

Not So Clear Cut: Gender-based Violence in BC's Tree Planting Industry

by

Jennie Long

Bachelor of Arts (Honours), University of Ottawa, 2017

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*We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose unceded territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.*

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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### **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

Resource and other outdoor-related industries are frequently described as male-dominated sites of toxic masculinity, resulting in gender-based violence for women and gender-diverse labourers therein. Despite the mounting scale of reforestation work in response to extensive deforestation and escalating climate catastrophe, the tree planting industry is under-regulated, and understudied. Industry leaders admit that prevalent and pervasive sexism is an issue, and recent reporting has surfaced widespread sexual assault and harassment as endemic to the field. A feminist analysis into the gendered power dynamics of tree planting is necessary in order to understand how these harms are being perpetuated, and thus, how they might be remedied. Through semi-structured interviews with industry actors, particularly with women and gender-diverse tree planters who have experienced gender-based violence in planting camps, my research investigates the various, interrelated power dynamics that render tree planters vulnerable to gender-based violence in these remote environments. Through their lived experiences, I explore the following questions:

- 1) What power systems interact to render women and gender-diverse people vulnerable to gender-based violence in the tree planting industry?
- 2) How can these power imbalances be addressed so that women and gender-diverse planters can find safety, support and fulfilment in the silviculture industry?

The stories shared demonstrate that ongoing patriarchal and profit-driven power dynamics in the industry result in widespread harm for women and gender-diverse labourers. There are persistent harmful cultural attitudes in planting, and persistent structural vulnerabilities which have created space for ongoing gender-based violence to occur without recourse. This thesis also explores various solutions proposed by my research participants, demonstrating how listening to survivors can help shape environments that are freer from gender-based violence.

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## **List of Acronyms**

BC - British Columbia  
BCFSC - British Columbia Forest Safety Council  
FPE - Feminist Political Ecology  
KKR - King Kong Reforestation Facebook Group  
NSDP - Northern Society for Domestic Peace  
PE - Political Ecology  
SAC - Silviculture Advisory Committee  
TERF - Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist  
TWIG - Treeplanter Workers Industrial Group  
WFCA - Western Forestry Conference Association

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## **Dedication**

*For my research participants. For all survivors.*

## Chapter One - Introduction: Gender-based Violence Research

*“Violence is one way to silence people, to deny their voice and their credibility, to assert your right to control over their right to exist... At the heart of the struggle of feminism to give rape, date rape, marital rape, domestic violence, and workplace sexual harassment legal standing as crimes has been the necessity of making women credible and audible” – Rebecca Solnit (Men Explain Things to Me, pg. 6)*

### 1.1 Objective and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how gender interacts with power to create conditions that facilitate gender-based violence in the reforestation industry in BC. It is through personal narratives and perspectives gathered from tree planters themselves that this thesis looks to analyze these intersections and the harm that is incurred and silenced in remote workspaces. Already, we understand that gender-based violence, including marginalization, oppression, harassment or violence, is steeped into workplaces, campuses and communities globally through intersecting systemic processes including patriarchy, capitalism, cishetermnormativity, white supremacy and colonialism (Crocker, 2020; Hunt, 2016). My study explores how systemic power interacts with the unique and remote workplace culture of tree planting to render women and other gender-diverse individuals vulnerable to harm. Tree planting represents the end of the forestry harvesting process and the beginning of the reforestation process. Due to this liminality, and in conjunction with the remoteness of the work, tree planting is essentially an invisible industry (Bumstead, 2020). More importantly, the voices of women and gender diverse tree planters who have experienced harm within the industry have been made invisible too. Indeed, a scholarly search of tree planting does not yield many results and in those few works, the lived experiences of women and gender-diverse planters has yet to be researched in a meaningful or intersectional way.

Addressing gender-based violence through research presents a unique opportunity to centre marginalized voices and reimagine systemic change through the power of story. Anti-oppression research sits at an intersection of activism and academia. The act of speaking out, of sharing one's lived truth, has always been the spark of anti-violence activism and has also informed many important academic works. Silence is violence, and from our most visible industries to our most invisible ones, breaking the silence on gender-based violence is crucial to creating safer spaces for historically-marginalized voices. Therefore, the stories of harm that tree planters generously and courageously shared with me are pivotal to addressing and reimagining how primary resource workplaces can be safer, more inclusive and less harmful workspaces for all. As anti-rape politics scholar Tanya Sersier has noted:

Epistemological primacy and political power of women's experiential knowledge around sexual violence and the central tenets of feminist belief in speaking out... promises to produce cultural change by shifting public understandings of rape to more closely reflect the experience of survivors; it assists the collective liberation of survivors by chipping away at the stigma and shame of rape; and it produces individual empowerment for the speaker by having her story heard and herself recognised as an expert on the basis of her experience (Sersier, 2018, pg. 6).

This thesis is guided by a commitment to the transformative potential of storytelling and speaking out, and to centering the voices of women and gender diverse people who have experienced harm in order to find a way forward for all.

I bring anti-violence research into conversation with Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), an approach that understands power struggles over ecological resources to be located at intersections of capital, gender and other systematic injustices, in order to best provide contextual background for my research questions:

- 1) What power systems interact to render women and gender-diverse people vulnerable to gender-based violence in the tree planting industry?
- 2) How can these power imbalances be addressed so that women and gender-diverse planters can find safety, support and fulfilment in the silviculture industry?

As the forestry industry is an important sector of British Columbia's economy, and as the ecological importance and scale of reforestation heightens in response to climate catastrophe, the silviculture sector needs to address these persistent workplace vulnerabilities. At minimum, the industry needs to address its legal obligation "to protect workers and other persons present at workplaces from work-related risks to their health, safety, and well-being" (WorkSafeBC, n.d.). More broadly, in order to maintain and grow a robust, responsive and socially-just labour force in the face of both ecological and gendered challenges, the industry must listen.

According to Ciszek, "two foundations for constructive [research] include the incorporation of positive emotions in negative stories and solutions-based reporting" (Ciszek, 2017). Following this foundational approach, I want to foreground that working in the tree planting industry has the potential to be an extraordinarily positive experience for women, for some of the very same reasons that currently make it so hostile. As I will explore, it offers an opportunity to work outside socially-constructed notions of gendered labour, achieve financial independence, build community, and spend seasons of time outside in remote locations across the province. Indeed, one survivor shared that she saw "tree planting being the best years of her life, but that she is still haunted about what happened to her" (Trumpeter, 2020). My research will not only explore this tension, but will tell a story that re-centres the experiences and needs of both women and gender-diverse planters in these conversations.

To speak plainly, this thesis is an "examination of violence, but also of what exists underneath, and before, violent relations" (Hunt, 2016; 3:52). Further, this is not a study that will "prove" whether or not, at what rate or in what forms, sexual assault, harassment or other forms of gender-based violence are ongoing in tree planting. Instead, this study is grounded in believing and listening to survivors, not to extract their trauma, but to learn from them in order to

build solutions that will allow for collective transformation. Elevating survivor “narratives not only strengthen and synthesize our efforts to bridge the conceptual and methodological barriers that limit our efforts to prevent [violence], but they allow us to expand our understanding of the potential of activist research” (Hippensteele, 1997, pg. 3). And indeed, anti-violence advocacy, research and work that believes and listens to survivors is needed if any industry is to ever be a safe and equal place for all.

My research contributes to the body of feminist scholarship around gender-based violence as a product of hegemonic masculinity in an array of workplaces, particularly those in outdoor spaces (Clancy & al., 2014; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Quinlan & al. 2017; Clark, 1996; Douglas, 2018; Welch, 2014). It remains the case that gender-based violence in outdoor workplaces is a gravely understudied area for many reasons, including the fact that outdoors has for too long been oppressively gendered as a cis-hetero man’s space (Cronon, 1996). As a young woman working seasonally in outdoor fields myself, it is my sincere hope that this research will contribute to the growing dialogue around protecting bodily sovereignty and maintaining safe environments not only on the cut-block or in bush camps, but across the country and beyond. By centring the lived experiences of women and gender-diverse tree planters amongst the forested and deforested landscapes of unjust power dynamics, this thesis will explore both vulnerabilities of harm and opportunities for healing for all within the tree planting industry.

## **1.2 Thesis Structure & Chapter Summaries**

Through the lived experiences and reflections of 17 women and gender-diverse tree planters, as well as three industry leaders, the stories shared in this thesis offer insights into the gendered power dynamics of tree planting, and highlight the transformative potential of survivor stories and the communities that support them. I investigate the gendered industry power

dynamics in practice within tree planting, and consider how survivor narratives can be mobilized for industry-wide change. This introductory chapter will outline the feminist political ecology (FPE), trauma-informed and narrative approaches that ground this research. My methodology is specifically attentive to what should be any anti-violence researcher's obligation to acknowledge the traumatic effects associated with gender-based violence, and provide increased safety, care and trust for interview participants. My thesis is therefore predicated on the creation of a research project wherein belief and support for survivors is accepted as both method and knowledge, and that stories of survival can transform our world. As my thesis will show, the continued existence of gender-based violence in primary resource industries necessitates that trauma-informed methods be implemented when working with survivors in any capacity.

Chapter Two offers an overview of economic, political and cultural tree planting industry practices in BC, paying particular attention to intersections of power, gender and capital. I find that the neoliberalization of industry regulation is not only environmentally harmful, but also harmful towards women and gender-diverse labourers. Chapter Two also provides a detailed literature review of tree planting's treatment in academia. I find that themes of rugged individualism and gendered power-dynamics are prominent but largely examined in a manner that is inattentive to ongoing gender-based violence in the field.

Chapter Three turns to the voices of my interviewees to illuminate the gendered systems of power that contribute to the reproduction of gender-based violence in BC's tree planting industry. Despite the range in the geographic and temporal experiences of my interviewees, cultural and structural practices across tree planting companies and their remote camps precipitate harm for vulnerable labourers. These same sexist and profit-driven power imbalances further silence and marginalize these harms, leading to re-traumatization for survivors and

inadequate accountability on behalf of company leadership. For bodily sovereignty and safer spaces to be made and maintained for all, these power imbalances demand recognition and recourse.

Chapter Four centres on possibilities for change, woven through the words of my interviewees. Perhaps because the planting company and camp can become a planter's entire world for the duration of the season, the solutions overwhelmingly proposed by my interviewees were aimed at the company level. Some of these solutions include: anti-violence policy and procedural follow-through; an intentional and safe increase in gender representation in leadership; and increased anti-oppression training for all, but especially for management. These solutions, and others that I highlight, culminate towards not only shifting the "cowboy" culture of tree planting to one that is more caring, but offer a shift in concrete accountability practices and structures.

The chapters in this thesis are grounded in an insistence that the analyses, perceptions, proposed solutions and lived experiences of survivors and their supporters be heard as they are foundational to creation and maintenance of safer industry norms, practices and cultural attitudes. Chapter Five concludes with a spotlight on the advice that my interviewees have for future tree planters. For the industry to truly sow a sustainable and safer future, it is exactly voices such as these that demand our acknowledgement, our belief, and our care.

### **1.3 A Note About "Gender"**

There are many non-binary and transgender people who are also tree planters. This study is unable to fully speak to the unique vulnerabilities that folks from the queer community face when they enter the historically-masculine dominant resource work world of tree planting. The bulk of my interview data comes from ciswomen, both straight and queer, and two non-binary

people. I did not reach any trans people in my sampling, nor did I speak to any gay men. The focus on ciswomen in this thesis does not intend to diminish or deny the experiences of any queer planters, but it does exclude the important lived experiences of trans folks who are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence in any field. I hope that further research and activism in this space will emerge as this study lays the foundations for more just, safe and fulfilling workspaces in the outdoors for trans and other planters from the queer community. Throughout this work, I will refer to my research participants generally as women and gender-diverse planters<sup>1</sup>.

Many terms have appeared and evolved in academia and social justice circles in a continual attempt to better understand and best represent systemic harm incurred upon women, gender-diverse people and other marginalized groups. I use the term “gender-based violence” most often in this study. In this work, gender is understood to be a dimension of identity, a social construct and a research lens. The “lens” of gender has allowed past scholarship to identify connections between dominant socializations of men embedded in hypermasculine, capitalist environments as “toxic” and the harmful manifestations of these phenomena that come to characterize the cultural, interpersonal and structural power relations in these spaces (Carrington & al., 2010; Cirefice & Sullivan, 2019; Esposito, 2015; Kojola, 2019; MacGregor, 2018). Gender-based violence is defined as an “interpersonal, institutional or systemic act of violence (physical, sexual, economic, emotional, spiritual, social) that devalues and/or reinforces expected entitlement to women, girls, and trans, Two-Spirit, genderqueer, non-binary, and gender non-conforming bodies and lives” (Anti-Violence Project, n.d.). Gender-based violence acknowledges that these harms are made possible because the power systems we exist under are

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<sup>1</sup> As scholar-activist adrienne maree brown shared, “if this is being read in a future in which this language has evolved, then please know I would be evolving right along with you” (brown, 2019, pg. 18).

unjust (Hunt, 2016; OUSA, 2018; Crocker, 2020; Sersier, 2018; Samaran, 2019). Whenever my interview participants chose specific terms such as assault, rape, discrimination or harassment to describe their experiences of harm in the bush, I also tried to follow their lead in my writing.

#### **1.4 Gender-Based Violence & Primary Resource Industries in Canada**

Gender-based violence and issues of gendered power are historically entwined with environmental injustices in Canadian workplaces and landscapes (Douglas, 2018; Hunt, 2016; Reed, 2003; Kojola, 2019). These non-traditional workspaces and the landscapes they operate within have historically been understood as masculinised sites of dominance over nature. Notably, these “hostile environments” reproduce exclusionary practices and representations that marginalize and threaten various women, as well as queer, Black, Indigenous and other historically disenfranchised voices from full, free and safe participation (Thompson, 2021; Joyce, 2016; Fox, 2018; Langlois, 2018). Ongoing colonialism, racism and homophobia limit, police and erase the historical and contemporary participation of marginalized actors and groups in outdoor spaces (Graham, 2020; Taylor, 2015; Kojola, 2019). When joined with toxic masculine identities, the participation and belonging of non-cis-heteromen in the “outdoors” becomes dangerously limited. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity has been continually identified in resource industries:

...where a traditionally all-male workforce, or almost so, predominates: dockers, seamen, the building trade etc. As might be suspected, concentrating on the most homogenous and masculinized kinds of labour has led to a stress on a macho form of masculinity, characterized by the ability to carry out exhausting types of labour and by the importance of drink, but also marked by practices on the edge of legality, where the dissociation between workplace and home was greatest, and gendered behaviour the most stereotypical (Vigna & Zancarini-Fournel, 2014).

This has been noted in traditionally male-dominated industries such as: forestry, fisheries, oil, gas and mining (Thompson, 2021; Fox, 2018; Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014; Douglas, 2018;

Larasatie & al., 2020; Reed, 2003); recreational outdoor industries like adventure guiding and the national parks service (Joyce, 2016; Langlois, 2018); and also, scientific fieldwork (Ross, 2015; Clancy & al., 2014). In all these outdoor, fieldwork and primary resource industry spaces, conflated ideas of the outdoors and an “authentic masculinity” (Cronon, 1996) continue to exclude women, and also other marginalized groups of people, from free and safe participation<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, gender-based violence is particularly likely to occur in tightly knit competitive male-dominated groups wherein precarious masculinity is entangled with the performance of masculine norms, from breadwinning to sports to resource labour (True, 2012, pg. 35-52; Carrington & Scott, 2010; Volkwein-Caplan & Sankaran, 2002; MacGregor, 2018). My work seeks to build upon past scholarship that has identified the dominant socializations of men embedded in hyper-masculine, capitalist environments as “toxic.” My thesis explores the harmful manifestations of these phenomena that come to characterize gendered cultural, interpersonal and systemic power relations in these spaces within the container of tree planting.

## **1.5 Methodologies**

### ***Feminist Political Ecology***

Political Ecology (PE) is a dynamic field, deeply interested in the political, cultural, and economic histories and contexts that drive environmental and social justice issues. Political

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<sup>2</sup> A particularly distressing example of gender-based violence in outdoor or primary resource industries is the phenomenon of Man Camps. The Man Camp phenomenon is a modern manifestation of colonial violence, facilitating an intensity of gender-based violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people in relation to industrial-land exploitation projects proximal to remote, rural communities (Konsmo & Pacheco, 2016). The result is the ongoing loss or disruption of bodily sovereignty for Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people in many communities (Secwepemcul’ecw Assembly, n.d.). Federal, provincial and corporate decision-makers routinely fail to consider the devastating impacts that Man Camps have on Indigenous communities (Linnitt, 2020). Further attention, research and resources are direly needed to support Indigenous resistance to the Man Camp phenomenon.

Ecology, and particularly Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), understands that “most often, so called ‘minorities’ by gender, race, class, and ethnicity are unfairly disadvantaged in the face of restricting political economies and climate extremes” (Buechler & Hanson, 2015, p.4). FPE is an approach that foregrounds the structuring force of intersecting power structures including capitalism, colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy (Rocheleau et al., 1997; Tsing, 2015; Harcourt & Bauhardt, 2018). Understanding violence through a FPE framework means understanding that violence is a “phenomenon rooted in local histories and social relations, also connected to transnational processes of material change, political power relations, and historical conjuncture” (Peluso and Watts, 2001). Environmental contestation, and the violence therein, should be understood by taking into account historical events, social relations, and political and economic policies, especially as they pertain to resource control and the accumulation of wealth. Moreover, FPE provides:

Useful ways to engage in radical thinking about the economic and the societal organisation of the relationship between humans and nature. Gender relations are focal... nature, bodies, gender, the reproduction of economy and society are tied together in a complex structural and cultural entanglement. In particular, ecological issues, the ways the environment is used and misused for economic objectives, are central for feminist ecological enquiry. (Bauhardt and Harcourt, 2018, pg. 20)

As Chapter Two will further detail, it is important to understand that on a landscape level, in the “cyclical” process of “sustainable” logging practices in BC, a forest is commodified, and through invasive extraction, is reduced to a cut-block. This cut-over landscape is then most often reforested as a future harvest, planted to be extracted one day in the future. This work is conducted by an industry faced with immense corporate pressure to keep all costs low. These seasonal, liminal communities of intense labour and livelihood occupy remote, extracted and isolated spaces across Canada. Moreover, we know now that women and gender-diverse labourers who enter these precarious workspaces face high rates of gender-based violence.

Therefore, in order to understand vulnerabilities in the lived experiences of contested bodies working on commodified, fraught landscapes with care, a methodological framework must understand that both women and the land are sites of gender-based oppression and capitalist extraction. This methodological framework must also centre *care*.

Feminist Political Ecologists have identified that care “for the wellbeing of others, and of oneself” is a unique and core concept to this field (Harcourt & Bauhardt, 2018, pg. 20). Care is defined as “looking after and providing for the needs of human and nonhuman others; it is about the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance and protection of humans and the more-than-human world” (Harcourt & Bauhardt, 2018, pg. 3). This understanding of care is an indispensable tool to counter violent power imbalances globally.

In order to conduct research with care, and to analyse these power relations and the environmental, economic, social and historical context they exist within, my work seeks to “legitimize women’s lived experiences as sources of knowledge. The ordinary and extraordinary events of women’s lives are worthy of critical reflection as they can inform our understanding of the social world” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, pg. 775). Following this methodological commitment, my research process is as important as the outcome. Indeed, within feminist frameworks, “the process of examining [women’s lived] experiences must reflect an ethic of respect, collaboration, and caring” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, pg. 775). I engage feminist “ethics of care”, as well as positionality, relationship-building and trauma-informed practices (Knight, 2019). In doing so, I seek to undermine the “silence as violence” (Solnit, 2014) power systems which “are mutually constructing, interrelated... producing complex social inequalities” which my research ultimately seeks to address and transform (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Given that “the overarching goal of feminist research is to capture women’s lived

experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, pg. 784), my research design, process and approach aims to embody these ethics of care, collaboration and respect so that my research itself is a radical reimagining of socially just ways of being and is best positioned to contribute to transforming the constructed systems of oppression in planting.

### ***Narrative Anti-Violence Scholarship & Neoliberalism***

I came to this research through the power of story sharing. I had never tree planted, and I did not know the gravity and pervasiveness of gender-based violence faced by non-men in the bush until personal friends shared accounts of their lived experiences of sexualized violence and gender-based oppression within the industry. Only once I began to hear these stories, and recognize patterns of power abuse across temporally and geographically discrete companies did I realize how pressing and invisible this issue was. In *Speaking Out: Feminism, Rape and Narrative Politics*, scholar and activist Tanya Seriser writes that "rape as an issue didn't arise because feminist leaders decided it was 'the issue' or because it was a designated topic on a consciousness-raising list. Instead, it became an issue when women began to compare their experiences, and realised sexual assault was common" (Seriser, 2018, pg. 4). Again, tree planting industry leadership have only been forced to "confront" pervasive sexual assault and harassment because women and gender-diverse planters began to share, speak up and speak out about the harm they continue to experience.

