which would allow us to actually change them. Pretending like these differences do not exist, enables them to continue to exist silently. Similarly, by not talking about gender or challenging gender norms with greenspace access, we are continuing to agree to patriarchal structures that are currently in place and have governed all of our decision-making (specifically with planning) and have been in place for the past century. Therefore, the absence of discussion around gender, the absence of discussion around women and greenspace, demonstrates the presence of patriarchy and existing gender hierarchies, and thus gender *is present*. Dominant gender discourse is present because feminist perspectives are not talked about and seem to be an elephant in the room.

Participants spoke of the ravines and “nature” as being separate from humans, which I thought presented an interesting worldview of a nature/culture dichotomy present (however this could be due to my pool of participants being more ecologically/environmentally focused). It seemed to me that this nature/culture ideology that my participants brought to the table, could offer an explanation as to why participants were unable to see the connection of gender to greenspace. By pitting the “human” connections against the ecological priorities, participants did not have space to dissect what the “human” side was composed of and explore the messiness and complexities of planning for humans. This would explain why they agreed that of course we need to plan for difference, but when I gave a concrete axis, they were unable to make the connection. Participants were so preoccupied prioritizing “nature” first, that they were unable to even consider minor human intervention. If they had entertained the idea of minor human intervention, for the benefit of marginalized populations (like women) perhaps, ecology or “nature” would not be overwhelmingly prioritized.

Additionally, not only were participants unable to see the benefits of human intervention (washrooms, lighting, trail development) due to their nature/culture ideology, however I would argue that the nature/culture ideology has further gendered consequences. Based on my literature

review, I would argue that (generally speaking) design features that make spaces more inclusive to women require human intervention in the ravines, whereas men can likely still use the ravines if there is no trail development, lights or washrooms. Thus, this mentality present in the *Ravine Strategy* participants that we need to prioritize ecology/nature over humans could actually have disproportionate consequences and further disadvantage women.

This danger of participants advocating for ecology first and everything else second is supported in Whitzman's article on High Park (2002) when she is describing how ecological priorities eventually won over safety concerns. Whitzman (2002, p. 310) states that "The position of these "naturalists" seemed to be that human overuse of parks was more of a problem than differential use by women and men and besides there was little that could be done to improve park safety that would not destroy their essential character". The *Ravine Strategy* is essentially reproducing this discourse, where other priorities win over women's struggle for equal access. In this instance, the more important priority is ecological integrity/ecosystem services; however there have been a plethora of excuses used in the past century to justify putting women's needs second, or even third, fourth, fifth. My prediction is that this nature/culture divide informing our thinking of the Toronto ravines can only hurt women's access to ravines and perhaps greenspace in general.

Why did these participants not imagine a ravine where humans and nature could co-exist, or better yet, imagine humans as a part of nature? Participants are advocating for an untouched and pristine nature that doesn't exist. As earlier explained by Heynen (2003), all "nature" is affected by humans. William Cronon dissects this myth of ecology-without-humans in his article "Resisting Monoliths and Tabulae Rasae", a response article to Dale et al.'s (2000) "Ecological Principles and Guidelines for Managing the Use of Land". Cronon's (2000, p. 673) article addresses the difficulties in "integrating ecological principles into land-use management" while critiquing the ecology-based paper on its lack of human presence. He states that ecological concerns are indeed important, however focusing only on ecology is narrow-minded and impractical for the real world. "Certainly we must strive to make sure that activities pursued primarily for human ends do not undermine the integrity of the non-human world...[however] if "principles and guidelines" like the ones in this report are developed from within too narrow

disciplinary framework, they will come to grief when applied to real-world settings that no single intellectual discipline can comprehend by itself” (Cronon, 2000, p. 673).