"Sexual violence is indicative of the abuse of gendered social power," (Stanko, 1997) and stories best indicate how that power comes to be abused within the container of a workplace's culture. Rape culture, defined as "attitudes and behaviours that condone sexual violence" and including "sexual violence [as] encoded in the normative patterns of heterosexuality", is a product of systemic forces operating in conjunction to oppress bodily sovereignty and create

socially unjust environments for women and gender diverse people broadly (Quinlan & al., 2018, pg. 6).

Neoliberalism, the economic program of encouraging profit-driven decision-making over all else, works alongside its entangled power systems like colonialism, sexism and racism to produce an overall environment which normalizes rape culture. In *Explaining Gendered Violence in the Neoliberal Era*, Tithi Bhattacharya writes this:

In the current crisis of capital, gender is an important ideological weapon used to hide the fault lines of class. The rising tide of rape defense from figures of social standing, the spate of bills attacking reproductive and LGBTQ rights, slut shaming and victim-blaming are various ways to reorder femininity and re-invoke the mythic breadwinner-homemaker family, thus providing ballast to unrealistic gender expectations and models for working-class men and women. A key to neoliberalism's triumph always was, and remains today, a successful and highly gendered attack on the global working class (Bhattacharya, 2019).

The crisis of rape culture described by Bhattacharya includes a promotion of “damaging masculinities” and other gender roles that normalize sexualized violence, becoming “particularly pernicious in male-dominated spheres [and]... disciplines that have been historically occupied by men” (Quinlan & al., 2018, pg. 6). Narrative politics, and the radical consciousness-raising of survivor-driven movements such as #MeToo, interrupt the deliberately-normalized and enormous space that rape culture occupies in our neoliberal society. As #MeToo movement founder Tarana Burke states, “rape culture creates the space for violence. So, we need to dismantle the culture that creates the space for violence, if we’re going to ever see an end or an interruption of sexual violence” (Brown, “Unlocking Us”, 82:17).

Neoliberalism “is the elevation of capitalism, as a mode of production, into an ethic... and a cultural logic” (Harvey, 2005). This logic of neoliberalism legitimizes many forms of gendered exploitation and rugged individualism (Welch, 2014). This is exemplified in a siloed, corporate industry such as planting where, beneath all the thin guises of “sustainability” and

“freedom” in the bush, individual companies, management and individual labourers are structurally and culturally incentivized by profit margins. Pushing back against these dynamics, consciousness-raising movements such as #MeToo expose how “neoliberal logic fits easily into older strategies of victim-blaming around rape, victim isolation and legitimises the notion of ‘victim precipitation’ and women’s responsibility for managing risk” (Serisier, 2018, pg. 39). From our most visible industries, like Hollywood, to our most remote, like tree planting, the collectivity of stories such as those expressed in the #MeToo movement, expose both the pervasive nature of gender-based violence and the rape culture that underpins it, but also expresses possibilities for more collective, caring ways of being.

Other anti-rape scholars have also noted that neoliberal logic prevents “justice not only in individual cases but for the collectivity. Such a movement [as collectively speaking out] would call attention not only to the harm of sexual violence, but also to the role of the government [and industry] in preventing the full exercise of women’s autonomy and freedom, and it would encourage action against the state when it fails to recognize the consequences of violence in women’s lives” (Bumllier, 2008). This thesis is animated by a commitment to justice for the collective and to the transformative political potential of experiential storytelling. This is only made possible through the bravery of survivors, past, present and future.

## **1.6 Positionality**

Through my research journey as a member of the Political Ecology Lab in the School of Environmental Studies at UVic, I have come to understand that “who we are and where we stand has profound implications for the knowledge we produce” (Sundberg & Dempsey, 2013, p. 176). I am a white, settler woman. I have also come to understand, as Rachel Flowers writes, that the “category of settler is both a structural location and a product of social relations that produce

privilege” (Flowers, 2015). I was raised on the traditional territory of many nations in what is now called Toronto, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. I was hardly cognisant of this as I grew up, even though I grew up immersed in the benefits and culture of settler colonialism. Like many of my peers, the public-school education I received did not explore Canada’s racist and ongoing colonial history in a manner that was comprehensive or culturally-safe.

During my undergraduate studies, on the territories of the Algonquin people in what is now called Ottawa, I began to incompletely understand the violent and hidden realities of colonization on these lands. I then lived in Australia for two years following my undergrad. Working as an outdoor adventure guide, I hiked and paddled through landscapes traditionally belonging to the Taungurung people. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also subject to violent colonial systems, as Indigenous communities are here in Canada. I learned more about the global depth and violence of colonization through this experience of living and working abroad on the stolen lands of other people, further realizing the blindness and ease of mobility that my privilege affords.

It has been since moving to Coast Salish territories and becoming a member of the UVic Political Ecology Lab that I began to more fully encounter my ignorance, and how I am very much a beneficiary of these systems of injustice. These systems not only harm Indigenous people, but also Black people and people of colour. Rape culture is impossible to disentangle from Canada’s ongoing and historical violence against Indigenous culture, bodies and land, as it is also intersects with systems and histories of white supremacy and racism. Sexualized violence is ongoing as a tool of colonialism and racism, as is Indigenous resistance to these violent systems (Hunt, 2016).

I am still unlearning and learning what it means to have settler and white privilege and what my responsibilities are to people and place. I understand more now that the “labour of settlers should be to imagine alternative ways to be in relation with Indigenous peoples” (Flowers, 2015). I will continue to grapple with what my responsibilities are as a settler on these lands and how to walk, relate, write, research and live in a good way. As Brené Brown says, the shift is from “being right” to wanting to “get it right” (Brown, 2018, pg. 92).

I am also a cis woman. While I speak to the experiences of harm faced by non-binary and trans tree planters in this industry with what I hope is empathy and insight, I cannot fully know the embodied experience of queerness held in unique ways by various gender-diverse planters. I have learned and unlearned much about the possibilities of what queerness and gender identity can mean over the last two years, from friends, from colleagues, and my research participants. I am also grateful for this learning, and I hope I can continue to learn what it means to be a good ally and how I can use my privilege to highlight the voices of others in various arenas.

I am also a researcher situated in this work as a survivor. Elizabeth Stanko, another sexualized violence researcher, when reflecting upon her experiences with “feminism, emotionality and research on sexual violence” writes how she is “reminded how often the so-called subject matter of [her] academic career is mostly about the individual management of sadness, pain, survival, and courage” (Stanko, 1997). Stanko’s experience of carrying these heavy emotions inside and outside of academia closely reflects my own emotional experience as a survivor-anti-violence-researcher. This research experience has been both painful and painstaking, but also joyful and illuminating. All these various lenses, dimensions of identity, and emotions have filtered into my analysis and writing. Beneath all these telling and powerful

emotions is my sincere hope that I have carried and cared for the stories shared with me in the most empathetic, belief-centred manner possible.

## **1.7 Limitations**

Any MA thesis contains academic limitations including those of program length, time, scope and financial constraints. Beyond these, there are important limitations to note specific to this thesis, some arising from the context of the research, and others from the research design. Previous academics who have studied labour relations from interview data in the tree planting industry found that it was critical to present as an “industry insider” in order to “foster open and reciprocal dialogues” with planters (Sweeney, 2009a). However, when I conducted the bulk of my interviews, I had never been to a bush camp, or planted a single tree. I snow-ball sampled the majority of my interview participants through friends of friends, all who whispered, nodded and gave knowing looks as I described the sensitive nature of my research topic. This personal, yet distinctly “outsider” approach to data collection meant that I formed researcher-participant relationships grounded in mutual respect, care and accountability. However, at the time, it could also be true that I lacked the actual tree planting experience to completely “get” all the nuances of the unique worlds that were described to me. I acknowledge that this affects the data collected in various ways. It was not until after I conducted the bulk of my interviews that I went tree planting. My analysis, coding and writing process began after my first season.

Several of my participants also planted in different provinces during some of their seasons, notably in northern Ontario and Quebec. They impressed upon me how poor they found the working conditions of their Eastern companies to be, and also how present, persistent and pernicious sexism, sexual harassment, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence were in these companies and camps. My scope is limited to British Columbia, but nonetheless I

feel it is urgent that these ongoing harms are addressed by the industry, and in future research specific to those regions.

All my participants are white or white-presenting, non-Indigenous and non-trans. I did not feel it appropriate to chase certain identities in my sampling, subsequently tokenizing individuals for the sake of touting “diversity” in my work. However, while planting is represented as a white, masculine and straight occupational domain, there are pockets of tree planting that are very queer-friendly spaces, and there are Black, Indigenous and other people of colour who are also tree planters. I have come to know of several companies that are intentional about creating safer spaces in the industry. This needs to be adopted by more industry decision-makers, and future research has a role to play in this. It is necessary to explore the experiences of Indigenous, Black and other planters of colour who labour at overlapping intersections of power in a manner that is culturally-informed, safe and attentive to the needs of marginalized communities. This would help to shed further light on how the forestry industry broadly can better care for its workers and the land.

These aforementioned intersections of identity are the most vulnerable to systemic violence and this thesis is limited in its capacity to speak to these vulnerabilities. Indeed, further research is needed to explore the whiteness of tree planting and other outdoor fields such as adventure guiding, conservation or forestry broadly, to better understand how these spaces come to be overwhelmingly “green insider clubs” (Graham, 2020; Taylor, 2015).

### **1.8 Research Design & Writing Process**

I came to be interested in this topic after speaking to friends who experienced gender-based violence while working as tree planters. Their experiences of harm in the bush moved me greatly, and thus I began to design a research project to address questions of violence, power

imbalances, gender and solutions. In order to locate and analyse oppressive vulnerabilities within matrixes of power in planting, my research is designed against these silencing forces by primarily elevating the lived histories of women and gender diverse planters. It bears repeating that “lived experiences [are] sources of knowledge. The ordinary and extraordinary events of women’s lives are worthy of critical reflection as they can inform our understanding of the social world” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, pg. 775).

In order to elevate the knowledge of a range of women and gender diverse planters from a range of companies across BC, I conducted semi-structured interviews with current and past planters during the planting “off-season” (see Appendix A for my interview guides). As BC claims to be a world leader in sustainable forest management (BC Gov News, 2017), I focused the majority of my interviews on women and gender-diverse planters who have worked for at least one season in BC in the last three years. Upon receiving approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (19-0573-01), I leveraged pre-established industry contacts to reach participants; I spoke with friends, and friends of friends, in order to build a rapport of trust, accountability and care with each individual. As I struggled with the risks of asking survivors of violence and harm to share painful experiences with a researcher, establishing personal relationships based on trauma-informed principles was important to me (Knight, 2019; Gorsak, 2019, pg. 17).

Furthermore, “prior research indicates that trauma-*focused* studies with survivors of sexual assault often result in participants feeling distressed or upset, and in some cases regretting their participation in the overall process” (Rogers, 2020, pg. 41). Because of this, my research questions were not designed to “dig” for traumatic stories, but rather open a conversation up gently and considerately about feelings, experiences and perceptions relating to oppression and

violence. While acknowledging the potential bias in mobilizing pre-established networks, I believe snowball sampling, and prioritizing trauma-*informed* (not trauma-*focused*) relations, have allowed me to build fruitful and caring researcher-participant relationships. This rapport is grounded in previously stated feminist ethics of “respect, collaboration, and caring” that are sensitive to potentially-traumatic disclosures, simultaneously rejecting problematic anti-violence research designs that have capitalised on the personal pain of interviewees. Often, as other feminist researchers have found, the rapport established ultimately added depth to my data (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, pg. 775). Indeed, although my thesis centres aspects of sexualized violence, my intention as an interviewer was never to dig for explicit details or traumatic events of what could be someone’s very worst experiences. Any such painful or graphic detail shared with me in interviews is explicitly not included in this work.

I paid special attention to the setting of whatever space we were in, and the privacy and autonomy of the interviewee over their own story. I began conducting interviews in January 2020 and I conducted my last interview in November 2020. The interviews were conducted over Zoom, the telephone, or in person. This range was due to complications following the global COVID-19 pandemic, but also due to the transient, geographically-disparate lives of tree planters during the non-planting months. All of these media have their advantages and disadvantages, but what mattered to me was that anyone participating in my research felt comfortable, listened to, cared for, prioritized and believed throughout the entire process.

Interviews averaged 90 minutes in length, with some as short as 50 minutes and others well over 120 minutes. All interviews were conducted with informed (and ongoing) consent and were audio recorded. Interview transcripts were manually transcribed verbatim, but cleaned up for grammatical coherence. I kept a journal handy throughout this process, and made note of

early emergent themes and my impressions or reflections of those themes. Following this process, I emailed transcripts back to each participant, allowing them ample time with their stories to make redactions or corrections.

Following this correspondence period, I began coding each transcript using a qualitative analysis software called NVivo 12. My entire manual transcription process of all 20 interviews became an exercise invaluable to my data analysis; it allowed me to really hear and listen to what my participants shared during our conversations, and so I knew the landscape of each transcript quite literally inside and out, and I had a journal record of my early impressions. My coding process involved highlighting emergent themes (Williams, 2008) as I worked with the stories in my transcript, some examples of which include power hierarchies, community practices, freedom, culture and solutions. Nested within these codes were specific types of stories, perceptions or experiences of harm relating to the larger theme; for example, nested under power hierarchies were stories of abuse of high-baller power, supervisor power, or crewboss power, as well as sexism generally. Overall, I adopted a “narrative approach to sexual violence research and advocacy that emphasizes the story within institutionalized forms of oppression” (Hippensteele, pg. 3, 1997). My hope is that the narrative approach allows for my interviewees to live in my thesis as “subjects in their own right” whose stories are “analyzed” with care and belief, instead of being made into “mere victims of an overarching patriarchy” (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

It has been hard to write cohesive thoughts about this industry and the stories that took place within; the industry is a composite of individual contractors, and each story is unique. This emotionally-challenging research topic has reminded me that while these are systemic and

societal problems, it is individuals who personally cause and experience harm. Therefore, I tried to approach each story with individualized care and thoughtfulness.

After going tree planting myself, it is definitely not lost on me that tree planting has the potential to be an incredible experience. For the most part, I felt safe and cared for by the crew of planters whom I was fortunate enough to work and live alongside for three months. I am so grateful for that. While my own experience as a tree planter has undoubtedly filtered into my capacity to write accurately on this subject matter, this is not an autoethnographic study and no part of my personal experiences are included in my findings, nor did I conduct any formal research during my season. Moreover, much of what I experienced, perceived and witnessed during my rookie season in my camp that could (and should) be considered problematic did not surprise me; it was just as many of the interview participants described.

### **1.9 Interview Participants**

A central interest of my research design, and indeed of my participants themselves, was that the identities of my interviewees were protected for their safety and general well-being. As such, the stories and quotes shared in this thesis are not dated, but they could take place anytime from 2000 or 2020 as the older stories from multi-season veteran planters share close resemblances to the stories shared by new rookies this 2020 season. This is ultimately telling of an industry in dire need of change. When recruiting, my snowballing parameters were such that I was looking to speak with people who had planted within the last three years in BC who were women, trans or non-binary. In the end, I spoke with 17 women and non-binary people who had worked across 20 different companies BC in various capacities.

I also spoke with three men who occupied leadership roles in the industry. These conversations provided invaluable insights and perspectives. I am grateful for these

conversations, and it brings me great comfort to know that these individuals want to lead the industry in a safer direction.

The problematic themes running throughout this range of experiences reflect the landscape-level cultural homogeneity of the industry, and yet every tree planter I spoke with had a unique experience in a unique corner of this tree planting world. Because of the tight-knit and transient nature of the industry, many of my participants worked for the same company, in the same or different camps, at similar or different times. The individuals I interviewed have occupied a range of roles in the industry, from tree planter to crew boss to company manager. This is detailed in the “Table of Interviewees” in Appendix A, along with the pronouns belonging to each individual. I have used code names to identify and personify my interviewees. In any anti-violence feminist research, “the political is indeed personal” (Stanko, 1997) and the conversations I held, transcribed, coded, analysed and wrote about are all incredibly personal. This is why my interviewees have personal code names to correspond with their quotes used in my findings. I offered to all my interview participants the choice to make up their own code name. Some chose to do so, and others were simply happy for me to make their code name up. Before beginning an analysis of interview data from my participants, I provide an overview in the next chapter of the economic, political and cultural tree planting industry practices in BC, paying particular attention to intersections of power, gender and capital.

## Chapter Two - The Tree Planting Industry in BC and Beyond

*The Canadian government will... use nature-based solutions to fight climate change – including planting two billion trees to clean the air and make our communities greener. And while the Government takes strong action to fight climate change, it will also work just as hard to get Canadian resources to new markets, and offer unwavering support to the hardworking women and men in Canada’s natural resources sectors, many of whom have faced tough times recently.*  
- Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, 2019 Speech From the Throne

*Planting is capitalism, environmentalism and a bit of tang.*  
- A Camp Called Mudslide, film

### 2.1 Introduction

Understanding gender-based violence through a Feminist Political Ecology lens highlights that this violence is a “phenomenon rooted in local histories and social relations, and is also connected to transnational processes of material change, political power relations, and historical conjuncture” (Peluso and Watts, 2001). Indeed, a narrative approach to gender-based violence research must be rooted in each story’s setting; the historic processes, social relations and economic considerations pertaining to the industry and corporate resource control (Hippensteele, pg. 3, 1997; Rochealu & al., 1997; Harcourt & Bauhardt, 2018). The chapter presents a general overview of the industry that highlights some of the unique ongoing practices of tree planting in BC. The first section will provide background information about economic, political and cultural processes that have shaped the forestry and tree planting industries in the province. The chapter then goes on to outline relevant legal and regulatory contexts governing the industry, as relevant to this research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a literature review outlining significant previous contributions to our understanding of the industry, including its unique culture and the lifestyle of tree planters. By coming to know these contextual considerations - and by situating research participants' stories in “the lay of the land” - we can better understand and redress the sources of gender-based violence in the industry.

## **2.2 Critical Context: Political, Economic and Historical Considerations**

The complex political, economic and historical processes of BC forestry have been governed by “finance capital, settler-colonial enclosures, and deregulation” (Ekers, 2018). In practice, the neoliberalization of forestry processes in BC allows for wide-profit margins for state and corporate actors alike, at the expense of sustainability. This extends to replanting, which has been treated as a “cheap as possible” way to fulfill the companies’ legal obligations, with minimal oversight from the state to ensure reforestation contributes to sustainability or that companies fulfill basic labour requirements. As such, re-planting rates are dramatically insufficient, and current reforestation practices are an inadequate sustainability strategy for redressing the ecological damage of deforestation. This is not an exhaustive exploration of forestry in BC, but this section will parse out these various “densely knotted together” processes in the transformations of BC's forest land (Ekers, 2018).

British Columbia as a province, and Canada as a country, is built and has been reliant upon the extraction of natural resources from unceded or traditional Indigenous territories (Gobby & Gareau, 2019; Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014; Klein, 2013). Broadly speaking, “Canada is an example of a resource-rich country that has lived off its inheritance” (Marchak, 1995, pg. 83), an inheritance that was stolen from Indigenous peoples who have stewarded their lands since time immemorial. Today, around 95% of the forests in BC are publicly owned and 29% of the province’s total exports are from the forestry industry (BC Forest Product Export, 2021). Forestry remains a cornerstone of the province’s economy and is pivotal in BC’s extractivist project.

Therefore, the state, the forestry industry, and by extension the tree planting industry, embody neoliberal characteristics typical of extractive industries. In fact, “rural regions of British

Columbia, Canada, are one of the most rigorous sites of neoliberal policy experimentation in the world” (Young, 2008). Neoliberalism describes “the institutional, political and ideological reorganization of capitalism that has been imposed through the attempted institutionalization of “free market’ doctrines” (Heynen & al., 2007, pg. 153). However, neoliberalism “has not established a framework for sustainable development, stable political regulation or social cohesion. Rather, neoliberalization projects are deeply contradictory insofar as they tend to undermine many of the economic, institutional and geographical preconditions for socioeconomic revitalization” (Heynen & al., 2007, pg. 154). In the province’s relationship with the primary resource sector, this is evident in the encouragement of capital growth over socio-environmental health and the subsequent widening of profit margins through pro-industry deregulation policies, and idealized occupational cultural norms including rugged individualism (Parfitt & al., 2020).

The BC government allocates rights to harvest or manage forest lands to private parties through a complicated system of licences, or timber tenures<sup>3</sup> (Clogg, 1999). These tenures are almost always perpetually replaceable as the under-regulation of these operations characterizes forestry management (Ekers, 2018). Indeed, when “an entire economy rests upon a few large corporations, governments are unlikely to apply rules that could damage or even inconvenience its ‘stakeholders’” (Marchak, 1995, pg. 88). In return for harvesting rights, the BC government legislated reforestation as corporate responsibility of the harvest licensee itself in 1987 (Forest

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<sup>3</sup> The state also has a heavy hand in timber harvesting. BCTS (British Columbia Timber Sales) is the government agency responsible for auctioning provincial logging permits, managing “20 percent of the province’s allowable annual cut for Crown timber” as well as reforestation contracts for projects such as Forests For Tomorrow (FFT) Program and Forest Carbon Initiative (FCI). Investigations have found BCTS notoriously thwarts their own protection rules and violates old-growth management plans (Lavoie, 2019; BC Government, n.d.).

Act, 1979; BC Gov News, 2017). Therefore, companies have a legal obligation to replant the land they profit from. Indeed, state and corporate actors maintain “that its renewal policies were sustaining the forest, but an illusion, more than forest, was sustained” (Marchak, 1995, pg. 62). The careful maintenance of this “illusion” has allowed for catastrophic deforestation province-wide (Cox, 2021; Simmons; 2020).

Tree planting companies are the subcontractors charged with practically maintaining this sustainable “illusion” under a reforestation system that necessitates cost-minimization, so as not to diminish wide profits margins from the “green gold” of timber harvesting (Marchak, 1983). Corporate timber licensees and the state alike award reforestation contracts to individual planting companies based upon a lowest bid model where “cost is the primary consideration in awarding a contract” (Harris, 2011, pg. 4)<sup>4</sup>. These private and public reforestation efforts have been described as ecologically “anemic” and an “embarrassment” (Parfitt et al., 2010). The disparity between what needs to be planted, the economic cost of this labour and the government’s reforestation budget and efforts, remains gaping (Parfitt et al., 2010; Press, 2021).

The tree planting industry’s evolution reflects its neoliberal relationship with both state and private forestry management systems. The earliest reforestation efforts in the 60s and 70s were the financial responsibility of the state. These early “small-scale” efforts were actually women-driven as the first tree planters in BC were white and Indigenous women living in rural communities. At this time, women were excluded from timber harvesting, but were still permitted into primary resource-related work through replanting (Ekers, 2014). However, as the replanting of logged cut-blocks became a legislated corporate responsibility in 1987, the forestry

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<sup>4</sup> There are some reforestation contracts that are also directly awarded to companies based on long-standing relationships or contract proposals.

labour force broadly was facing dramatic changes. Running parallel to a downturn in the logging industry, women reforestation crews were “phased out” by professional male-dominated labour contractors who “blew the women’s productivity out of the water” (Ekers, 2014). The modern model of replanting ensued, wherein “the introduction of a piece-rate wage scheme and a series of other innovations individualized the labour process and refined the practice of planting trees” (Ekers, 2014). In conjunction with this lowest bidder contract award model and competitive piece-rate wage schemes for labourers that “centre on individual achievement” (Ekers & Faran, 2010), neoliberal logics of profit maximization propel all facets of decision-making within the silviculture industry (M'Gonigle & Parfitt, 1994, pg. 61; McCarthy, 2005; Parfitt & al., 2020). In 2004, “the amount of public dollars spent on replanting decreased by 93 per cent” (Parfitt et al., 2010) and tree planters themselves felt this economic squeeze hardest, with volatile pay and labour conditions described as “grim” in the early 2000s. However, due to ecological and carbon-related forestry initiatives, such as the Forests for Tomorrow Program and the Federal government’s Two Billion Trees promise, industry estimates found a “25% increase in overall volume of work from 2006-2020” (WFCA, 2020a), although reporting has found these initiatives to be problematic (Press, 2021; Kuitenbrouwer, 2019). Piece-rate wages, known as tree prices, have accordingly, if marginally, increased in recent years.

This section has introduced some important political, economic and historical industry features in BC, highlighting the neoliberalization of BC forestry and its socio-ecological consequences. This system of reforestation has been widely criticized by ecologists, Indigenous communities and industry watchdogs alike. Forestry in BC has long been criticized as “destructive to the environment in which it operates, [it is] an industry in a state of economic collapse... it has not built into itself the silvicultural capacity needed to sustain it

environmentally or economically” (Drushka & al., 1993, pg. 11). The myth of “perfect regrowth: for every tree cut down another one is regrown” (Simmons, 2020) continues to be problematic. The messages and views “that British Columbians get of our forests... are carefully curated” (Cox, 2021), allowing corporate actors and the state alike to avoid adequate regulation, and massively profit from timber harvesting without adequately restocking harvested lands in socio-ecologically sustainable manner (Parfitt et al., 2010; Simmons, 2020; Cox; 2021; Marchak, 1995; Wood; 2021; Venier et. al., 2014; Harris, 2011). Graeme Wynn summarizes this, saying:

‘Sustainability’ has appeared in many guises since foresters in the American northwest began to talk, a century or so ago, about sustained yield as a means of ensuring healthy forests, continuing lumber production, and stable human communities.... But in a world in which most influential eyes have been fixed, firmly, on the bottom line, and that bottom line has been measured, for the most part, by a single metric—profit/prosperity/the \$—that balance has been hard to find and harder to sustain (Wynn, 2016).

### **2.3 Tree Planting Companies, Camps & Community**

On the ground, this aforementioned “single metric” of profit scarcely leaves space for considerations of environmental sustainability, let alone holistic safety concerns. For planters and contractors alike, this “single metric” is boiled down to tree price – the more you can plant, the more you can earn. Tree planting is an intensely physical job which most often requires workers to live proximally to cut blocks in remote bush camps of varying states of isolation and comfort for the length of their contract (WFCA, 2020a). This creates a distinctly competitive, “work hard, play hard” culture that has been associated with violent masculinities in other resource extraction-related industries (Carrington et al., 2010; Kojola, 2019).

Most BC tree planting companies are represented by a larger organization known as the Western Forestry Contractors Association<sup>5</sup> (WFCA). This association is committed to “business

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<sup>5</sup> Many Western Canadian tree planting companies have operations in the province of Alberta, as well as in BC. As such, the governing body known as the WFCA also often extends to include companies that

and safety leadership in the silviculture industry” in BC through organizing annual conferences, advocacy, communications and occupational health and safety mandates (WFCA, n.d.-a). The BC tree planting sector in general comprises “approximately 65 employers [and] these contractors range in size from less than 10 workers to nearly 500” (WFCA, 2020a). Although tree planting in BC employs roughly 5,000 workers annually, more concrete statistics are difficult to obtain owing to the transient, seasonal nature of the industry labour force (Ekers & Faran, 2010). The individual planter will earn only what they are able to plant. However, this single metric of per-tree-wage profits is enough to financially incentivize, attract and retain a workforce season after season to labour under these challenging circumstances. In addition to the financial incentives, some planters are attracted by the “freedom” of living and working “outside” of normal society (Ekers & Faran, 2010). Indeed, other scholars who have studied tree planting culture have noted that the industry continuously upholds a narrative of “adult summer camp” and a “Canadian rite of passage”, thereby attracting young ‘exploitable’ labourers through ‘work hard, play hard’ notions of individual earnings and freedom, far from what is considered ‘normal’ society’ (Ekers & Farnan, 2010).

Although there have been some attempts to organize tree planter labour unions for economic and health and safety-related protections, obstacles to this have included a:

predominately a young seasonal workforce with no long-term commitment to the industry, remote and dispersed work sites, a lack of organizing resources, and a ubiquitous spirit of libertarianism that permeates the workforce and contractors alike. The piece-wage system also inhibits many of the traditional bases of collective action and solidarity as it individualizes workers’ material interests while simultaneously aligning them with those of their managers or employers (Ekers and Sweeney, 2010).

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have operations in Alberta. While this study focuses on tree planting in BC, it is understood that there is both industry and company operational crossover between Alberta and BC, as well as the rest of Canada. Due to the limited scope of an MA thesis, my focus remains on BC.

Neoliberal influences and a dispersed, young and seasonal workforce deterred collective unionization in the 1990s, and since then there has been little labourer collectivity in industry operations in BC (Ekers and Sweeney, 2010). The notable recent exception is TWIG (Treeplanters Workers Industrial Group), a small, grassroots planter advocacy collective with a telling mandate: “TWIG began in October of 2018, as a small group of planters who were frustrated by the way the planting industry operates; all too familiar with stories of sexual violence, rookie hazing, and illegally endangering activities that permeate an exploitative industry” (TWIG, n.d.).

Demographically speaking, according to recent surveys, the average age among “employees in the field... is 25.7 years of age and 36% of workers [are] students” (WFCA, 2020a). There are “approximately 65 separate camps located throughout the province at the peak of operations [in the spring] ... with an average camp size of 50 to 60 workers” and most “workers provide their own accommodation. The majority... use tents. Others use converted vans, campers, and trailers or motorhomes” (WFCA, 2020a). Planting crews, typically of 6-12 individual labourers, are deployed daily by truck, but sometimes even helicopter or barge, typically working three days “on” followed by one day off.

While individual reforestation contractors are organized under the WFCA, individual tree planters themselves self-organize online. There is a well-established tree planting website forum called RePlant.ca where planters and supervisors alike frequently post, comment and debate about an array of labour, economic and cultural issues relating to the industry. Besides this forum, seasonally and geographically disparate labourers across Canada interact over Facebook. While there is one central tree planting Facebook page known as “King Kong Reforestation” (KKR), two other Facebook groups are important to note for the purposes of this study. “Radical

Silviculture” (formerly known as “Womxn in Silviculture”)<sup>6</sup> is an online community created by women planters to establish a safe space for non-cis-men planters to communicate outside KKR. This safe space also exists for non-cis men planters to discuss ongoing issues of gender, sexism, harassment and assault without the “gross comments section” (Hana) trolling that KKR is known for. Indeed, many planters have noted how harmful interactions on KKR can be, mirroring problematic interactions in real life planting camps. In early 2020, a group split off from Radical Silviculture because some cis-women members protested aspects of the group’s inclusivity mandate, such as rules which asked for all members to use non-gender specific language when writing posts. Some of my interviewees discussed how this third online group, “Silviculture Sisters”, created a cis-women-only space, which has a gender-essentialist mandate and non-binary/trans-exclusionary practices that fomented notable tension.

On all three of these platforms, planters share news, discuss planting culture, and advertise employment opportunities; buy or sell gear; organize rideshares, and discuss ongoing social issues in planting such as gender-based violence. In each space, the tone and characteristics of posts and comments typically align with the mandate and membership of each individual group; a general search about sexual assault or harassment in any of these online groups can be anything from illuminating to deeply distressing.

## **2.4 Gender-based Violence & “Institutional Betrayal” From Industry Leadership**

Beginning in 2017, the ongoing issue of unaddressed gender-based violence has emerged and become visible in the industry. This section will explore responses from tree planting

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<sup>6</sup> “Radical Silviculture” replaced the name “Womxn in Silviculture” in April 2021 following a membership-driven initiative to address the harmful implications of the term “womxn.” The term or “womxn” is problematic as it is harmful towards non-binary and transgender individuals by continuing to deny full access to womanhood (Chandra, 2021).

leadership to reports of sexual assault and harassment. At the 2017 annual conference - on the heels of the global #MeToo movement - a WFCFA report admitted that “sexism is more prevalent in the tree planting industry than is generally recognized... [and] although the overall demographics of the industry show we are approaching a gender balance at the worker level, the sector remains male-dominated” (WFCFA, 2017). In this conference, panellists identified that within the industry there is “a tendency to believe that societal norms around harassment and other behaviours are suspended on reforestation crews, due to the isolation of some camps, cultural assumptions about being a fringe community, lack of wise leadership and good examples, and the general inexperience of the workers and some supervisors” (WFCFA, 2017). While this was attributed also to the dominance of men in management positions and lack of resources to deal with complaints of sexual harassment, a discussion of power abuses and accountability measures was lacking entirely. Regarding recognizing gender-based violence and taking accountability measures, industry representatives wrote:

We have to consider how much our workplaces and conditions resemble university campuses: same demographics; same gender balance and same opportunities for abuse. University campuses, of course, have been causing a national uproar because of the epidemic of sexual assaults among students... These situations involve more suffering for victims and worse consequences for supervisors and owners as the violations attract the OH&S [Occupational Health and Safety] Regulation, the Criminal Code of Canada and The Canadian Human Rights Act (WFCFA, 2017).

This WFCFA report notes the significance of the analogue of widespread university sexual assault, and also notes some of the legal obligations that hold employers responsible for establishing safe workplaces. I would like to identify parallels between the insufficient responses from industry regarding gender-based violence and the inaction or insufficiency of post-secondary responses to sexual assault nationally (Rogers, 2020; Crocker, 2020; Quinlan et al., 2017; Gorsak, 2019). Following high profile cases such as the rape chants at Saint Mary's University, the misogynist Facebook posts at Dalhousie's dental school, and the suspension of

the University of Ottawa's hockey team, it has been noted that image-conscious institutions can be nudged into action by a scandal, but “cost-benefit logic dissuades [them] from implementing the wide-ranging prevention training and response supports... since ‘returns’ of such measures are difficult to quantify, universities are reluctant to invest in preventative initiatives” (Quinlan & al., 2017, pg. 64). In institutions such as university campuses, this has been coined “Institutional Betrayal” wherein “survivors of sexual violence turn to their institutions for accommodations and support [and] are often disappointed by the disbelief, blame and stigmatization” (Gorsak, 2019). This sense of betrayal, also often called a “second assault”, exacerbates the post-traumatic reactions to the initial experience of gendered violence (Quinlan & al., 2017, pg. 61). These feelings of “Institutional Betrayal” or “second assault” are described by my interview participants when they have shared narratives of attempting to get support from management after incidents of gender-based violence, as Chapter Three will highlight.

The WFCA is a corporate-composite association that claims only now to be “realizing” the pervasive extent of these injustices after long overdue consciousness-raising in society generally and the bravery of tree planting survivors for speaking out. While it is promising that industry leadership have been nudged by “scandal” to publicly recognize the prevalence of these pressing issues, it is not enough to merely say this happens here. Industry leadership needs to acknowledge that this happens here, *and* explain how they are addressing it on multiple scales. Further reading of this 2017 report indicates that this type of comprehensive action for survivor welfare is not a central industry mandate. The same WFCA panel continues on to advise industry leaders that, “it is imperative to deal with workplace harassment problems right away... these situations involve... worse consequences for supervisors and owners” (2017). The lack of care for “dealing with workplace harassment problems” in a manner that extends beyond financial or

legal incentivization implied in this statement is telling. The tiering of “worse” post-reporting consequences for supervisors and owners decentres the experience of the survivor and instead centres managing industry optics, “damage control” and overall profits. These “cost-benefit logics” are central to the phenomenon of “Institutional Betrayal” wherein survivors do not find the support they need from their workplace. This way of characterizing industry responsibility makes it clear that the bottom line - rather than concerns for the wellbeing of their workers - is driving company responses, making it clear that industry leaders are less interested in the holistic well-being of survivor workers. “Damage control” approaches such as this assertion by the WFOA are dangerous and disenfranchising as they actively render harassment complaints silent, invisible and do not centre the experiences or needs of survivors. It demonstrates that industry leadership would prefer that these issues not be theirs to deal with at all, rather than constructively working to ensure workplaces are free from harm or taking accountability for their role in perpetuating unsafe workplaces.

Clearly, there is a problem of gender-based violence in planting, and employers on the whole are not actively engaging with this problem in a way that supports those who are experiencing these harms. Care-deficient responses such as the 2017 WFOA report have also been attributed to underreporting in Canadian society broadly, wherein only 15% of women who experience assault ever report it (Ending Violence Association of BC, n.d.). Among other distressing or traumatic consequences survivors face after experiencing harassment or assault in the workplace, studies show that 1 in 7 women simply leave their job after experiencing harm due to their organization’s lack of care after the incident (Kearl et. al., 2019). This too upholds rape culture, and silences the lived experiences of many people who have experienced harm, creating the negative feedback loop that characterizes the experiences of many survivors by

preventing appropriate responsive action. Simply put, organizations and perpetrators alike continue to get away with causing violence and harm towards their co-workers.

Industry leadership were forced into discussing these issues once again at the 2020 WFCA conference, thanks to advocacy from a feminist social services center called the Northern Society for Domestic Peace (NSDP) located in Smithers, BC. After support workers at the centre received multiple disclosures of sexualized violence from planters and one planting company actually sought their assistance in handling an incident of gender-based violence, the NSDP created an anonymous SurveyMonkey platform which they circulated across the three prominent planting Facebook groups in order to better understand how pervasive sexual harassment and assault might be in the industry. At the 2020 conference, support workers from the NSDP shared over 70 traumatic and previously unheard accounts of sexual assault in the tree planting industry, predominately from women tree planters, that they had collected through these anonymous surveys (Trumpeter, 2020).

I attended this conference to hear this presentation, and as the speakers from the NSDP read through these many painful stories to a conference room of mostly older men, company supervisors, owners or managers, the mood in the room was one of shock. One through line from these stories was that when women were assaulted in camp, they feared not being believed, or in fact were not believed, when reporting to camp management. The NSDP also shared some statistical data they had gathered in a brochure created for the conference: “Only 13% of survey respondents had *never* experienced sexual harassment/assault in camps.” These anonymous respondents knew what management in the conference room appeared not to: sexualized violence is a pervasive and ongoing issue in tree planting camps.

This portion of the 2020 WFCA conference was covered by national and regional BC news outlets, which noted that these important and previously silenced narratives have emerged in part due to the rise of the feminist “#MeToo era, [which] provides one of the first opportunities for tree planters to tell their stories” (Trumpeter, 2020). The news articles covering these reports called these “disturbing accounts” of sexual assault in planting “shocking, but not surprising” (Metcalf, 2020). This was also certainly the mood during the conference presentation itself. It was my impression that the listening audience of industry leadership knew that they have participated in and shaped an industry which has not cared about the harmful experiences of its workforce. Therefore, as a researcher, I found it equally disturbing that while we are shocked by traumatic disclosures such as these, these accounts fail to surprise us when we hear stories of women assaulted in their workplaces. The underlying expectation emerges that women and gender diverse labourers are inherently unsafe in these work hostile environments. The power systems that interact to precipitate these injustices need to be addressed so women and gender-diverse planters can maintain bodily sovereignty when working in any field, including planting, and we do not learn to expect and accept such “unsurprising” stories.

## **2.5 Legal & Regulatory Obligations**

This section will offer an overview of the regulatory and legal processes regarding human and labour rights that apply to the planting industry in BC. As my methodology foregrounds the experiences of women and gender-diverse planters, it is understandable that their experiences are nested within the camps and companies in which they work. Importantly, this regulatory and legal context did not arise in my interviews. Most of my interviewees simply described tree planting as “a place where there aren't really any rules. You witness that rules don't exist” (Diana). This section will explore what “rules” there actually are, as well as the regulatory and

legal obligations of employers. I will also highlight persistent gaps in their practicality, compliance and accessibility.

While survivors could pursue justice through law enforcement and the criminal justice system, “there are well documented systemic deficiencies in how the criminal justice system responds to cases of sexual violence” (Clarke, 2020). A discussion of the complex ways in which the criminal justice system fails survivors is outside of the scope of this thesis, but it is important to understand that the criminal justice system can be a barrier-heavy, retraumatizing system, often leaving survivors feeling “isolated, frustrated and voiceless” (Department of Justice, 2019).

Another legal avenue is the BC Human Rights Code which directly prohibits employers from discriminating against workers on the basis of “sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression” (Human Rights Code, 1996, 13). Workers who are subject to discrimination, including gender-based violence, are able to bring a claim against their employer based on the potential violation of the Human Rights Code. Compared to the criminal justice system, “human rights tribunals are cited as a better vehicle for pursuing sexual harassment complaints” (Hastie, 2019). However, this option is still an imperfect, demanding and lengthy process where harmful victim-blaming stereotypes, re-traumatization and “vulnerability to backlash is consistent” (The News, 2017). Furthermore, most survivors simply do not know this option exists, and employers are less than likely to advertise this as an option.

In the province, occupational health and safety legislation is the responsibility of WorkSafeBC. Under the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulation, employers have a positive obligation to take all reasonable steps to prevent and minimize discrimination, bullying, harassment and assault in the workplace. This includes implementing an effective policy and

procedures, as well as workplace training for all employees (WorkSafeBC, 2013). While workers can file a claim against their employer through WorkSafeBC, this statutory agency takes an “education over enforcement” approach. Their mandate is to ensure that employers are focused on bullying and harassment education and prevention, but they very rarely penalize non-compliant companies. In fact, after a claim has been made through WorkSafe against an employer, responsibility for handling the incident is typically handed back to the employer themselves (Personal Correspondence with a WorkSafeBC claims agent; WorkSafeBC, “FAQs Workplace Bullying and Harassment”).