Furthermore, Cronon offers solutions to understanding ecology and land-use management and perhaps overcoming this idea that “nature” is pristine and not be intervened with:

American ecology has long been attracted to a vision of the natural world in which pristine wild systems are regarded as the only legitimate examples of ecological “health”. Any human alteration of such systems therefore appears as “disturbance” or worse, a violation of their natural integrity. Seductive as this either/or, bad/good, disturbed/undisturbed dualism may be, it gets us into all sorts of trouble as we confront the challenge of responsible land management—which, after all, must inevitably be a form of “disturbance.” As ecologists and others have increasingly recognized in recent years, we need much subtler tools for distinguishing a range of human impacts on natural systems, some negative, some neutral, some even positive, all judged by values that cannot help but be anthropogenic even as we strive to make them less anthropocentric. (Cronon, 2000, p. 673)

I agree with Cronon’s statement that we (humans) are inevitably a disturbance to “nature” and think this should have been incorporated into the *Ravine Strategy*. In line with Cronon’s thinking, positive or neutral human impacts can exist in “nature”, and I believe incorporating design features into the ravines that would make the spaces more women-friendly would be considered positive impacts.

VI. Recommendations

In this nature/culture argument what is the solution? Do we compromise ecological services and habitat for the sake of more women being able to use these spaces as equally as men? As an Environmental Studies student and an environmentalist/nature-lover at heart, I feel conflicted. I too dream of “pristine” ravines, as an oasis for squirrels and birds, free from invasive species and interruption. However, simply removing humans from the equation is not a solution. Toronto is a large metropolis of people and cutting off access to these greenspaces that offer so much does not seem like an ideal solution. You can solve many urban issues by removing humans from the equation. Pretending like an alternate universe exists where

greenspace is completely off-limits (and people abide), especially in the context of a world-class metropolis is unrealistic, uncreative and unfruitful. As stated by Cronon (2000, p. 675), “By accepting the human presence in the landscape not as something to be regretted, but as an essential and irreversible feature of the history that has produced the systems we seek to understand, protect, and use”. We need to devise solutions that aren’t against human presence, but work with human presence.

We need to use imagination, not just science to find solutions to allow “humans” and “nature” to co-exist. Only looking at scientific evidence and expert-based knowledge gives us an excuse to not talk about the complexities of humans and how our differences affect our access. We need to encourage Torontonians, especially women to become stewards of the ravines to show that human interaction and use does not always have to result in negative ecological consequences or detriment.

I think more research needs to be done examining if and how different uses/recreational activities impact the ravines. Many participants made general statements, for example, mountain biking is more disruptive than running, cycling is more disruptive than bird watching, however these claims could be supported by further research in the ravines. City of Toronto should also start conducting gender-specific data, as the lack of any such data made it challenging to conduct my research, and I am imagine any future research on the ravines.

Given that findings on gender and greenspace in research conducted previously explicitly examined gender (sometimes in conjunction with other socioeconomic factors) leads me to believe that unless we address gender openly and honestly, we cannot plan for difference, and therefore we cannot plan for women. Discussions around greenspace, parks, whether they be policy document or high-level visioning activities, need to respect/emphasize planning for difference. These documents need to talk about the topics that are not so easy to address, such as race, gender, and differently-abled bodies. If we keep homogenizing the model of the one “park user”, it seems that marginalized peoples will continue to be invisible. Yes, perhaps the balance between “nature”/ecology and human access is challenging, however if we are not inviting all perspectives to the table, I question how we can achieve results for a just, equitable city. As stated by Ho et al. (2005, p. 282) “It is important to understand how the expectations and desires of men and women in such ethnic groups differ from those of traditional park users”.

Speaking practically, next steps of the Toronto Ravine Strategy should involve focus groups with different groups of people, not just one group of community “experts” who already use the ravines. This could be incorporated into the planned next steps of identifying ten priority areas Collaborations with existing community groups, like the Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee, METRAC, Toronto Women’s City Alliance, are a few suggestions, as these could ensure that gender is discussed and prioritized. I acknowledge that involving more stakeholders does require more time and financial investment, however I believe it could be worth it to produce a much more effective, equitable document for our ravines. In an ideal world, the City would find ways to incorporate gendered perspectives into all aspects of its planning, perhaps through a mandatory checklist or study, to ensure that patriarchal and oppressive planning practices from the past are not repeated.

VII. Conclusion

When Whitzman (2002) conducted her research on High Park in Toronto in the late 1990’s, she concluded that although she had made progress engaging women to reclaim the park and get safety and gendered concerns considered in park management, ecological concerns were prioritized over safety issues. She states, “When the draft proposal for restoration and management of High Park was released, safety became a minor issue” although they had tried to find a balance between environmental, historical and recreational interests, “No balance was shown in environmental and safety concerns” (Whitzman, 2002 p. 309-310). Whitzman’s research in Toronto was only one piece of a plethora of research conducted on gender and greenspace and planning for difference, planning for women. And yet, as my research shows, the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* would have us believe that park and greenspace planning occurring in Toronto today is still failing to consider gender implications, or even just multiple publics.