The British Columbia Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) was established in 2004 as a WorkSafeBC partner to concentrate more closely on safety operations in provincial forestry. It is an industry-funded association that works alongside “forest sector employers, workers, contractors, and provincial government agencies” to provide forestry-specific health and safety information and auditing with the mandate that “every forestry worker goes home safe, every day” (BCFSC, 2020). Through the BCFSC “SAFE Certified” program, companies themselves are mostly internally-responsible for safety audits. Under BCFSC, there is a Silviculture Advisory Committee (SAC) which is a tree planting sector-led safety council that self-monitors for effectiveness and “collaboration among actors is the principal method used to achieve” SAC’s industry standards (BC Forest Safety, “Silviculture Advisory Committee”). Importantly, there is no mention of workplace harassment or assault on any of these websites or mandates. Furthermore, just like the SAC, the WFCFA is also a contractor-composite association. While they have addressed gender-based violence through some advocacy, they have little legal or regulatory power (Harris, 2011, pg. 10). Furthermore, because contractors operate “at a considerable physical and institutional distance from management and from regulators” such as

BCFSC, the SAC or the WFCFA, consistent enforcement is a considerable challenge thereby intensifying workplace dangers (Lawson, 2010).

Therefore, although many legal and regulatory bodies exist within the province, persistent gaps in compliance and relevancy prevail. Following a devastating labour rights scandal involving a tree planting company subjecting workers to “slave-like” conditions in 2010 (Balikama Obo and Others v. Khaira Enterprises and Others, 2014), forestry safety ombudsperson Roger Harris tellingly titled his planting industry watchdog report “If A Tree Falls in The Woods and No One is Around to Hear It” (Harris, 2011). Harris summarizes the gaps in regulatory processes of government agencies, which have resulted in devastating under-reporting and under-regulation of tree planting companies (CBC News, 2011). Harris highlights the practical limitations to the effectiveness of various these enforcement strategies, stating:

There are a number of government agencies responsible for enforcing regulations around camps, including: the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Environment, MFLNOR, and WorkSafeBC. Each agency approaches enforcement differently. Some adhere to a complaints-driven approach, which means that enforcement does not occur until an incident has taken place. Others follow an education over enforcement approach, which may have long term merit but potentially increases opportunities for abuse. Finally, some agencies rely on random in-field inspections to enforce regulations, but without accurate information about camp location and operating timelines, the effectiveness of this type of enforcement is also limited (Harris, 2011, pg. 10).

Harris’ report importantly argues that there are few and unclear pathways for planters to hold their companies accountable for unsafe workplaces. The gaps highlighted by Harris reflect a seasonal industry based upon rugged individualistic freedom and profit-driven remote operations. Despite the existence and “collaboration” of these many administrative, regulatory and legal bodies to which tree planting companies are supposedly accountable to, there is little incentive or accountability for compliance built into these systems (Harris, 2011, pg. 10). Not only does the remote “distance limit ordinary factory-style surveillance, and this sets the working

lives of extractive workers... apart from those of their colleagues”, but the forestry industry’s reliance on “outsourcing and performance-based contracts” influences the practical, “boots on the ground” motivation for ensuring compliance with OHS rules (Lawson, 2010).

Indeed, the responsibility for compliance is largely company-focused, thereby allowing for space for serious workplace injustices to occur in remote places without adequate recourse or oversight. Harris notes:

There are routine and systemic problems in the forest industry as a whole, including the way government contracts are awarded and the lack of government enforcement around safety standards... The regulations are there, but this was an example of where everyone took care of their own silo and no one took care of the worker (CBC News, 2011).

The isolated, competitive, primary resource marketplace is entirely concerned with cost-minimization, and so taking responsibility for non-market related issues is simply not a priority (Harris, 2011, pg. 13-16). The nonexistent enforcement around safety standards is notable from my interviewees’ experiences. Regarding the poor labour practices that she noticed over the course of her planting career, one interviewee said: “Within the regulation of WorkSafeBC and the idea of a workplace, there are just so many unacceptable things that go on in planting” (Susie).

A looming gap in compliance or enforcement for safety standards is under-reporting. Some of the regulatory bodies, notably the criminal justice system, WorkSafeBC and the BC Human Rights Tribunal, “adhere to a complaints-driven approach” (Harris, 2011, pg. 10) and multiple barriers to reporting are an issue for survivors of gender-based violence in tree planting. These reasons include the demographic nature of the workforce, the difficulty of navigating and accessing external resources while planting, and the additional risks to survivors created by disclosing or reporting. The WFCFA has noted that one of the challenges in their labour force is having a “primarily young, and increasingly less experienced, seasonal silviculture workforce”

(WFCA, n.d.-b). Young, inexperienced, contracted labourers often lack the resources to understand and advocate for their fundamental rights to a safe and healthy employment environment, making labour exploitation easier to “get away with” and often resulting in under-reporting.

Furthermore, navigating these many systems could be mystifying to a young worker, and difficult to access safely from a remote bush camp. Finally, for survivors of gender-based violence, the process of disclosing and reporting to any employer, legal authority or regulatory body can be profoundly risky and challenging (Sersier, 2018, pg. 69-91; Lorenz & al., 2019). The viral social media hashtag #WhyIDidntReport (Fortin, 2018) and the treatment of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford (Traister, 2019) are two notable cases which exemplify these disturbing trends.

Beyond these reasons, deliberate discouragement from company leadership contributes to under-reporting. Tellingly, the 2017 WFCA Workplace Harassment Report urges individual companies to handle incidents of assault and harassment in the field quickly and internally, so “these issues” can avoid attracting attention of external regulatory bodies such WorkSafeBC, the Human Rights Act, or even the police with the fear being, as noted in section 2.3, that these external regulators will bring “worse consequences” for owners and managers (WFCA, 2017). This approach does not incentivize accountability to rectify the harm from incidents, but rather incentivizes under-reporting; employers are more invested in, and are guided to, dodge the attention of external regulators. Consequently, workers are further distanced from the support that a reporting process could provide and the experiences of survivors are side-lined, superseded or silenced.

In the neoliberal framework of forestry in BC, governmental regulations are seen as direct limitations to increased profit and income-margins for the industry and for individual planters alike. Recall that reforestation is a subset of the logging industry, an industry among extractive industries that has long viewed external regulation, be it environmental protections or safety guidelines, as a hindrance (Lawson, 2010). The planting industry, then, is part of a composition of contractors and subcontractors all eagerly pushing to exploit or be exploited (Swidler, 2018, pg. 51). Just as in other industries governed by neoliberal frameworks, the ongoing harm against women and gender-diverse workers is an accepted by-product of this exploitation (Welch, 2014).

The forestry industry desires to minimize all costs associated with replanting trees, to safeguard what forestry scholar Patricia Marchak calls their “green gold” (Marchak, 1983). From that perspective, being accountable and taking care of workers feels like an imposed additional cost. However, if employers are found liable in failing “to protect workers and other persons present at workplaces from work-related risks to their health, safety, and well-being” (WorkSafeBC, n.d.) and the harmed worker is able to navigate the reporting apparatus, it can result in devastating legal and financial repercussions for company owners (Deloitte, 2019). To provide one example, if an employer was found guilty of discriminating against an employee through “poor treatment”, the BC Human Rights Tribunal alone could award the complainant up to \$50,000 in just an Injury to Dignity Award (BC Human Rights Tribunal, n.d.).

This all helps to clarify why the industry prefers self-regulation, and why the historic silence around ongoing gender-based violence in the industry prevails. WorkSafeBC, the Human Rights Tribunal, and administrative safety councils like BCFSC all aim to reduce the risks of worker abuse, but there are substantial gaps in their abilities to meet those goals. These gaps

include ineffectual enforcement of rules and the weakness of complaint-based responses in an area where under-reporting is all too common. Moreover, the gaps are compounded by the material-motivations of a profit-driven structure and rugged individualism of industry culture. Some regulations do exist in theory, but their practical application in the bush is limited by ineffectual enforcement, deliberate industry attitudes and the socio-material conditions of the tree planting industry.

## **2.6 Literature Review: Tree Planting in Academia & Beyond**

Although industry responses and regulatory contexts remain flawed, I think it is important to note that the 2017 and 2020 WFCAs annual conference efforts alone have done more to acknowledge gender-based violence than almost any academic tree planting study. This brief literature review concentrates on the ways in which gender, power and tree planting culture are understood by previous academic studies. The bulk of tree planting research has been conducted by, and ultimately centres around the experiences of, men planters. Because the industry is characterized by a hyper-masculine performance of bush skills, seasonal experience and piece-rate tree numbers, one such researcher noted in his methodology that, “performing fieldwork in a traditionally-masculine industry required a performance befitting this norm... [therefore] it was necessary to display practical prowess during the research process” (Sweeney, 2009a). The alarming toxicity implied in this methodological approach perpetuates a sexist mentality of the hyper-masculine, profit-focused “work hard, play hard” culture that tree planting is well-studied for (Clark, 1998; Walby & Spencer, 2018). Sexist and harmful industry attitudes coming even from academia shed light on deeply embodied cultural values based heavily on “masculine traits” and “neo-tribal” belonging to the industry (Sweeney, 2009a; Walby & Spencer, 2018). These cultural values need to be understood as more than innocuous by-products of a physically-

challenging, rugged industry; these cultural values can harmful, exclusionary and dangerous.

In a 2010 study entitled “Planting the Nation: Tree Planting Art and the Endurance of Canadian Nationalism” scholars Michael Ekers and Michael Farnan note that “planting trees under a piece-rate wage scheme is widely recognized in Canada as a veritable national ‘rite of passage’ for young, white, middle-class university students and travellers” (Ekers & Farnan, 2010). These scholars point out that, “whiteness, a denial of the colonial present, the negation of class, and a continued blindness to issues of gender and sexuality collectively continue to be some of the enduring features of Canadian nationalism” which are heavily romanticized within tree planting culture (Ekers & Farnan, 2010). This allows the industry to market itself as an “adult summer camp” and attract a workforce to the physically-challenging bush world of tree planting without reckoning with issues of colonialism, gender or power (Ekers & Farnan, 2010). This invisibility is replicated in how modern lived experiences of women and gender-diverse people working in the industry have been subsumed and “painted over” by these harmful, hegemonic narratives.

The industry-reinforced branding of a romantic, nationalist portrait of tree planting labour as formative and rugged is actively promoted by industry leadership to annually reproduce a workforce with the "ideal type" high-performance labourer, allowing for higher productivity, labour retention and hyper-masculine hegemony in management. Building of the seasonal reproduction of tree planting communities, Brandan Sweeney’s 2009 study entitled “Producing Liminal Space: Gender, Age and Class in Northern Ontario’s Tree Planting Industry” highlights that planting camps and the communities therein share common cultural practices despite ranging geographic locations, frequent worker turnover and seasonal breakup of camp formations. Sweeney argues that a successful operation contains seasonal practices that “require

tree planters to become completely immersed in their occupational lifestyles... The communities formed in tree planting camps help facilitate the transfer of tree planting knowledge—tacit or otherwise—and the diffusion of social norms and expectations that are essential to the successful operation of a camp” (Sweeney, 2009a). While Sweeney highlights the prevalence of “binding” social practices such as inappropriate language and intense partying that are “antithetical” to behaviour in the outside world, he does not name their harmful potentials or links to rape culture. To him, this is all just representative of the “lifestyle of tree planters... [which] would be considered unacceptable in most workplaces” (2009). However, despite the harmful implications of these findings, Sweeney makes no comment on the potentially harmful risks associated with remote, male-dominated fringe cultures where young people working within a hegemonic patriarchy feel a unique, temporary sense of freedom and lawlessness. Particularly, what Sweeney describes as “the use of ‘rough’ language – especially of a sexual nature... [which] diffuses into the occupational community's dominant culture” (2009) is not studied for the toxic or disturbing connotations it could have in diffusing rape culture into the occupational community. Sweeney dismisses this simply by noting that “gender is not the focus of [his] particular article” (2009a).

However, when gender is an explicit focus in tree planting literature, these studies sensationalize or offer misguided justification for inappropriate, harmful gendered behaviour. In a study entitled “Pounding Dirt All Day: Labour, Sexuality and Gender in the British Columbia Reforestation Sector” scholar Michael Ekers (2012) studies how a heterosexualized working environment becomes entwined with notions of productivity, leading to a harmful gendering of tree planting work. Ekers found both women and men are subject to sexual scrutiny and harassment in usage of derogatory, hyper-sexual language, sexual objectification, harassment

and workplace power dynamics condoning unconsented sexual activity. However, “male bonding and forms of sexual assault become intertwined” and “the reinforcement of binary understandings of ‘homo’ and ‘hetero’ sexuality govern relations between male workers” (2012). Engaging more deeply with these harmful implications of the objectification of women planters as a tool of bonding between men co-workers is not Ekers’ objective. Women labourers remain the object, never the subject. This understanding of gender-based violence as a by-product of homo/hetero-social labour practices in remote workplaces is interesting, but inadequate when imagining socially just or legally-safe workscapes for all.

The most recently published tree planting article also breezes over potentially-harmful community practices entitled “Tree Planting as Neo-Tribalism: Ritual, Risk Boundaries, and Group Effervescence” by Kevin Walby and Dale Spencer (2018). These scholars investigate ritualism, uneven power dynamics, performative masculinity, partying and risk-taking as normalized, anticipated and “neo-tribal” tenets of tree planting culture, deriving from an omnipresent culture of “work hard, play hard” (2018)<sup>7</sup>. Regarding partying and days off, the scholars write this:

‘First order is to get the rooms, second order of business is to get booze’... [and] another part of this riotous conduct is sexual, or “shacking up”. Lovers are shared. Some people might go through several lovers in a single season. Only in the crowd... do people lose their deep fear of being touched. In the Dionysian sexual revelry of the neo-tribe there is an abandonment of individuality through entering and being entered by another persona... Indeed, who you love matters in a neo-tribe: ‘if you're shackled up with a high-baller, you're in with management’ (2018, pg. 63).

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<sup>7</sup> A discussion or reckoning with the harmful, colonial implications of calling tree planters “neo-tribal” is also absent from Walby and Spencer’s study.

In this account of routine “night-off” party, alarming and disturbing risk factors for gender-based violence--such as the uneven power dynamics in sexual relationships, the unrestricted and encouraged use of alcohol or drugs, the absence of consent conversations, and a culture parading this “neo-tribal” experience--are presented as normal, authentic and desirable. These scholars do agree that “ritualistic parties can be risky... People fall into gigantic bon fires, cut their feet on broken glass, and drink themselves away into stupors” (2018). However, there is a complete absence of critical regard for potential gender-based violence as the scholars fail to consider the potential for harmful, inappropriate or violent behaviour within these highly-vulnerable circumstances. Importantly, this is the first tree planting study written in the #MeToo era and written after the 2017 WFCA report on harassment and assault, but just as prior studies offer deeply limited accounts of power, gender and violence in planting, these scholars fail to acknowledge the gender-based violence risks particular to women, let alone non-binary or trans folks in these “neo-tribal” spaces.

Interestingly, the only academic study attentive to the lived experiences of non-men planters is also the oldest. A public health thesis by Jocalyn Clark from 1996 entitled, “Do Tree Planters Live On the Edge? Health Risk Taking Among Reforestation Workers in Northern British Columbia” holistically considers various physical and mental health risks associated with tree planting work using qualitative methods. Clark notes that planting culture is “a strong social organization bestowing power based on productivity, the number of years of experience and gender reinforcing group norms. Risk-related social activities maintain an integral place within the subculture and promote a sense of camaraderie and collectivity” (1996, pg. ii). Clark also takes interest in the industry’s self-perpetuation of the “adult summer camp” and “breed of their

own” (1996, pg. ii) culture as she aptly recognizes connections between these risky cultural behaviours and risks of sexualized violence particular to women planters.

Clark notes that social dynamics and power relations are augmented by the remote location and intensity of life in a tree planting camp. She compares the prevalence of sexual harassment in high performance athletics to planting, noting how “the social influence exerted by the hierarchy within tree planting crews allows higher power planters to determine accepted and expected behaviour and set an example for others... it yields them opportunities to use/abuse that power in social relationships with others” (1996, pg. 105). Due to coalescence of power imbalances, remote settings and intense labour lifestyle, Clark finds:

Sexual harassment appears to be a central issue within tree planting crews and constitutes additional risk for women in tree planting. The consequences of such widespread gender-based harassment and discrimination include increased risk of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and violence, in addition to increased alcohol and drug use, and unsafe sex. These hazards heighten women's experience of the social health risks identified for tree planters (1998, pg. 115).

Clark also published her important findings about the prevalence and harmful consequences of sexual harassment for women planters in a article entitled, “The More Lady You Are, The More They Treat You Like a Lady: Sexual Harassment and Health Risk for Young Women in a Male-Dominated Work Setting” (1998). Clark notes:

[W]omen face additional pressure because those in power hold traditional attitudes toward women that allow gender-based discrimination and harassment to persist despite increasing numbers of women entering the business. The implications of sexual harassment for health risks are serious and represent inequitable working conditions for female tree planters (1998).

Clark demonstrates how “gender-based harassment is accepted as part of the job” (1998) and reveals how industry-held attitudes towards sexual harassment both dismiss and justify the harm as a naturalized by-product of the “work hard, play hard” environment.

Clark shares participant narratives wherein individuals in management roles, crew bosses and men generally wield unchecked power in these remote work locations<sup>8</sup>. One participant narrative discusses industry hiring practices wherein crew bosses will hire “a good selection of women for his friends, for himself, for opportunities, for sexual opportunities” (Clark, 1998). When women refuse sexual advances in the workplace, many quit as “they just can't take the harassment, the day-to-day grind” (Clark, 1998). Clark illuminates the role management and crew bosses play in establishing harmful work environments, with one interviewee saying “unfortunately foremen do tend to, I guess, sexually harass women... in hopes that... if you anger the women, the women will work harder... [but] for most women, if anything, they don't work harder. They get the job done so they can go home. Or they go (back) to camp and then they try to figure out how to get out of it” (1996, pg. 107). Here, management itself is identified as a common perpetrator of gender-based violence, and aggressive sexual harassment is inextricable from sexism and profit-driven motivations. Importantly, Clark concludes her thesis urging further investigation, stating “the issue of sexual harassment requires immediate attention as more women become members of the treeplanting workforce and no mechanism exists in treeplanting camps for the resolution of harassment issues” (1996, pg. 117).

Some news media and popular culture have echoed the troubling findings from Clark’s research. There are limited examples of tree planting in grey literature, perhaps due to its quasi-invisibility and macho, rugged-characterization. Yet tree planting holds some cultural currency as a sensationalized topic of conversation and public interest. The 2021 tree planting documentary “One Million Trees” briefly touches on sexual harassment and assault in the

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<sup>8</sup> Within the financial structure of most reforestation companies, crew bosses make a percentage of what the individual planters on their crew earn. Therefore, crew bosses are financially incentivized to have strong planters on their crew. Crew bosses are also known as foremen or staff.

industry (Bumstead, 2020, “One Million Trees”). Further, the memoir by Canadian author Charlotte Gill discusses her experience as an industry veteran, providing some insight towards the ecological insufficiency of current reforestation practices, as well as “tribal” industry culture (Gill, 2011). Another tree planting memoir by self-proclaimed “high-baller” Greg Nolan contains “depictions of the women on planting contracts [as] an uncomfortable blend of romanticism and sexism” (Sandborn, 2019) Finally, a well-circulated 2018 VICE article entitled “Bush Workers Deal With Sexual Harassment in the Middle of Nowhere” shares narratives from several women silviculture workers involving sexual innuendoes to sexual assault that they experienced in the workplace. Interviewees describe how the industry protects predators and one was quoted as saying, “I feel like I’m hunted because I’m female and that feels unsafe” (Fox, 2018). These non-academic sources provide valuable insights, but lack queer perspectives and a larger critical context with regards to precipitating power structures.

Altogether, the deficiencies of modern tree planting literature in addressing intersections of gender and power in tree planting demonstrate that Clark’s recommendations have been undiscussed until now. This study addresses that gap. I include the lived experiences of women as well as gender-diverse tree planters, and center their voices in an intersectional manner considerate of interwoven power dynamics. My research adopts a survivor-centred solutions-orientation to redress and transform the power dynamics responsible for gender-based violence in camps.

To summarize, other than the important contributions of Jocalyn Clark, past academic tree planting scholarship ultimately fails to consider the experiences of non-men, or the dangers to non-men, given the cultural conditions and practices they explore in planting camps. These studies reveal that tree planting is a remote, traditionally-male dominated workplace where

reckless and ritualistic cultural practices shape tree planting camp communities. These studies also reveal persistent indifference from industry and some academics alike towards equitable gendered labour practices in planting, reinforcing the notion that tree planting is an “adult summer camp” (Ekers & Farnan, 2010) where rugged “work hard, play hard” (Clark, 1998; Walby & Spencer, 2018) cultural attitudes rule.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Tree planting is a subsector of globalized forestry processes in BC. It is an industry characterized by a neoliberal approach to regulation, meaning that the state and corporations alike focus on profit maximization at the expense of environmental and social wellbeing. As such, planting itself is under-regulated, and is resistant to further regulation. Further, despite legal obligations that employers have to take all reasonable steps to prevent harm in the workplace, there are practical, cultural and logistical challenges with accessing reporting, justice or safety for planters who do experience gender-based violence. Previous research has identified several characteristics of the industry culture that are potentially harmful to women, but - with one notable exception - these works fail to explore the dangerous implications for women and gender-diverse planters within this cultural context. Popular media has explored these harms in a limited way. This context is understood as the complex setting within which the stories from my interviewees unfold. The stories from my interviewees are ultimately nested within this interwoven context as these various economic, historic, cultural and political elements define, and set the stage for, gender-based violence therein.

## Chapter Three - Power, Profit and Patriarchy in Planting

*My advice is to say, this is a dangerous industry and you are not valued, other than for putting trees in the ground.*  
- Diana

*[We estimate] one person, per each camp, per season. And that is only the people who have reported. That is so shocking to me. And it's so shocking because you feel like it couldn't happen. Because you're in this really wonderful, close environment with a lot of like-minded people and a lot of them have become fast, close friends and then [violence] becomes very hard to hear.*  
- Northern Society for Domestic Peace spokesperson, 2020

### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I introduced the context for understanding the tree planting industry - the setting of my research questions and my interviewees' stories. These contexts help clarify some of the factors contributing to why and how women and gender-diverse people continue to face gender-based violence at high rates in the tree planting industry, and who benefits when these injustices remain silenced. The tree planting industry is steeped in exclusionary notions of the resource extraction sector as a patriarchal space, wherein a "hard work, play hard" (Clark, 1996) mentality is driven by profit-maximizing desires particularly regarding piece-wage productivity, leaving little time or resources for other concerns. As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, when these structural and cultural attitudes are combined with remote work locations and permissive attitudes towards risk-taking, the result is a systemic gendered power imbalance that creates vulnerabilities for harm to occur without recourse. For a primary resource industry which boasts that "gender has nothing to do with how well workers perform in the field" (Lindsay, 2015), gender certainly affects how labourers are treated, harmed, cared for and believed.

This chapter explores the following question: *What power systems interact to render women and gender-diverse people vulnerable to gender-based violence in the tree planting industry?* This question is explored through the stories from 20 planters, survivors and industry

leaders from over 17 planting companies. Looking for patterns and trends in emergent themes, my analysis is particularly attentive to the areas where cultural and structural power domains intersect with one another. My focus is on confronting these violence-tolerant and silencing forces in a careful and intersectional manner. Many of the planter-survivors I sat down for conversations with told me that they have never told anyone about the harm they experienced while tree planting during or after their season, or that they were not believed when they did speak out.

Tanya Sersier concludes her work *Speaking Up: Feminism, Rape and Narrative Politics* by writing:

Collective practices of listening, hearing, discussing and assimilating stories among ourselves and insisting that they receive a hearing in the world at large are essential to a feminist politics of narratives. These practices both insist that women and survivors of violence have lives that are narratable and that matter and we make them matter through their collective and reciprocal production and telling (2018, pg. 214).

The collected stories interwoven throughout this chapter, with their insistence that women and gender-diverse planters are systemically vulnerable to experiences of harm in the bush, matter deeply. This chapter does not seek to “prove” whether or not women and gender-diverse people experience high rates of sexualized violence in tree planting bush camps. As Sharon Marcus has argued, sexualized violence research should be regarded “not as a fact to be accepted or opposed, tried or avenged, but as a process to be analysed and undermined as it occurs” (Marcus, 1992, pp. 388–389). By believing, elevating and honouring the stories from tree planters who have experienced harm in these violent and gendered ways, this research in itself represents a challenge to these silencing forces. I feel grateful and honoured to carry these stories forward. I have spoken with, care deeply about and believe people who have experienced gender-based violence. It is time that the industry, and company leadership, learns how to do the same.

This chapter will address the culture and structures that together precipitate a hostile environment for women and gender-diverse tree planters. Within tree planting culture, entrenched profit-driven attitudes, notions of freedom, and toxic-masculinity are reinforced by company leadership, trumping trauma-informed aspects of safety, believability and care. Within the structure of the industry and companies, these cultural norms are upheld by a failure in adequate human resources [HR] or management practices and a willful blindness or deliberate silencing from management towards problematic, harmful and unsafe behaviour. These cultural and structural dimensions of power not only create vulnerabilities for women and gender-diverse labourers to experience harm, but prevent these harms from being appropriately minimized or adequately responded to, leading to prevalent, unacknowledged and unaddressed gender-based violence.

When preparing for research interviews initially, I wanted to frame interviews as an opportunity for a conversation that felt natural, and conversely wanted to give participants the chance to speak about their experience holistically. Drawing upon trauma-informed methodologies and feminist ethics of care (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Knight, 2019), I wanted planters to feel like they had agency and choice over what they shared. I also wanted planters to feel safe, believed and cared for as we talked, for I knew, or soon learned, that this has not always been the experience of my interviewees when disclosing harm that they have previously faced. Our conversations typically began with first encounters with the industry, then discussed what the environment in camps looked or felt like, and continued on to discuss the harms therein. The flow of this chapter will address the culture that creates space for harm to occur, followed by an investigation of the structures that marginalize and silence planters who experience harm.

These entwined power systems not only create a hostile environment for women and gender-diverse planters, but also prevent gender-based violence from being adequately redressed.

### **3.2 Becoming a Tree Planter**

*It's just a completely different crazy world. It takes you out of society, and into a different world.  
You become a member of a strange clan.  
- One Million Trees documentary*

I will begin this chapter where I began each interview, asking how my research participants became tree planters. As explored in the second chapter, there are many attractive qualities about the tree planting industry, which individual companies promote and capitalize on in order to retain the large, transient workforce needed for the difficult, physically-taxing manual labour of tree planting season after season. “With the majority of workers paid on a piece-work basis, the workplace is strongly focused on production. These cultural features place a critical and immediate emphasis on the best selection, motivation, treatment and training of workers” (WFCA, n.d.-b). Companies heavily emphasize a planter’s material potential: tree planting can be a lucrative endeavour, and the material interests of workers and management align as profit margins increase as more and more trees are planted quickly (Ekers & Sweeney, 2010). Company websites typically include a statistics page containing figures outlining top earnings, daily tree averages and rookie earnings. While these can vary in range depending on the company, the contracts they win in the bidding process, and geographic location, average earnings fall between \$300 to \$350 per work day (A&G Reforestation, n.d.; Summit Reforestation, n.d.). Company websites also heavily advertise many other attractive lifestyle factors to potential planters, enticing them to come plant and enjoy working hard, highlighting freedom, fun, delicious meals and the opportunity to make friends from all across the country. One such advertisement says:

Tree planting will be simultaneously the most rewarding and the most challenging adventure of your life. Through the profound friendships made in the planting community, the physical art of planting trees, and the moments of solitude, tree planting will push you to your greatest potential. Tree planting is more than a job for the summer, it is an initiation! Find out what you're capable of, be a part of the most fun and hard-working workforce in Canada, fund your schooling/travels and see parts of the country you wouldn't otherwise. Come plant with us! (Summit Reforestation, n.d.).

In this recruitment declaration, the company promises many “rewards”, but the biggest reward is ultimately financial gain. The industry’s neoliberal roots are prominent in the recruitment statement’s emphasis on the individual and their individual capacity to earn, achieve and thrive. Tree planting is advertised as an “art” which extends beyond any regular job opportunity; it is a life-changing opportunity where budding planters can prove themselves, make friends and above all else, make money.

Interestingly, while many planting companies do hire some planters through their websites and promotional materials, when discussing how my research participants came to become a part of the industry, nearly every person noted that they heard about the industry or found a “spot” on a crew through friends, family members or Facebook connections. Notably, only two of my twenty participants were not hired or referred in this manner when they went tree planting for their first year.

Conversely, mimicking the beckon of company website recruitment materials, the planters I spoke with similarly noted that they were interested in finding community, growing stronger in their bodies through physical labour and having an adventurous summer in the outdoors. They also noted that they were attracted both by the opportunity to make significant amounts of money over the course of just a few months and by the freedom of the party culture.

I had heard just ‘word of mouth’ about it. Like this is a Canadian ‘rite of passage’ that you can go do and make a lot of money and it’s a really interesting experience in the wilderness. So, I had always known about it for a while. And so finally when I went to university, I met someone who had worked with [the company I am still with] and knew

a crew boss who was hiring... I got in touch with that person and I got a spot on their crew and then that was my job in university for four years. Every year. And this will be my fifth season coming up (Hana).

As highlighted in the quote above, planters I spoke with were also drawn in by the industry branding of tree planting as a rugged, lucrative and freeing “rite of passage” in the “wilderness.” All of the women and gender diverse planters I spoke with also highlighted that it was important for them to experience working in a manner that would challenge traditional notions of primary resource work as “men’s work,” breaking barriers of what is traditionally-constructed to be rugged, hyper-masculine outdoor labour.

[Before planting] I just felt really incapable. And I felt unable to take on the world while just being an urbanite. And I wanted to be made strong. And I was starting to realize all the ways I was conditioned into my female body and made to be feminine. And I was a small person, I didn't have a lot of muscle on me. I was like 110lbs or something and I just wanted to prove to myself, that I could do something really challenging. And I remember just asking to be made strong. That’s what I asked of the experience (Rebecca).

### **3.3 Vulnerabilities in Recruitment Practices**

Although many women and gender-diverse planters initially felt drawn to the industry to break out of gender constructed norms, interviewees identified many problematic aspects of casual planting recruitment practices that contribute to a lack of safety and oversight. Hiring practices are cavalier, governed by “insider” politics or nepotism, are profit-motivated and include sexist practices. When I asked interviewees about their experiences and perceptions of planter recruitment, most participants described how they found their first spot on a tree planting crew through a friend or family member. One participant explained to me: “So typically the way people are hired by planting is by word of mouth. If you know someone, typically you'll get a job” (Emma). Due to this insularity, hiring is much more casual, and much more cavalier, than other workplaces. Planters are referred, connected and hired casually, through friends and “word

of mouth” (Hana), but also through social media forums such as KKR or “Radical Silviculture.” The trend that people are hired because of who they know is important. This not only speaks to how pervasively nepotism can influence company decision-making around safety concerns, but more generally there is a strong sense of an “insider vs. outsider” mentality that pervades planting.

Having this “insider” link proved essential to finding a good, safe spot on a good crew. To provide a negative and unsafe example, Taylor made their hiring connections only through advertisements on KKR and unknowingly ended up working for a dangerous company in which they were the sole women-presenting person present. Furthermore, in my personal experience as a researcher who had not been planting before beginning this study, it felt important to have contacts on the “inside” to help facilitate trusting connections and conversations with potential interviewees, and I also found my spot on a crew through friends.

Indeed, many of the planters I spoke with voiced that in order to get into the industry, “you are so much more hireable if you have a friend who is a tree planter... [and] once you have one season under your belt, once you had experience to show, crew bosses won't really question your character. It's just kind of like oh, you've planted before, you're hired kind of thing” (Susie). As Susie highlights, this industry experience takes precedence over substantive character references. Indeed, particularly once the season has started and production becomes more pressing, my research stories show that the qualifications for hiring are a planter's experience, skill, productivity or an insider's connection, rather than a character reference for their industry history.

Furthermore, a power dynamic of nepotism often characterizes decision-making in the industry. Several of my participants mentioned situations where family and close friends were

given priority by management regardless of safety concerns. Moreover, planters and survivors described instances where they felt silenced due to the close familial or friend connections in a company, which trumped emotional and physical safety concerns. One planter described one company where she worked where “it was kind of a family thing” (Francis), making it hard for non-family members to advance in management. When discussing why planters choose not to disclose to management after experiencing harm, another planter described the nepotistic networks of power as a silencing system, saying that:

Sometimes I guess it is easier [to remain silent] than going against a system that has a bit of nepotism there and people that are good friends with the other supervisors or people in power or whatever. It is this tight knit community and when you try to yank it up at all, you can get a lot of push-back I think... It is just a web of people who are really close and they have crossed lines where if they hadn't been so well-connected, they would have been terminated... one guy who is still a supervisor who has had a lot of accusations about being abusive. But he is still supervising... Which is horrible to think about. Especially in a camp setting, it can be dangerous (Josie).

Not only does this “insider” culture and management structure favour powerful individuals over others - perhaps unsafely allowing them longevity in the industry - it also affords supervisors and crew bosses unchecked control over who and how they hire, allowing for the normalization of sexist and cavalier hiring practices. For example, hiring protocols that are standardized workplace practices in other industries do not universally apply in planting as it is up to companies to enforce. The strongest example of this is the lack of reference checks.

During my interviews, I asked early in the conversation if reference checks were a familiar part of the hiring processes. Diana told me that “No one is referenced. If you're referenced, it's for your planting ability, but anyone can come into planting with literally any background” (Diana). Most other interviewees also shared that they never gave references, or reference checks were never done when they were hired, or even that they had not heard of reference checks in planting before. The lack of reference checks, or emphasis on planting skills

and tree productivity rather than character or safety concerns, illuminates another dangerous dimension of this seasonal industry's insistence on profit over general labourer welfare and safety. Eva summed this up well, saying:

It's such a transient job. There's not a lot of longevity. I mean if you move from being a planter to being a supervisor and you stick around, you are solid gold, you are so valued. But even if you're a planter who has stuck around for 3 years, you are also solid, you are valuable, and companies want you because they don't want rookies... I've done it myself before where I've contacted companies before and I'd say like I've done this for a while, I plant good trees, do you want me? And they say yes. It's as easy as that.

In many companies, the hiring of a crew for the upcoming season is done around January or February, and the complete responsibility for it is often farmed out to crew bosses. It was revealed that this is a responsibility many crew bosses do not bother to take seriously or "just don't have time" (Eva) to do with care, also often because they are hiring through friend/familial connections. Furthermore, given the nature of piece-rate labour, in the financial structure of most companies, crew bosses and supervisors are financially incentivized to have the most productive planters on their crew. Brenden, who worked as a crew boss for several seasons before becoming a supervisor, told me hiring "as a crew boss, you just want to have people, you just need bodies, because it's a piece-rate based industry. You want people that are going to make you money" (Brenden).

These informal and profit-motivated hiring practices where "you just need bodies" prove easy to take advantage of. Several women from disparate companies I spoke with described a disturbing trend where crew bosses will select and hire rookie women based upon their desire to sleep with them, before the season even begins.

I know at [my company], some of the male crew bosses will hire their rookies based on people they do want to sleep with. So those things are happening even before the season begins. Male crew bosses basically trying to stack their crews with women they might want to sleep with... but super casual though. It's kind of relayed as a joke, rather than something wrong (Emma).

Other planters I spoke with who had experienced this sexist hiring trend also described times where they were asked to send pictures of themselves to hiring crew bosses in order to be offered a position on their crew. These hiring practices only applied to women, as their bodies are hyper-sexualized. The value is placed on their physical bodies as “an object of planting” (Diana), but also for “hook-up” potential. The sexual objectification of women planters is pre-established before they even plant their first tree. This disturbing trend is not only sexist and unsafe, and there is a disturbing absence of consent culture; it is assumed that crew bosses will just get to sleep with whomever they “select”. Susie described her crew boss saying, “When you’re in a position of power like me you can sleep with any girl you want.” The connotation is that the crew boss or supervisor has limitless power over who they choose to hire and subsequently, who they choose to sleep with.

Altogether, recruitment and hiring practices are notably informal in the industry. This results in several impacts pertinent to this study: firstly, this leaves space for ongoing abuse and harm to occur and remain obscured; secondly, this creates a clan-like “insider” culture that makes accountability difficult; and thirdly, this reinforces a sexist hierarchy of power that supports a culture of permissiveness and sexualization.

### **3.4 Transient Workers & “Predator” Mobility**

A dangerous consequence of the culmination of a profit-motivated culture and problematic hiring practices is that both known and unknown predators can take advantage of an extraordinary ease of mobility from company to company. Steve, a company supervisor, described a situation where he unknowingly hired an individual who “was a planter that was banned from the coast because he was found to be drugging women. He ended up moving to the interior, planted a ton of trees for us, and the previous employers did not disclose any

information. And then that person worked for us for three years” (Steve). Steve continued on to describe how he eventually had to fire this individual again after he sexually assaulted a woman in his camp. After the survivor went to the RCMP with her experience, Steve described what happened next:

So I drove him into town and asked him where he wanted to get dropped off. He seemed totally fine, and I thought he would be a lot more upset. And I asked him where he wanted to get dropped off and he said the parking lot and I dropped him off and then about 10 spaces down, I noticed there was another planting truck, like a supervisor truck. And he just got out and threw his bags in the back of that truck and drove away. And I was like ok... And it turns out he had friends in that camp and they were all management and so probably they didn't even know (Steve).

This chilling story is symptomatic of an industry where you “just need bodies” (Brenden) because the “basis [of] the workplace is strongly focused on production” (WFCFA, n.d.-b).

Concerns of predatory behaviour are often not vetted, taken seriously or considered reasonable grounds for dismissal when a planter’s productivity is making the company money.

This unfortunately is only one of many stories shared with me where known predators move throughout the industry with ease, and their history of sexualized violence was unknown or merely unimportant to their next company. Monica, Robin, Hana, Robert and Diana all shared similar stories. These interviewees were particularly upset that there did not seem to be an official way to stop dangerous individuals from continuing to participate freely in the industry, and continuing to have access to potential victims in remote, vulnerable bush camp settings. Because competing, siloed companies operate independently, and provincial privacy laws<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ending Violence BC “Creating Safer Workplaces And Communities Policy Guidelines” explains that there are limits to disclosing personal information about a person who caused harm (pg. 22-23). Among other reasons, unless there is a threat of imminent danger, disclosing personal information, *without* being solicited for it (ie. reference checks), that could affect someone’s reputation is prohibited in conversation and online. Also see the BC Privacy Act: <https://www.canlii.org/en/bc/laws/stat/rsbc-1996-c-373/latest/rsbc-1996-c-373.html>

technically prevent overt disclosures about workers between independent contractors, often only informal “whisper networks” allow for a planter’s potential history of sexualized violence to be revealed. After being targeted by a predatory individual, Monica began speaking to other friends at different planting companies about his violent behaviour towards her. She said:

And once I started talking to other people who knew this guy and had planted with him, he had a track record at over six companies of stalking and harassing and he had been fired from at least one of those companies! It was like this fucking trail all over the industry (Monica).

It was only by tapping into an informal “whisper network” (Douglas, 2018) that Monica brought these allegations to her supervisor. As Monica pointed out, it remains that any individual, even once fired for inappropriate or violent behaviour, still has the ability to move relatively easily throughout the planting industry without their history of sexual misconduct following them because they are culturally and structurally free to do so. As demonstrated in Steve’s story, this is particularly true if the accused predator is a high production planter with insider connections or many years of experience. The mobilization of the “whisper network” or, as Francis called it “these common experiences that were just stories told around a campfire”, hold undeniable importance as women and gender-diverse planters themselves can informally share critical information regarding safety. However, that critical shared information is undermined if company decision-makers do not listen or believe what survivors and their supporters say.

The overall problematic human resource practices of the tree planting industry are important to examine as they contribute to pre-establish and re-establish the power dynamics and camp demographics inside of bush camps before the season even begins. The dangerous lack of oversight and adequate reference checks, and priority given to planting productivity, all allow for individuals wishing to take advantage and cause harm to others to do so easily, and continually, even once investigated. The trends analysed in these sections above - the emphasis on

productivity rather than character, the concealed mobility of accused predators, and even the casual, hyper-sexualization of women's bodies when hiring – prevail into other forms once the planting season has begun.

### **3.5 Gender Representation in Camp Management**

Early in my interview-conversations, I was also curious about the gender representation of the decision-makers that interviewees noticed and experienced in their company. When women and gender diverse people enter or find any longevity in planting, it is important to recognize that they are doing something quite radical compared to the demographics of the resource industry labour force broadly. In the natural resources sector broadly, women make up around only 21% of the total workforce (Statistics Canada, 2021). Furthermore, non-men are also more likely to bear the harms of extractive industries without realising any of the financial or social benefits (Ladeau & Lewis, 2019; Reed, 2003; Kojola, 2019). Therefore, it is promising and unique for a resource industry to have close to 50/50 “men vs. women” ratios on a non-management level, with some notable exceptions. Monica pointed out that, “Like the actual labour... it doesn't discriminate if you're a man or a woman or whatever you identify as, which is beautiful” (Monica). While tree planting accepts women and gender-diverse people as entry-level, general labours, or “physical bodies of planting” (Diana), the decision-making positions of power and authority are overwhelming held by cis-men. This was confirmed by an industry representative who said, “We realize that lack of representation of women in positions of authority remains part of the issue... We are unusual in the sense that we have as many women as we do in a primary resource industry. We need to continue to recognize and promote that” (Robert).