Gender did not play a role within the Toronto Ravine Strategy because despite the fact that participants knowledge and agreed with planning for difference, they were not able to make the connection between planning for difference and gendered perspectives. The worldview that participants demonstrated, examining ravine issues as a matter of nature versus culture, masked the complications and messiness that arise from the “human component”. It is only in dissecting the complexity of human interactions that we see the groups that are not represented (left out) and only then we can we begin to take an equity approach. The Strategy attempts to be

inclusive by using the language “park user” and not specifying between differences in race, gender or income. However, as every single participant I interviewed said they were not particularly happy with the final document and did not feel represented, perhaps instead of encapsulating everyone’s needs and preferences, the Strategy really represents nobody, or only very few individuals that actually identify with the homogenous “park user”.

Furthermore, design features which I argue could make greenspaces more inclusive to women, require human intervention in the ravines, which many participants were against. Therefore if gender is not considered in planning for these spaces, there is a missed opportunity to incorporate design features that could benefit women.

The discussions around the ravines seem to be framed around “ecology/biodiversity versus recreation”, however, this seems to have the effect of “ecology/biodiversity versus women/feminist perspectives”. Women’s needs and preferences for public space (and greenspace) have been discredited and invalidated for many decades, as competing interests take priority. I would argue that not much has changed, and this time women’s needs and preferences are being sacrificed at the expense of our limited understanding of biodiversity and ecology. As one of my participants stated, “I think the more that Toronto can embrace the idea that um, you know, community engagement and biodiversity can begin to go hand-in-hand rather than having to choose one or the other, the better”.

Throughout this Paper I have emphasized the need to incorporate feminist perspectives in park/greenspace planning and the importance of *planning for difference*. I have done this by highlighting the key literature in gender and greenspace, while exploring theoretical pedagogies of feminist political ecology, and urban political ecology. I have tried to emphasize how the “nature/culture” divide, challenges to greenspace design features, and our limited understanding of access have the potential to discourage planning parks in ways that would be women-friendly and continue to negatively affect use, access and enjoyment of parks/greenspace for women.

Further research needs to be conducted on gender and ravines and strategies need to be put in place to ensure feminist perspectives are incorporated into park planning discussions. Additionally with more time and resources, a more comprehensive approach to park planning

with a focus on intersectionality and factors like race and income, could prove very effective for park planning. The Strategy planning process included Sabina Ali, founder of the Thorncliffe Women's Committee, and although they gave Ali a platform to discuss safety, gender was still not a topic of discussion. As Toronto attempts to become more gender-friendly as a whole (efforts to bring Gender-responsive budgeting to City Hall comes to mind), park planning cannot be forgotten. All of these efforts are crucial in legitimizing women's struggles and validating the experience of women in the park, and women who wish to be in the park.

Planning for women also has the potential to benefit other groups of marginalized peoples as well. Feminist academic, Loukaitou-Sideris (2016, p. 559), stated in her article about gendered mobility and barriers, "it should be noted that women-friendly neighbourhood design is synergistic with the interest in "barrier-free" and "universal design" concepts, which seek to increase accessibility to neighbourhood amenities for all, including elders and the disabled". Therefore planning for women can also have positive spillover effects to children, differently-abled folks and the elderly.

It is clear through my analysis of the *Toronto Ravine Strategy* and feminist perspectives that without discussing gender openly and explicitly, planning for women falls through the cracks and leads to yet another policy document which disregards women's needs and wants for greenspace. Research has been showing, for the past 30+ years, the need to integrate women's needs and feminist perspectives into park planning. It seems about time that it is taken seriously and put into action, because women too, deserve to have greenspace to not only use and access, but also to simply enjoy.

VIII. Bibliography

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IX. Appendix A

Draft Interview Guide – Non-City Employee(s)

*Interviews will take place in a neutral, accessible space- a coffee shop, library or somewhere similar. Water and napkins will be available for the interviewee.