However, it remains that women and gender diverse planters do not see the same recognition or promotional success as cis-men in planting. The sector's characterization as "male-dominated" endures because of the persistent and reproducing cis-male demographics of crew bosses and especially of camp supervisors, company owners or managers<sup>10</sup>. Hana noted that "women in management in my four years have always been a much smaller percentage" and Monica said that "I could count on one hand the number of female supervisors I know running camps." The typical trajectory is that it takes at least three seasons of experience to become a crew boss, and more to become a supervisor. Crew bosses are typically selected by supervisors, and supervisors are selected by company managers or owners. Individuals interested in those roles would have to continually return, not just to the industry generally, but usually to the same bush camp or company in order to move up through relationship-building. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that men typically return, endure and thrive seasonally enough to be promoted and recognized, and this longevity or "success" in planting camps mirrors the "hyper-masculine management" (Emma) gender representation in all levels of management. Meanwhile, my interviewees expressed that non-men who return are passed over for these roles because of inherent sexism (Francis), or that non-men choose not to return or seek management roles due to high-rates of gender-based oppression and violence (Emma).

These reproducing demographics seep into an overall cultural workplace landscape of planting as a "boy's club" where the "'naturalness' of rural landscapes has the effect of naturalizing idealized forms of masculinity" (Ekers, 2013), reproducing old notions that men "belong" or "are made" in the outdoors (Cronon, 1996). Indeed, the masculine ethos of who

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<sup>10</sup> Conversations with those familiar with the industry have revealed that there is apparently only one non-man company owner of all the 60+ planting companies in BC, at the time of writing this in Winter 2021.

belongs in power in planting camps derives from conceptions bound up in “rural landscapes and associated forms of agricultural and resource work [which] underpin the popular notion that rural men are rugged and physically and emotionally strong... that rural men supposedly embody an ‘authentic’ masculine identity” (Ekers, 2013). In planting, this all converges seasonally to recreate an “old, white, male industry” (Francis) leadership.

### **3.6 Learning the Bush Camp Culture**

Chapter Two’s literature review detailed the “distinct... breed of their own” (Clark, 1996, pg. ii) planting culture as an under-regulated “fringe” bush culture wherein the “diffusion of social norms and expectations [are considered] essential to the successful operation of a camp” (Sweeney, 2009a). This section will explore how this valorized “cowboy culture” can be sexist and harmful in nature, requiring new planters to learn community norms quickly. When I asked about what their first season in the bush was like, every planter I spoke with, regardless of gender identity or current role within the industry, shared that it was “an intense experience” (Lily). Cameron told me that during their rookie season, they, “cried every single day. And not just because of gender-oppression, but also the job was that hard.” Rookie planters are tasked not only with learning how to plant trees quickly, properly and for up to 10+ hours a day, but rookies also must learn the dominant occupational culture of the camp around them. As many interviewees shared with me, the challenge inherent in going tree planting can be rewarding and gratifying beyond potential financial security. I want to foreground these positive potentials and acknowledge that planting can be “all these polar opposites” (Diana).

However, a lot of this potential reward and gratification is determined by what the socio-cultural climate is like in a particular bush camp, and also how easily rookie planters can adapt to that dominant, alternative culture. In Sweeney & Holms’ (2008) investigation of community

cultural practices in bush camps, they explain that: “To ensure a successful planting season for the crew, new planters must be integrated into the camp’s community of practice and acquire the tacit knowledge that enables them to become as productive as quickly as possible” (Sweeney & Holms, 2008). Productivity is essential to successful integration into camp. They also explain further that this tacit knowledge is defined by inappropriate planting-specific vernacular, binge substance use after a hard day of work, and an emphasis on competition to encourage more productivity in piece-rate wages.

While these potentially-harmful cultural aspects are a definite departure from workplace social norms outside of a bush camp, they are valorized inside of planting camps, allowing them to be taken to dangerous extremes. Lily shared:

The whole energy of a camp sometimes is like men are planting and they're big and strong and I think they see that among themselves and it just fuels them to be more aware of it and then they feel like they can do anything without any repercussions. And it made me feel really small and totally not comfortable or safe in my surroundings... Supervisors and crew bosses come up in the planting camps seeing that stuff and seeing that as normal behaviour and so they're like ok, this is fine if we build this big box fire and just like drive through it with our car. And it will be like a tradition or something that people do... it's been that way for so long, and you can just go crazy on nights off and you're way out camping in the bush, and nobody is going to be there to stop you from doing that kind of thing (Lily).

These ruling cultural attitudes of lawlessness, recklessness, freedom and the prevalence of unimpeded inappropriate or risky behaviour trended in every interview. Often, it was labeled “cowboy culture” by my participants. When discussing ongoing sexism she faced from management and high-ballers in her camp, Dana shared:

Tree planting camps are so isolated from regular society and we are not at all regulated like other places are. Every time I go planting, I honestly feel like I have gone back in history, like I have regressed like 20 or 30 fucking years, because that is the mentality. It just is. It's the lawless wild, wild West about safety, sexism, issues. It is just so backwards in so many ways. And like it is hard to explain, but it is a sink or swim place. There are not people there to make regulations. And when you're there you just have to get with the

program. And like saying you're a feminist, like don't fucking say that in camp, you're asking for it (Dana).

Like Lily, Dana found the remote, “lawless wild wild West” culture difficult to speak out against; instead, the culture of bush camps requires all planters to “get with the program.” This compulsory indoctrination into planting culture is “intense” (Emma), but it happens in a way that makes it seem acceptable and natural given the “circumstances of the labour” (Robert). For example, during her first few shifts as a planter, Rebecca described drinking alcohol in the truck driving back to camp after a work day, using this example to demonstrate how reckless behaviour is normalized to the point of community acceptance:

So, the whole situation is very new. You don't know what to expect, you don't know what's normal, you don't know what appropriate behaviour is... I was just like, okay, I guess this is normal here. This is what they do here, we are out in the middle of northern BC and this is just normal now... I didn't really think anything of it, everyone was doing it and that was just kind of common practice in the bush that you got exposed to. So that is just an example of something that I knew wasn't ok, but I was still learning the culture (Rebecca).

I want to highlight that while Rebecca understood the situation to be antithetical to what would be considered acceptable and safe outside of planting, she also understood that normal “rules” didn't really apply in the bush and that she, as a rookie woman, had little power and voice to speak up. Just as Sweeney & Holms (2008) pointed out, if rookie planters want to be accepted, “successful” and “productive”, they are required to learn tacit community knowledge quickly and integrate into the dominant planting culture.

However, nearly every planter I spoke with also described that going tree planting also was something that made them feel “stronger and more confident” (Diana). Recalling that some planters, like Rebecca, went planting because they “wanted to be made strong”, the physicality of bush work attracts women and gender diverse people by making “bush skills” that they

“wouldn’t naturally come to just by being a man” (Cameron) more accessible. When I asked what her favourite parts of planting were, Josie also said:

I loved... wow, where to begin. I loved the fact you are outside all the time. It is really important to me... being outside can be really healing. And the people. The people were top of the list for me throughout my time planting. You are in such an intense place mentally and physically every day and you form these bonds with people that are really special and meaningful. And I think stepping out of my comfort zone as a woman. I never thought I would be driving a quad or hitching a trailer up to a truck and winching stuff. Like those are things no one would have taught me before, I never thought I was going to do. And then I was just like in this role I was thrown into and I was seen as capable. And something I have kind of chased ever since. Just seeing what I can do and being made aware of all the things I can do as a woman (Josie).

Those feelings of capability, strength and connection are immensely valuable. However, the very same factors that make the experience so profoundly “meaningful” for women and gender diverse planters, such as the remoteness, intensity and all-encompassing community, are also all factors which increase the potential for gender-based when “cowboy culture” rules.

### **3.7 Profit-Motivated Productivity & Invisibilized Experiences**

After exploring high-baller and profit-motivated power dynamics generally in camps, this section will outline how experiences of gender-based violence are both produced and made invisible by these dynamics. Eva described how her first crew boss had a “suck it up and plant, stop crying, stop whining, kind of mentality... it was definitely that you either make it or you leave. [She said] I am here to make money, so you should be here to make money too” (Eva). Many other interviewees, including the men I spoke to like Brenden, had a challenging first season filled with concerns about “underperforming” and being unproductive. However, once interviewees felt like they “figured it out”, thereby starting to plant more trees and make money, they also began to enjoy other aspects of the job as well, such as becoming part of the larger community, the camp life and the partying.

For my first week I absolutely hated it. I was like... this job sucks and it's so hard and cold. I think I felt a little bit lonely... [but] I think once I started to figure it out and started to make money and I realized, okay wow you can actually make a lot of money doing this... [and] I hadn't made any connections yet and didn't feel ingrained with the crew for the first few shifts, but by the time the second and third shift rolled around I was like I love these people so much we are going to be friends forever (Abby).

Feeling “ingrained” in the culture and being financially productive are entwined; the conflation of productivity and high earnings with feelings of self-worth and belonging within a dominant capitalist workplace culture are not unique to tree planting. Neoliberal capitalism self-perpetuates financial and political power accumulation by knitting together a positive valuation of the self with increased productivity (Esposito, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Bhattacharya, 2019). In tree planting, this valuation can occur daily; planters are paid, and sometimes even publicly “ranked”, based upon the number of trees they are able to plant each day. As a result, “high-ballers” can carry a particular “cultural cache” (Emma) or “social currency” (Susie). Conversely, lower production or “low-balling” planters can receive adverse treatment. Lily shared that during her first season, her crew boss ignored her daily because she was not planting enough trees to be worth his time, saying this:

I was new, so I wasn't really strong. I wasn't a really strong planter. It was my first season. And [my crew boss] would ignore me. It was like I wasn't even a part of the crew. Like he was unhappy with my performance... He would just want to go off and plant with his strong planters on his crew, because this is a crew that had all these strong planters on it... [it was this] boys high-ballers crew, and it was totally uncomfortable for me. I didn't have any person there showing me around and showing me how to do things. It was just really hard (Lily).

Lily's adverse experience underlines the clear priority given to the “boy high-ballers”. She highlights that lack of alternative support for her in this profit-obsessed, patriarchal scheme.

The entwinement of productivity and self-worth is pervasive. For example, Abby stated that, “[When] I made no money, I was pointless” (Abby). Camp management and supervisors

sometimes capitalize upon these feelings of worthlessness through public ranking in order to motivate planters and increase competition, thereby increasing productivity. Emma shared:

The higher management actually posted the numbers of every single person in camp in the mess tent one day in like rank.... It felt awful. It was terrible... They wanted higher production, so it was meant to kick people into higher gear (Emma).

Not only did this leave Emma feeling awful, it can further inflate and fuel the feelings of superiority or “cultural caché” held by high-ranked, high-balling planters. Individual production prowess over others is on display for all in the remote community to see and embody. Indeed, these competitive, profit-motivated cultural values are so strong in planting that some planters themselves believe in the equation that more trees is equal to more power: “People definitely do or can attach their status as a high-baller or someone in management to the way they treat others” (Hana). And meanwhile, low-production planters are left with feeling “worthless” (Abby), “uncomfortable” (Lily) and “terrible” (Emma).

The public knowledge of the ranked valuation of the labourer, the body and productivity can have concrete and harmful consequences, leading to normalized, persistent and violent power imbalances. Material capital is given priority over lived experiences of harm had by women and gender-diverse planters. This is a powerful, invisibilizing and silencing force. Recalling how section 3.4 explored how high-production individuals with a history of sexualized violence can move easily throughout the industry, some camps and companies actually protect harmful individuals for their productivity value; the production capacity of some is deemed more important than any violence or harm experienced by others.

Susie expanded upon this when recalling an incident where a high-baller planter, well known within “whisper networks” (Douglas, 2018) around camp to be predatory or dangerous, was eventually fired for sexual assault:

That was part of the reason why when the guy assaulted the girl in my camp this past year kept being hired back. It wasn't just that the complaints weren't being taken seriously, but also he is an extremely high production planter, he plants a lot of trees and he is seen as the camp high-baller and that carries a lot of weight with it and that trumped a lot of complaints against him, until it got to the point of no return (Susie).

Even when this alarming information was brought to management, it went unaddressed until it got to the “point of no return”. So-called “minor” complaints of gender-based violence were routinely tolerated and dismissed; in the eyes of camp decision-makers, the high productivity of the perpetrator simply overvalued the experiences of the harassment.

The cultural and structural power that tree productivity has in creating an “environment of tolerance” (Robert) for bad behaviour has been noted in news coverage of sexualized violence in planting (Trumpeter, 2020), and in other planting labour rights scandals (Harris, 2011). This dangerous trend of high-baller privilege is discussed in the CBC coverage of sexual assault in the industry, where it is reported that “highly productive tree planters were given a pass... you plant a lot of trees, you can get away with anything” (Trumpeter, 2020). This silencing effect of productivity was also discussed briefly in the CBC documentary “One Million Trees” by two planters interviewed (Bumstead, 2020).

The harmful phenomena of valuing productivity over labourer welfare and safety has disturbing and distressing consequences. All the planters I spoke with discussed some dimension of this power imbalance. Importantly, in an extremely upsetting story shared, Lily was sexually assaulted by a camp “high-baller” and “he was friends with everybody, even the supervisor” during her already adverse rookie season. She said:

That was an awful experience for me. And after that happened, he was continuing to be the same. Like he was just a high-baller and he just didn't really care about what had happened. And I was trying to just be quiet about everything and just sweep everything under the rug, because I didn't think it was going to be important and I didn't really have anyone I wanted to talk to about it. So that was something that felt like... well I don't know if I would say only sexist... but yeah it was pretty horrible (Lily).

Lily's distressing story represents the invisibilizing and silencing forces that tree planting survivors can face when their perpetrators hold additional social power and "cultural caché" through their productivity status and other connections to management. Lily was also in a camp where she was not made aware of sexual assault or harassment policy or guidelines, and various levels of management, including the supervisor and her crewboss, had routinely previously made her feel "totally not comfortable or safe in [her] surroundings". In conjunction with this, Lily understood that the perpetrator was highly valued in the camp community because of his high production capacity, and she never spoke of her assault until years after the incident.

I want to point out that this silencing is akin to the rape culture noted high-performance, competitive sports wherein researchers have found that gender-based violence is particularly likely to occur in tightly-knit competitive male-dominated groups wherein toxic masculinity is entangled with competitive performance of masculine norms (True, 2012, pg. 35-52; Carrington & Scott, 2010; Volkwein-Caplan & Sankaran, 2002). Various factors in "sport culture coalesce to create a high-risk environment for the perpetration of sexual assault... [as] characterized by misogynistic and sexist attitudes, objectification of women, defensive homophobia, sexually aggressive definitions of manhood, pressures for men to 'score' and tolerance and promotions of sexual violence" (Quinlan & al., 2018, pg. 152). These high-risk factors are reflected in the piece-work driven competition culture wherein individuals are systematically, structurally, culturally and interpersonally encouraged to labour strenuously to plant and earn high sums of money, as well as an "untouchable status" in camp. Likewise, just like the untouchability of university athletes and the precarious, competitive arenas in which they socialize, this facilitates extreme vulnerabilities for marginalized people engaging in these systems (Volkwein-Caplan & Sankaran, 2002). When discussing the disproportionate representation of elite athletes in

sexualized violence statistics, one scholar wrote: “Athletes may be granted celebrity status and privilege, leading to a sense of impunity and sexual entitlement. If winning in sport is paramount, some universities and sport organizations may be tempted to ignore or cover up incidents of athlete sexual violence” (MacGregor, 2018). While “winning” isn’t necessarily everything in planting, the number of trees going into the ground certainly can be, meaning that traumatic experiences such as Lily’s go unseen, unheard and unaddressed<sup>11</sup>.

### **3.8 Gender Identity, Sexuality & Unsafe Spaces in Planting**

This section will explore how specifically how queer planters face unique intersections of oppression and violence within the planting. Drawing upon the experiences from above, when queer and non-binary people also occupy positions of power in planting, they still are subject to harassment, oppression and sexualized violence. Cameron explained how, despite being in their third season of planting and holding a management position as crew boss, they still did not feel safe speaking out about their real identity as a non-binary person. Cameron even struggled to earn the same respect that men in their exact same position were afforded.

And being, to people who didn't know, a woman, but then also being out as gay, it was a triple header. Because I was young and inexperienced and everybody knows I am inexperienced... And being a "woman" and being gay, I struggled with earning respect from people and I had a hard time sometimes being strict and getting people to take me seriously. And I didn't think any of the big brawny dudes who were my coworkers experienced that at all... And I never really felt like I could tell everybody, particularly like management and especially the men... sort of a combination of I didn't feel safe and also wasn't up to it. Like the amount of fucking work this is going to take to explain to these people again and again, like my pronouns and my name. Tackling that was overwhelming. And so, I never did. In the whole 6 years. I never said, this is who I am and call me this (Cameron).

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<sup>11</sup> While the planters I spoke with felt strongly that high-performance planters did tangibly have more social capital in camp and “pull” with management, the combination of toxic masculinity and competitive productivity afford an untouchable status to men that women, queer and gender-diverse high-baller are not conversely afforded. As Emma said, “if you're a male high-baller, there's like this sexual potency that you're kind of afforded... but if you're a female high-baller, it's intimidating. So like those power dynamics don't work the same way across genders.”

Despite their position of authority and planting experience, Cameron's true gender identity remained unshared and private throughout their entire planting career. It was not a safe enough space for them to speak out or up about their true name, pronouns or identity because of the toxic influence that "the management, and especially the men" had in creating a work environment that was hostile towards identities beyond the gender binary.

Other planters noted that in their planting camps, there was a telling lack of queer visibility. Often, the cultural environments of planting camps were even actively hostile towards LGBTQIA2S+ individuals. In Susie's camp, members of management were aggressively responsible for oppressing non-binary planters. She shared:

I think the thing that left the biggest impression on me about gender in planting was around non-binary experiences. My friend in my camp was non-binary and went by they/them pronouns. And their crew boss would absolutely refuse to use their pronouns and would go out of their way to call them their dead name or their gender-assigned at birth pronouns and would tell the whole crew to do this and it was super upsetting... they just had to bear it on their crew (Susie).

It is important to note how this upsettingly hostile work environment was actively maintained by the crew boss. Harley also shared that high-production planters and management in her camp displayed explicit homophobic behaviour, creating an overall camp atmosphere that felt unsafe.

The high-ballers and management would run around telling everyone that if you showered you were gay. And so, I felt alienated, like I couldn't be myself. I wouldn't even be able to say if anyone else was queer or non-binary, I don't think they would be comfortable saying so, like myself included. Definitely that culture was not there. It was a very, very hetero-cis culture. I think the reason people were encouraging that in camp is because it comes back to like, it's expensive to bring water into camp to shower with, and if you're all showering that's going to cost the company a lot of money. And so they saved the company a lot of money by getting everyone hyped to not shower through these tactics. And then in my second year, I think that there were more women planters, but I also think that the supervisor specifically hired a lot of women so that he could have his pick (Harley).

Harley's analysis of the situation, about cutting facility costs as a factor in the overt homophobia and sexism perpetuated by high-ballers and management, is notable, as is Harley's impression that the supervisor was taking part in predatory hiring practices. These unsafe, violence-promoting cultural behaviours were driven by the individuals structurally and culturally-granted with the most power within camp.

Harley also noted that aspects of homophobia and transphobia translate to interactions in the online planting community. When discussing a series of posts about trans and non-binary inclusion in planting, Harley shared:

There is not a culture of respecting women and respecting non-binary/trans people in the mainstream tree planting industry... I do think that it is a big issue everywhere, but especially in planting and it is made very, very evident in "Womxn in Silviculture" [now called Radical Silviculture] and King Kong. And many people do not take it seriously and even when they get called out and say they are refusing [to use people's pronouns], they just don't get it... But it's a huge thing in planting. But it just seems like people in planting do not respect non-binary folk and there are a lot of non-binary people that just don't say anything because they feel like it is not worth the fight (Harley).

As both Cameron and Susie's stories suggest, the experiences of non-binary planters are so invisibilized and silenced within the industry and its online communities that many feel it is simply "not worth the fight" during the season to speak up or out. Some planters also noted that on the tree planting Facebook groups, they noticed homophobia and transphobia are frequent "hot topic" issues. For example, when the splinter Facebook group "Silviculture Sisters" was created to protect the transphobic beliefs of women who refused to comply with the gender-diverse mandate of "Radical Silviculture" (Womxn), it set off a flurry of posting activity regarding trans and non-binary oppression across all three Facebook groups, resulting in comments that were numerous and diverse, toxic and supportive. Regarding the safeguarding of "Radical Silviculture" as a safe space for people of marginalized gender expressions, Harley said:

We not only had to explain ourselves to the very people that oppress us and harasses us and that have raped many of us, then the women who made that post messaged me trying to explain why she isn't a TERF and isn't transphobic and I was like no, what you said was very problematic. It was distressing. The argument basically was like do non-binary people have a place in tree planting, and the answer from them was no. And how distressing it would be to be a non-binary person and see this discussion on both groups about whether or not your very existence is valid. I found it to be very upsetting (Harley).

The wholly upsetting invalidation of non-binary and trans identities speaks to the resource industry's valorization of rugged, masculine-cishetero individualism, wherein individuals can be violently discouraged by the dominant culture from exhibiting gendered behaviours that fall outside of this norm (Ekers, 2013).

More unfortunately, like divisions within the mainstream feminist movement, transphobia and other gender-exclusionary practices continue to make even feminist-seeming spaces unwelcome for all people (Hines, 2019; Vakoch, 2020). Indeed, some interviewees I spoke with harboured and shared transphobic beliefs with me. These beliefs were expressed as not wanting the oppression of what they thought of as “women women” (Monica) to be lost in the movement to create safer spaces for all in planting. These TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) beliefs showcase how precious little safe space truly exists for non-binary and transgender planters within any facet of the industry, even in feminist places designated to be safer than the mainstream planting community. TERF comments such as this reinforce that even within feminist communities seeking to eliminate oppression within the industry, the lived experiences of non-binary and trans tree planters labouring at unique, marginalized axis of power continue to be invisibilized and silenced.

### 3.9 Cultural and Structural Barriers to Finding Support in Camp

This section will explore the consequences of toxic masculinity in planting management that work in tandem with structural vulnerabilities to create a “perfect storm” (Eva) for planters to experience gender-based violence without adequate recourse, reporting structures or support.

The upheld structural and cultural barriers to leadership advancement within the silviculture industry mean that, “everyday women [and gender-diverse planters] wake up behind their male counterparts” (Cameron). In returning to the overwhelming uniformity of the straight hyper-masculine industry leadership, my interviewees discussed that advancement to leadership roles happens not through a person’s merit as a leader, but through their productivity as a planter, as well as previously discussed nepotistic favouritism from current management.

The main stamp of approval to become management was that you were a company high-baller and that you planted really well and that you were in with the management culture, which was hyper-masculine. It is all a boy's club - all of the supervisors are men. So even though there is a pretty even split among at least rookies between men and women, that split significantly became super asymmetrical as you went up the management ladder. Because honestly, it just sucks to be around that many men in their late twenties and early thirties. And honestly, it would be challenging for a woman to feel comfortable in that environment (Emma).

Here, Emma is highlighting how tree planting management culturally recycles its uniformity through a maintenance of an exclusionary “boy’s club” culture. Francis pointed out she felt the division of upper leadership in her camps was the result of structural decisions made by her company.

There are hard jobs for the men and soft jobs like OH&S or paperwork for women. In some companies I've worked for, the only management jobs they have for women are the safety and care side. None of those driving a quad or running a chainsaw sort of thing. To be honest, that’s a form of discrimination (Francis).

The patriarchy’s stronghold on gender division results in women and gender-diverse planters continuing to experience systemic barriers, discrimination, oppression or violence, even

once they are veteran planters, high-ballers or hold leadership positions of authority. Cameron explained how they faced harassment and homophobic slurs from their fellow crew bosses and their subordinates alike as a women-presenting, openly-queer crew boss. Women supervisors and crew bosses like Abby, Lisa and Hana also shared stories where men working under them openly disrespected, ignored or harassed them. Abby shared stories where the forester, the representative from the logging company responsible for the contract, refused to acknowledge her as the person in charge by continually asking for her “male boss” instead. Lisa had men working under her in her camp touch her inappropriately and non-consensually. Hana was warned that her planters would dismiss her as “cute” and was subject to public sexual harassment from planters on party nights. Regarding this, she said:

It was just really embarrassing, so I didn't want to talk about it because it was really gross and embarrassing and weird... I understand why people don't want to come forward. There is a lot of shame and fear and embarrassment in telling your story... Certain people in planting camps don't take women as seriously, and that absolutely translates into taking sexual harassment allegations seriously or believing people that are bringing that stuff forward (Hana).

As Hana’s highlighted, “certain” people in leadership positions in camps “don’t take women as seriously.” Indeed, while there are many reasons why people who experience gender-based violence may not wish to disclose or report to their management body, in any industry or arena, within planting there are numerous unique barriers which inhibit and discourage survivors from sharing their stories and accessing adequate safety or justice, let alone avenues of healing. Firstly, cultural uniformity is important to the industry, as represented by male-dominated management makeup and the overall cultural climate of planting camps. As such, many participants described feelings of “not wanting to make it a big deal” (Lily) after experiencing harassment or assault. In Canadian workplaces generally, it has been reported that “80% of Canadians choose to remain silent about the sexual harassment and unwanted sexual contact they

experience at work... people who experience sexual harassment don't want to 'rock the boat'" (Radbourne, 2016). Recalling that bush camps are tight-knit communities located often hours from even a rural town, persistent cultural attitudes encourage planters to think of one another as family, living and labouring beside one, another season after season. It could be challenging to speak out or up against any individual in that community, regardless of any additional power that they may wield, or who is responsible for receiving reports. When discussing barriers to speaking out in planting camps, Josie shared:

I also have friends who I know have experienced sexual violence in planting camps and they just brushed it off like it's not a thing, because I think that's a part of it. It does become your family and you get really close with these people and your boundaries kind of move a little bit and it could be a person that you care about, and you don't see it for what it is. And when I think back to when I was in camps, I was just being complacent. I didn't think of it at the time. You just have a new normal (Josie).

Josie highlights in her experience that what would be considered inappropriate, harmful, non-consensual or violent in other workplaces in the "outside" world is "brushed off" or minimized for the sake of maintaining established community cohesion in camp. Tree planter survivors' fears that reporting would "rock the boat" are grounded in not wanting to disturb the illusion of "adult summer camp" (Ekers, 2010) that has been so well-crafted, well-promoted and reproduced by the industry season after season. By silencing, minimizing and invisibilizing adverse experiences, the promise of friendship, community, potential earnings and freedom remains an intact and enticing central narrative. People who cause harm are able to continue doing so unencumbered, companies can continue to attract a seasonal workforce, and tree planting survivors are silenced.

Reporting from Canadian workplaces broadly also highlights how survivors and people who have experienced harm "express concerns about not being believed, being stigmatized as weak, labelled a trouble-maker, and subjected to retaliation by peers and supervisors, or

diagnosed as unfit for work” (Radborne, 2016). Considering how all these factors could manifest in an isolated bush camp context, the responsibility that company management plays in taking the experience of harm seriously, and in a trauma-informed manner, is critical.

There are many diverse and valid reasons why a survivor would not want to report an experience of gender-based violence. However, during my interviews, it became further evident that some key members of company management were uninterested and incapable of responding to such the complaints of my interviewees with sensitivity, belief and care. Furthermore, company managers, supervisors and crew bosses were often the individuals responsible for the violence, making it all the more difficult for survivors to access justice and support. Francis never reported her distressing experience, because her camp’s supervisor was the perpetrator.

She shared:

It was probably around four in the morning, and my whole bed was just soaked. Everything in my tent was just soaked. And it was beer. Which was so weird, because I hadn't been to my tent all night so I didn't know what had happened. But I slept in the beer, because I didn't have anything else to do. And then I heard through the rumour mill and such, that it was the supervisor and his friends who poured that beer all over my stuff, in hopes that I would have to look for another place to sleep and turn to him and sleep in his bed. And that was the supervisor. So, if that's coming from up there, so if another planter did that to someone else, how could you expect them to face any repercussions? They wouldn't (Francis).

In Francis’ experience, she was incredibly limited in her options after this violent and violating experience; the supervisor of the camp, the person with the most structural and cultural power in a remote camp located hours from even a highway, was perpetrating this harm against her. With no alternative options and no alternative oversight in the bush camp, Francis remained silent. The supervisor who caused this harm continued overseeing bush camps for many seasons afterwards.

This section has highlighted harmful structural consequences of cultural uniformity and traditional gender roles in camps and in management. These consequences include numerous

barriers to reporting or finding support after women and gender-diverse planters experience violence in camps, often at the hands of someone with power.

### **3.10 Systemic Abuses of Power in Bush Camp Management**

While this chapter has already detailed several stories where women and gender-diverse planters have been subject to gender-based violence by their camp management, this section will continue to explore narratives where abuses of power between employers and employees are routine and unprohibited. Ordinarily in workplaces, power-over hierarchies between employees and employers prohibit consensual sexual relationships, as management bodies are held to a high degree of legal responsibility for minimizing and preventing workplace violence (Ending Violence BC, 2019; WorkSafeBC, n.d.). When discussing this abuse of power in camps, Emma said:

In this industry those power hierarchies are just not really acknowledged as being prohibitive to having sexual relationships. And you're in the bush so there's this sense of removal from how a job typically is in the outside world. It's a community, it's a family and so relationships happen that would probably not happen in another industry in that they have more oversight...I saw a lot of the different male supervisors have sexual relationships with young first-year female planters (Emma).

Any relationship where there is a power imbalance by law cannot ever truly be considered consensual (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2019, pg. 8). Camp supervisors and crew bosses can control nearly every aspect about what your day can look like not just in the social climate of camp, but also on the block during the actual labour of planting trees; supervisors or crew bosses control earning potential, physical safety and the quality of the land one has to plant in. While discussing this dynamic with Eva, she said:

You know, if you're not willing to go along with someone and they're saying, hey I wanna hook up with you, and you don't want to, and then they're in charge, well you can definitely feel the consequences of that. They can put you on worse land, they can put you in some really gnarly piece, they can put you somewhere where you are by yourself

and you're not sharing your cache with anybody and isolate you... they totally have the power to do that. Because only they are in charge (Eva).

Diana also discussed the labour-specific consequences she faced after multiple incidents with a predatory crew boss, from which there was no escape.

Especially after I called him out... my crew boss was slowly oppressing me. Like wouldn't talk to me, wouldn't make eye contact with me, started to not acknowledge my existence... And he was putting me in visibly shittier pieces than everyone else... I was feeling pretty depressed at this point because it is really hard and he just keeps putting me in shitty piece after shitty piece... he was literally controlling my money (Diana).

In this story, a lack of oversight, the complete decision-making power management has in the bush, and the silencing that can happen following experiences of harm were responsible for a range of adverse consequences. Diana's powerlessness was made even more evident because her crew boss controlled where she laboured each day, how isolated she was and how much money she was able to make, in an attempt to silence her concerns.

Just as every planter I spoke with experienced or witnessed some dimension of high-baller power and gender-based violence, every planter also discussed dynamics between toxic masculinity, management and gender-based violence, which they felt powerless to speak out against.

There was a lot of sexual harassment in that camp that was perpetuated by management, I don't know how intentionally, but there was definitely a precedent set by people in management. For example, my crew boss was disgusting... he comes up to me and says the only reason I accepted a crew boss position was so that I could watch the girls planting topless. And I was standing alone at my cache (Harley).

Harley experienced a management team that took advantage of their unobstructed power in her bush camp community to perpetuate and cultivate a sexist, homophobic and unsafe work environment. Like Diana, this made her feel uncomfortable and unsafe, not just during camp life, but also during the workday itself.

### 3.11 Neoliberal Freedom, Disposability & Silence

As explored in Chapter Two, planting is shaped by inadequate regulatory oversight. As the previous section highlighted, members of camp management often freely perpetuate a camp culture where misogynistic and homophobic attitudes guide interpersonal relations. This section will explore the traumatic consequences of an unencumbered, profit-focused, patriarchal industry where “you just need bodies” (Brendan) and “rules don’t exist” (Diana). As studied in other neoliberal industries, when workplace decisions are firmly made in favour of profits, notions of “freedom” become a guise for profit-driven under-regulations, meaning that abuses of power can go unchecked (Harvey 2005; Monbiot, 2019; Welch, 2014; Esposito, 2016; Heynen & al., 2007). As many of the previous stories have highlighted, siloed, competitive company operations, lack of accountability and emphasis on wild “freedom” found in the bush all culminate to create a space where bad behaviour continues unimpeded, and even becomes an accepted norm.

Lisa shared these insights during our conversation as we were discussing the environment of tolerance created by management for predatory and violent behaviour in bush camps:

Whenever we talk about limiting freedom people are like, woah woah woah, I think you're going to lose a workforce, because this is freedom. But it can't be all freedom. You know, I don't believe in a free market. I believe in like, regulation of a free market. So, I think that's something as an industry we're totally challenged by... and it comes down to people who haven't been held accountable. So, like we're not accountable to shower, we're not accountable to be normal, but we're also not accountable to keep our substance use in check. We're also not held accountable to not leave piles of garbage in the woods... It's a disposable life (Lisa).

The seasonal, under-regulated and siloed company operations of the planting industry does not adequately build care or accountability into its culture or structure. The lack of limitations and emphasis on general freedom both management and tree planters can take advantage of in bush camp environments have tangible consequences for both the human and non-human actors within the landscape. In these seasonal, finite camps, it can feel like a “disposable life” (Lisa)

where the planters are ultimately “just bodies, because it’s a piece-rate based industry” (Brenden).

On this theme of disposability, often after women or gender diverse planters were assaulted or harassed, they felt forced into leaving the bush camp. When they leave, their stories often disappear with them. As tree planting labourers, women and gender-diverse planters can be viewed as highly disposable. Diana was involved in a situation where she was supporting a friend who experienced sexual assault from a crew boss in their camp. Their subsequent attempts to seek justice for the survivor were met with indifference from management, the survivor ultimately had to leave camp for her safety and the perpetrator remained. Diana recalled this about the meeting with management:

The supervisor’s reaction was, well maybe she's not cut out for planting, and maybe she needs to go home. And I was no, this man should be fired... But the supervisor's reaction was like, well it’s about money. And she wasn't a good planter, because she had just started and she came late and she was dispensable. So, it was just like she's not cut out for it. And she had zero support. And she had to leave (Diana).

In this highly upsetting story, the ruling power of capital, of money and of trees, trumps any aspect of care, respect or believability the survivor deserved. The supervisor’s “cost-benefit” analysis of the survivor’s adverse experience determined that the financial incentive to keep a perpetrator in camp, where he could potentially cause more harm to other workers in a remote workplace, was worth more than the disturbing experience and concerns of the survivor and her supporters. Anti-rape scholar Sersier writes how “this is a very contemporary form of neoliberalism, where a commitment to victims’ rights sits alongside a political insistence that individuals take responsibility for managing their own risk... [and] individuals who fail to act on their own behalf to manage risk are not deserving of protection” (Sersier, 2018, pg. 38). Echoing Sersier’s words, Diana shared her analysis of the situation with me:

You are instantly saying she is not valued, she is just a body, a body of physical planting, and also someone just raped her and we are doing nothing. She was going to go on in her life feeling that she was not even valued as a person in that moment. So that was really difficult. And there was nothing we could do at that point. Like what else could we do. We were also trapped in the bush... and also, it's my job too, I also can't leave too. I need to make money. It's the instance of when planting gets really difficult because you're trapped. You're trapped because it's your job, it's your source of income... [and] getting out of the bush camp is really difficult (Diana).

Gendered, profit-driven forces work in unison to render individual tree planters as disposable bodies, valued only for their individual earning potential, in a hostile environment far from help. Diana empathetically describes the ongoing trauma of sexualized violence, and she highlights her own powerlessness as a supporter as she too was beholden to material forces in the bush. The camp supervisor's decision is final, the survivor is silenced, and the established power systems that value money and "trees in the ground" more than safety and care prevail.

Silence is violence, and the trend of survivors leaving after an incident of sexualized violence is not novel in Diana's story or my research. Lily, Lisa and Dana also described similarly chilling stories wherein it was only after years of silence when they, or other survivors close to them, disclosed experiences of sexualized violence from planting camps precisely because the environment was too hostile to adequately support them. Disturbingly, Clark's 1996 tree planting public health research also noted incredibly similar trends. Clark reported that women working as tree planters in the 90s stayed silent in the face of discrimination and violence in order to "get the job done so they can go home... [or] try to figure out how to get out of it" (1996, pg. 107). Despite over twenty-five years since Clark's thesis was published, and massive consciousness-raising feminist movements around sexualized violence in society broadly, these "silence as violence" trends continue.

When Robin shared an experience of sexualized violence, for her the “worst part” was that her experience was not believed or adequately supported by her company’s management when she reported. Robin said:

The way management responded to this incident shocked me, as previously I thought the industry had made a lot of progress in this regard. This made me feel incredibly unsafe in the camp environment, for a few reasons. I felt that I was not believed, and also felt that the company did not take sexual assault seriously. I feared that if something happened to me, or to someone else, they would be treated similarly and not taken seriously, only compounding the trauma.

This story illuminates the trauma that is exacerbated when companies fail to believe and support survivors. When this type of active silencing or retraumatization occurs after survivors seek support from their institution, it is considered “second assault” or “Institutional Betrayal” (Crocker, 2020; Gorsak, 2019). In this phenomenon, studied in depth within neoliberal institutions like post-secondary education, “trusted and powerful institutions ... [act] in ways that visit harm upon those dependent on them for safety and wellbeing” and there can be “devastating impacts on victims when these sites failed to prevent or responded “insufficiently” to harms that happened within the institutions themselves” (Gorsak, 2019, pg. 54).

As Robin’s story and others demonstrate, “Institutional Betrayal” or “second assault” compounds the trauma faced by survivors. It is almost always linked to neoliberal institutions which are also found responsible for “preventing the full exercise of women’s autonomy and freedom” (Bumiller, 2008). Recalling that within BC’s forestry and silviculture sector, ongoing “neoliberal reforms to the corporate resource economy significantly extend corporate powers by removing non-market obligations to environment, labour, and communities” (Young, 2008), the tree planting industry has systematically failed to address and prevent the sexualized violence experienced at high rates by women and gender-diverse planters in its community. As in the previous narratives shared, “neoliberal discourses of competition and market rationality have

commodified even our experiences of personal pain” (Gorsak, 64) and the harmful “cost-benefit” logic exhibited by tree planting camp management broadly is demonstrative of a tree-counting, neoliberal institution which has systematically failed its workers and its survivors.

### **3.12 Beyond Silence: Storytelling, Progress & Possibilities for Change**

Given this, to say that all of my interviewees were eager for change would be an understatement. They know, as deeply as anyone, that tree planting is a vulnerable and often dangerous place to work as a woman or gender-diverse person. Following up on Robin’s story, she shared this:

We are seeing stories posted on “King Kong” and “Womxn in Silviculture” [Radical Silviculture] and these forums all the time about feeling like we are making a lot of progress and these conversations are happening a lot more. But then, something like that happens and it feels like we have rewinded like 50 years and you’re in a movie or something (Robin).

Even as an anti-violence researcher, I want to believe that there is always a possibility for hope (Kelsey, 2020). As Robin highlights, the acknowledgement that harm is ongoing is an essential first step. Narrative politics, and the act of speaking out collectively, pushes back against systemic and cultural attitudes that “render women’s speech about violence unheard, denied or subject to corrosive doubt” (Sersier, 2018, pg. 211). But like my other interviewees’ wishes for change, Robin’s belief in “progress” contrasts with her lived experience of violence and the silencing disbelief she experienced from management at her company. As a researcher, this further demonstrates to me that silence is violence, and survivor-attentive story-telling and solutions remain critically necessary. This is a remote-operating industry, steeped in neoliberalism, that has intentionally made violence and oppression against women and gender-diverse labourers therein difficult to see, speak against and reckon with.

All of the experiences, stories and narratives courageously shared with me in this chapter indicate that the structural and cultural power domains which have historically allowed for these harms to occur are the same domains of power which act to render them silent and invisible. As Lisa said:

It's happening in our company. With people that we know... [all of these factors] are a perfect storm. Tree planting is amazing. It's an amazing environment. It's an amazing environment where you can do and be anything. But if somebody comes and tries to take advantage of you, there is so little you can do. There hopefully will be more solutions, as we move forward. But the amount of vulnerability is wild. It's wild.

### **3.13 Conclusion**

This chapter is firmly rooted in believing survivor narratives, and elevating these stories to better understand how tree planting industry culture and structure can make spaces so unsafe for women and gender-diverse planters. This chapter flows through the twenty interview-conversations I held with tree planters. Within tree planting, persistent harmful vulnerabilities in industry culture and structure together precipitate a “perfect storm” (Eva) for gender-based violence to occur at high-rates without adequate recourse. This chapter has demonstrated that these entwined systems of power marginalize and silence women and gender-diverse planters. Cultural issues such as profit-driven attitudes, “cowboy culture”, idealized freedom and social power hierarchies reinforce that planting is a “work hard, play hard” (Clark, 1998) environment where the experiences and needs of women and gender-diverse planters matter less than the status quo. Structural issues including inadequate HR practices, absent safety regulations, profit-driven practices, and the reproduction of a male-dominated industry management culminate in a lack of safe space for women and gender-diverse planters. Ultimately, tree planting is beholden to the neoliberal, extractivist project in Canada (Klein, 2013; Cirefice & Sullivan, 2019). Any industry so tunnel-visioned towards profits does not make survivor-focused policies or practices

a priority. Further, tree planting remains a male-dominated sphere where often planters witness that “rules don’t exist” (Diana). As a result, real experiences of harm continue to be invisibilized and silenced. These profit-driven and patriarchal domains of gendered-power need to be addressed at all levels of the tree planting industry.