I will start by introducing myself and explain again the purposes of my research. I will reiterate that this is not an interview to understand the details of the final Strategy- which I am familiar with, but to find out more information about what is *not* in the Strategy- how decisions were made, what might have been left out, etc. I will then provide the consent form and go over the form with the interviewee.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any questions about the consent form? Do you agree to it?

INTERVIEWER: I will protect your anonymity unless you prefer to be identified by a name of your choice. Would you like to remain anonymous?

*Interviewee asks questions if they have any, if not they sign the form.

INTERVIEWER: Now it is time to ask my research questions. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers.

1. What's on your mind today/how are you feeling today?
2. Can you briefly describe your role in the Toronto Ravine Strategy planning process?
3. So, as I'm sure you are aware, the Advisory Group was only one component of the Strategy planning process...how do you think it fit in with the other components- public meetings, Steering Committee?
4. How were decisions made? What seemed to decide what ultimately made it to the finished Strategy? Votes? Reoccurring themes? What were the goals of the Strategy, how were they defined, who were they defined by?
5. Do you feel like your thoughts and discussions had an impact on the final Strategy? Would you consider the space inclusive? Did everyone get a chance to speak?
6. Do you remember if the terms "nature" and "wilderness" were ever defined or discussed? What about greenspace?
7. Do you see urban forests as a type of greenspace?
8. Do you remember if "park user" was ever defined?

9. Some people think gender may influence how we see and use “nature”, what do you think of that?
10. Do you remember any discussions around fear or safety?
11. Did/do you imagine any alternatives to the Strategy?
12. Is there anything else you would like to say, or you think I should know, before we conclude?

INTERVEIWER: Thank you for your time and participation! Would I be able to email you with follow up questions, should they arise?

Interview Guide – City Staff

I will start by introducing myself and explain again the purposes of my research. I will reiterate that this is not an interview to understand the details of the final Strategy- which I am familiar with, but to find out more information about what is *not* in the Strategy- how decisions were made, what was left out, etc. I will then provide the consent form and go over the form with the interviewee.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any questions about the consent form? Do you agree to it?

INTERVIEWER: I will protect your anonymity unless you prefer to be identified by a name of your choice. Would you like to remain anonymous?

*Interviewee asks questions if they have any, if not they sign the form.

INTERVIEWER: Now it is time to ask my research questions. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers.

1. What's on your mind today?
2. Can you briefly describe your role in the Toronto Ravine Strategy planning process?
 - What was the flow of the meetings? Did everyone get a chance to speak?
 - Would you consider the space inclusive? Why/why not Who got to be involved? How did you understand your role as a facilitator? *Is it safe to say your answers today will be based on x component? Or all processes?*
3. So I understand there were a couple different methods used to create the strategy- Interdivisional steering committee, advisory committee and public meetings? Did these all hold the same weight for what made it into the strategy? Or can you explain on the relationship between the different methods.
 - How were decisions made? What ultimately decided what made it into the strategy? What were the goals of the Strategy, how were they defined, who were they defined by?
4. I noticed the Strategy uses terms such as “nature”, “wilderness”. Were these terms ever defined or its meaning discussed?
 - (How) was greenspace defined? Do you see urban forests as a type of greenspace? Why or why not?
5. Can you explain how the group defined or understood “park user”? Were different types of park users considered?

6. Some people think gender may influence how we see and use “nature”, what do you think of that? Do you think gender should be considered when planning greenspaces?
7. Some people think gender, race, class and other socioeconomic factors affect recreation uses and preferences. Is this something that was discussed? “underserved communities” (p 51)
8. I noticed several comments on fear and safety in the ravines...do you remember how those topics arose/what the discussion was like around...?
9. What types of park infrastructure were discussed – washrooms, lighting, design of pathways, “ensure high quality planning, design, construction and maintenance” (p 19) – vague?
10. How was accessibility and access discussed in the group? Only physical components? “physical opportunities to connect” (p5), trail accessibility (p51)?
11. Did you imagine any alternatives to the Strategy?
 - o What do you see the next steps as being? Either what you think or hope for them to be. (Training, i.e. Priority investment areas etc. but what happens to this actual document), do you see this process as political?

CONCLUSION: If I happen to have follow up questions, would I be able to follow up with you? Would you like me to email you a copy of my final paper? Depending on confidentiality of course—anybody you can recommend from TRCA, academic partners or other recommendations of who I could contact?