At the end of my conversation with Diana, she declared this: “Planting is beautiful, but you need to be fully aware that your safety is not valued and that you are a sexual object. This is a dangerous industry and you are not valued, other than for putting trees in the ground.” This chapter insists that stories, and the women and gender-diverse people who carry them, are valuable beyond measure, offering insights into the power imbalances that precipitate this “dangerous industry.” Tarana Burke, and the #MeToo movement she started, demonstrate how collectivized story-sharing and believing allows survivors of all kinds to make declarations of progress. Burke says, “we’re not in these movements to live a life full of anger and rage. We’re in these movements to declare that you’re not alone if you’re a survivor of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and that we are entitled to full lives of joy” (Brown, 2020, 22:59). Women and gender diverse tree planters are indeed entitled to full lives of joy, during the planting season and beyond. This chapter has been both a declaration of care and belief, and a declaration of the right to workplaces free from violence.

## Chapter Four - “A Culture That Cares” & Solutions in Story

*Do we turn to the survivor of harm and say, “Don’t be so sensitive, don’t rock the boat,” and punish them with silencing or shunning? Or do we make the braver choice: to centre and protect those harmed, to become able to recognize masked systemic violence when it occurs, and turn to the source of harm and firmly say, “no, this stops now” while also maintaining care and connection for everyone involved? That is everyone’s role to play in transformation.*  
– Nora Samaran “The Emergence of Nurture Culture” pg. 95

*This shit is really hard hitting. And I think we just need to give the industry a slap in the face and be like this is what is happening, and you need to realize this happens, and do something.*  
- Hana

### 4.1 Introduction

Current silviculture practices ongoing within BC are host to diverse and imperfect solutions to rapid deforestation and the climate crisis we are facing. Policy-makers have noted the importance of reforestation work in the face of the climate crisis, but this ecological scope needs to be broadened to include social justice for labourers. Just as tree planting transforms fraught landscapes, the tree planters I spoke with also reported that tree-planting has the potential to be a transformative personal opportunity for women and gender-diverse young workers. I have heard and shared stories of survival, support, solidarity, and healing after harm. Every interviewee said that planting had been one of their toughest experiences, but that the camps were also places where they had their best days. As Josie shared, “I loved being outside. It was really healing. And every day you form these bonds with people that are really special. And I really liked pushing myself physically and feeling like I was doing something meaningful and stepping out of my comfort zone as a woman” (Josie).

To adequately address violence in any industry, anti-rape scholar Tanya Sersier envisions “a response that concedes the inevitability of that violence, but seeks to ameliorate it, and one which forces open the social, legal and cultural [intersections of power] revealed by women’s

narratives to imagine a different world” (Sersier, 2018, pg. 212). My previous chapter has opened up a dialogue around cultural and structural intersections of power as revealed by the stories, experiences and perceptions of my interviewees. This chapter will take up Sersier’s idea of “imagining a different world” through the solutions imagined by my research participants, so that more women and gender-diverse tree planters can have meaningful and transformative experiences.

In alignment with Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) and trauma-informed anti-violence methodologies, it is only through caring about the stories from those most harmed that solutions can be imagined and further implemented. FPE recognizes that there are cultural and structural “inequalities that women [and gender-diverse people] endure, and those pictures and broader narratives silence their voices, knowledge and lived experiences” (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015, pg. 5-6). Through understanding these power systems and elevating previously silenced voices, FPE mediates solutions to “break out of dominant ways of thinking about the environment, economies and societies” (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015, pg. 5-6). Moreover, trauma-informed practices insist that survivors “are the experts of their own lives” (Knight, 2019). Therefore, for solutions and responses to gender-based violence in planting to truly be survivor-centred, they must “prioritize survivors’ needs and rights, rather than those of perpetrators and/or institutions” (Crocker, 2020, pg. 22). This chapter is written in solidarity with, and in the spirit of, these essential methodological commitments.

Tarana Burke and Brené Brown point out that: “The people who make decisions about the lives of survivors don’t seem to have enough information about what survival looks like... we’re not survivor-centred. We are first ‘protect the power systems in place’-centred” (Brown, 2020, 41:17). The way we treat and care for survivors in our society will always be inadequate,

problematic and outdated if maintaining power systems continues to take priority over holistic survivor well-being. “To be truly survivor-centred, sexual violence prevention and response initiatives must be informed by... survivors who have expressed interest in contributing” (Crocker, 2020 pg. 25) and any genuine solution must place the people who are most vulnerable to harm at the centre and listen to their voices. In each conversation held, interviewees shared their imaginations and analysis of solutions. This chapter will paint a landscape of these wishes, ideas, frustrations and hopes. While this chapter is an exploration of what might be possible in the planting industry, it also explores why and how solutions are failing people who experience harm in the bush by digging into the inadequacies or vulnerabilities of solutions from a survivor-centred perspective.

Three major recommendations emerged in my conversations with women and gender diverse planters, as well as industry leaders. Firstly, most companies lack a comprehensive and well-communicated policy on sexualized violence including sexual harassment. The women and gender diverse planters I spoke with shared that not only is the existence of a solid policy and accompanying procedures important to them, but that such a policy offers an opportunity for a company to “walk the talk” regarding their stance on workplace violence and the safety of all planters in the bush. The second major recommendation is to increase the gender diversity in management and leadership of camps and companies. My participants highlighted, and also problematized, the many cascading effects of increasing gender representation. The third major recommendation is improved workplace training, including sexual assault and harassment training, but also extending to other forms of anti-violence education such as consent training for planters, and anti-oppression training for management, all of which could serve to help shift the current “cowboy culture” to one that is more caring towards experiences of sexualized violence.

Other minor recommendations that I will speak to briefly include a discussion of party culture, privatization of tree totals, examining personal relationships where there are power asymmetries, and the practice of having non-management “safe people” for reporting in camps. In the final section, I offer my views as a researcher on both the tensions and limitations of advocating for a cultural shift in the absence of adequate industry regulation.

We need effective solutions to problems as complex and harmful as sexualized violence. Interwoven throughout the solutions examined and problematized in this chapter is the question of “culture” within planting, with the understanding that all the solutions which follow are considered to be part of this much needed culture shift towards a culture that cares. My intention for this chapter is to uplift and investigate the potential solutions both shared and problematized by tree planters who have experienced, and are most likely to experience harm, within the silviculture world.

#### **4.2 Solutions in Policy**

This section will examine the proposed solution of anti-violence workplace policies. Policies demonstrate an employer's commitment to anti-violence and can serve as a tool that both people harmed and companies can refer to for their own protection. The section will highlight three ongoing problems with anti-violence policy in the industry: 1) company policies are either nonexistent or are inadequate; 2) policies lack adequate, comprehensive elements of safety, belief and survivor-support; and 3) policies need to signal a cultural shift and be enforced by decision-makers in camps.

Most of my interviewees did not seem aware of any policy at their company, despite bullying and harassment policy implementation being an OH&S regulation for all workplace in BC since 2013 (WorkSafeBC, 2013; WorkSafeBC, n.d.). From my interview data and due to my

work as a freelance industry policy consultant, I know that still many companies still do not have an adequate policy (at the time of writing this thesis in Winter 2021). Of my 17 interviews with women and gender-diverse planters, only once was an effective policy mentioned by my interviewees, who said they were fortunate enough to work in a camp one season that had a “solid policy” (Diana). Diana remembered that in this policy, the company provided definitions of unacceptable workplace behaviour, explained multiple reporting options, and established their commitment as a management team to safer workplaces during a shared community meeting at the start of the season.

Unfortunately, more generally, most interviewees simply did not know if their company had a policy or not, which indicates the policy was a failure. Indeed, when asking tree planters who I spoke with about any policy their company may or may not have, I was also curious about how, when and in what manner that policy was shared with employees. These are important and telling dimensions of policy, which ultimately shed light on the overall camp culture and climate. Indeed, anti-violence scholarship outlines that documents surrounding sexualized violence need to move beyond the paper in order to become embodied by the community (Ending Violence BC, 2019; Crocker, 2020). As an industry representative shared with me:

You can have the greatest policy or language in the world, but if you don't hammer it home and get workers to believe in it and embody it, it becomes like other safe work procedures. We could have good safe work procedures, but if nobody is wearing their hardhat and having branches land on their noggin, you've failed (Robert).

This failure that Robert describes presented heavily in my interview data. When turning to a discussion of policy, most of the planters I spoke with shared experiences such as this:

For all three of those companies I've spoken about, none of them had a sexual harassment policy. Not a one. Maybe in very recent years, but I can't remember a single thing that was said... It was just never there... [and] being a young hardcore kind of girl doing this hardcore kind of job, you didn't know you wanted [a policy]. Because you wanted to be cool, to be one of the boys, and so in a weird way, you didn't think that you needed it and

that you could handle yourself if things happened. And of course, bad things happened. You're in the bush with a bunch of boys and booze, like bad things happen all the time (Francis).

Francis' words highlight three important aspects of this issue. First, the engagement with employees around a harassment or assault policy was so inconsequential and non-existent that it never registered for her, despite her fourteen seasons of bush experience with three prominent companies. Secondly, for Francis, the "hardcore" ethos that is proudly cultivated by tree planting culture blurred her perception of any necessity for such a framework. Third, when "bad things" did evidently happen, there was a lack of structural company protection for survivors. Lily echoed similar perceptions when we discussed if policy was shared or communicated to her and her fellow employees. She said:

I feel like people just assumed that it was common sense. Like no one really enforces any rules in writing in planting. It was more for safety when you're outside planting, like various dangers... But nothing sexual harassment or assault awareness (Lily).

This lack of awareness, lack of rules and subsequent enforcement around sexual harassment and assault is disturbing, and dangerously outdated. In Harley's experiences, she said that before 2019 she had never even heard of any company having a sexual harassment or assault policy, at all. In relating this to me, she restated that, "tree planting is so far behind in so many ways" (Harley). Similarly, Abby shared that "2019 was the first year we had a respectful workplace policy that had any kind of teeth to it" (Abby). Susie's perceptions mirrored those from before. Also in 2019, she was involved in policy creation at her company and was "super upset to see" that:

During the drafting of the policy, the owner, his attitude... it was like, back in my day we just called in common sense to not assault people. It's this older generation mentality about taking things too far, and this and that, but no, you really have to spell it out. You really have to spell out consent, because the worst-case scenario did really happen in our camp (Susie).

Here, Susie problematizes a common flaw in policy documents, wherein the document not only lacks comprehensive detail, but is unwilling to “clearly condemn sexual violence” let alone “convey belief of and support for survivors, and outline the institution’s intention to hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour” (Crocker, 2020, pg. 24). When companies are unwilling to acknowledge the possibility of gender-based violence in their camps, accountability is impossible.

Rebecca pushed to establish a workplace harassment and assault policy at her company, but the response from management was, “well that’s never really been a problem here, but to me that is the problem. If there isn’t a policy set in place, it is creating potential for a problem” (Rebecca). The willful blindness adopted by her company does indeed create vulnerabilities wherein harm can occur. The inadequacy, or sheer absence, of a policy also means that when an incident does occur, there are limited or lacking guidelines for survivors to find support, or to guide companies through a reporting or investigation process. Further, by lacking a comprehensive and well-communicated policy, companies are legally negligent (WorksafeBC, n.d.).

From my research conversations, and from my membership to the Facebook group “Radical Silviculture”, it has been made abundantly clear that it is historically women and gender-diverse planters who are advocating for and creating more robust responses and approaches to ongoing gender-based violence in their companies, from the ground up. Often, these grassroots conversations about solutions in the industry are ongoing, but are confined to this online, “safe space” forum. Historically, it is women and gender-diverse planters who do this necessary, but intellectually and emotionally-heavy labour often in their off-time and are

undercompensated. Indeed, as Eva highlights, this same energy and attitude needs to be adopted by industry leaders as well. She shared:

I definitely think that the attitude needs to start from the owners and the supervisors and then trickle down. I think it would be in their best interest to have solid policies and procedures and that is just very, very basic. Obviously, that is not a solution.... Just because you have a policy does not mean that you are going to enforce it... But I still think that at the very, very bottom you need to have a solid policy and say this is what is not ok, and these are the consequences, and this is how to deal with it, and this is who you can report to. Just very, very clear literature on the process. And I also feel it should act as a warning to potential perpetrators... letting people know that we don't tolerate this behaviour is important (Eva).

As Eva describes, having a solid policy is an important piece of creating an “environment of intolerance towards sexual violence” (Robert). In *Violence Interrupted*, an academic work dedicated to understanding and problematizing sexualized violence responses, policies are understood as documents which provide “guiding principles, or a framework, that map out an institution’s intention with respect to preventing and responding to sexualized violence within the community” (Crocker, 2020, pg. 23). The author goes on to highlight that:

Survivor-centred policies and procedures should clearly condemn sexual violence, convey belief of and support for survivors, and outline the institution’s intention to hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour and prevent incidents of sexual violence... The language used in sexual violence policies and procedures should be careful not to reflect commonly held misconceptions about sexual violence, as language fundamentally shapes our ideas about sexual violence, victim-blaming, and perpetrator accountability... [and] policies and procedures must employ trauma-informed language, reinforce survivors’ blamelessness, and inform survivors about their rights (Crocker, 2020, pg. 24).

These policy tenets of accountability, belief and care are indispensable. If power-holders in planting are truly to centre those most harmed, rather than the cultural norms or corporate needs of the industry itself, then the policy must adopt a framework with the criteria highlighted above. According to current anti-violence literature, for a policy to be effective it should outline the document’s scope, as well as include definitions relevant to gender-based violence, disclosure

and reporting options for survivors, safety planning for survivors, the investigation processes, and privacy, cultural and legal considerations (Ending Violence BC, 2017, pg. 16-27).

However, it appears that many industry leaders have not adopted such a framework. Even basic sexual assault and harassment policies are relatively novel to the industry. Many companies were nudged to begin policy development following the 2017 WFCA report on workplace harassment (WFCA, 2017). It is worth highlighting that the WFCA report emphasizes the importance of company-specific procedures and organizational thoughtfulness in designing them. Tree planting companies are geographically disparate with distinct variations. Remoteness, organizational size and the community demographics of their workers are some of the factors that make each planting camp unique. Workplace-specific considerations are necessary in policy, especially a policy that aims to minimize harm in a remote, hostile environment. Finally, in order for a policy to be survivor-centric, it must be ethically-written, and contain and embody elements of belief, care, safety and choice for survivors, as well as legal and privacy protections for all employees and employers.

In contrast to this, Robert shared that most companies have just adopted “a one sentence of a zero-tolerance statement” (Robert). Indeed, the issue of an inadequate, limited or unclear policy trended in my conversations. Dana shared this about her company’s limited policy stance:

In my second year, I was in a 150-person camp. It was huge and crazy. And we did have to have a huge big meeting, and they handed out beers... They talked about [policy] and said we have zero-tolerance for harassment and come talk to us, like management. And I always felt weird about that being the only option. I didn’t know if I would be able to go to talk to management about harassment or sexual assault (Dana).

In alignment with anti-violence literature findings, Dana highlights that the lack of options for reporting and choices generally for people who experience harm at her company actually discourage survivors from disclosing or reporting, silencing and marginalizing their adverse

experiences further (Ending Violence BC, 2017). More dangerously, as explored in my previous chapter, it is often members of management who are openly tolerant towards or are actually perpetrating gender-based violence in camp. Therefore, a policy that only has one reporting option, and claims solely “zero-tolerance” towards violence without procedural systems in place or a culture that supports it, is not a solution<sup>12</sup>. This inadequate policy is instead a problem that creates a guise of safety, allowing companies to profess that they are safer than they actually are; harm can continue to happen unreported and unresolved by management, leading to a lack of support or belief for people who experience harm and “Institutional Betrayal” (Rogers, 2020; Gorask, 2019).

Confronting these issues is so novel to the industry that many companies appear to not know what to do. However, perpetrators of gender-based violence actually protected by a limited policy and procedures system as it discourages open and empowered reporting. Whether these limited policies are “lip service” or actively protect the power holders who wrote them into existence, these vulnerabilities in policy processes were confirmed by Robert, who said that: “There are a lot of reasons why things are not reported, and a lot have to do with how we set up

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<sup>12</sup> Some emergent anti-violence scholarship troubles zero-tolerance policy statements (Roehling, 2020). Zero-tolerance policies are often one line statements that claim zero-tolerance for workplace violence, and are attached to immediate firing procedures for perpetrators. This can fail survivors, companies and perpetrators alike, by increasing employee liability, protecting people who have caused harm from accountability measures, silencing victim narratives, and instead providing a “one size fits all” approach to conflict resolution that often does not always fit (Ending Violence BC, 2019). Zero-tolerance policies often do not acknowledge or address ongoing systems of power inequalities which precipitate these harms and oppress different individuals in unique ways. Furthermore, stories from my interviewees show that zero-tolerance policies have discouraged survivors from reporting or disclosing incidents. Survivors do not necessarily always want to see perpetrators fired and “lose their job” (Rebecca), even if they do want some sort of resolution to help them feel safer. Indeed, planters I spoke with explained how they choose not to report to management after experiencing sexual harassment or assault from their crew boss because they did not want their crew boss to lose their job.

our systems” (Robert). It is promising that the broader industry itself recognizes that inadequate policy is problematic. The 2017 WFCA report on workplace harassment concludes with this:

There are no plug-and-play workplace harassment policy and practice systems for firms that we know of or can recommend at this point. The value in having these systems is often the thoughtfulness that is required of owners and managers in describing what a respectful workplace should look like, and designing the necessary systems to support it (WFCA, 2017).

The emphasis on company values and company-designed approaches to workplace violence policy signals that the solution of policy requires a culture shift that reflects thoughtful implementation. However, the prevailing hyper-masculine “wild wild West” (Dana) culture of management in many planting camps continually dismisses the adverse experiences of women and gender diverse people in the bush, regardless of what their anti-violence policy might claim. For example, this was Taylor’s experience. They worked for a company with a “run of the mill” policy, but their report of workplace violence went entirely unanswered by the owner. When speaking with Emma, she explained how policy also became an unembodied “check in the box” in her camp that did not reflect the reporting options or cultural overhaul needed to bring these violence-tolerant behaviours into light:

I’m sure they did [have a policy], just like checking their boxes. But the culture of the company was very much just grin and bear it. It was a hyper-masculine, macho camp culture and company culture. All of the supervisors, and almost all, or actually maybe all, of the crew bosses in my camp were men... And as far as I remember, there was no independent [non-management] person to report to (Emma).

Therefore, while robust, survivor-focused policies are a critical piece of creating an “environment of intolerance” (Robert) towards gender-based violence in planting, a cultural overhaul in industry management is ultimately revealed as inextricable from change. My interviewees all indicated that there needs to be a “culture that cares” (Lisa). For policy and procedures to actually be effective tools in violence prevention, and supportive for survivors,

these documents need to be created and upheld with a cultural sense of care. Unsurprisingly, research participants were angry about the total lack of care, and total lack of consequences, they routinely saw as a result of this negative culture. After witnessing individuals get away with “bad behaviour” season after season, Monica shared this:

I have seen it over and over and over again, and I've heard so many stories, of people doing bad things and there are no fucking consequences. I don't care what companies say about these new fucking policies or whatever they have into place, but they're not making sure that their foremen and supervisors and management are actually taking these things seriously and actually doing something about it. In my opinion, up to this point, this has not happened (Monica).

Monica’s anger is beyond justifiable. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, existing power systems and power-holders in planting are complicit in ongoing gender-based violence when they fail to uphold their legal obligations, fail to offer support to people who experience harm in camps, and fail to embody what their policies might claim. The profit-centric, individualized “grin and bear it... hyper-masculine” (Emma) cultural ethos of industry leaders in the face of gender-based violence in planting camps further silences survivors and discourages open reporting and accountability. As Monica underscores, it is the power-holders and decision-makers in camps – crew bosses, supervisors and owners – who are responsible for this failure. While a lack of, or simply lacking, anti-violence policies and procedures in tree planting camps are a structural vulnerability for women and gender diverse planters, the cultural failure of tree planting camp management to communicate and uphold their anti-violence policy must also be addressed.

This section has explored dimensions of workplace anti-violence policy in the planting industry. Despite the legal requirement that employers in BC have adequate anti-violence workplace policies, on the ground most of the planters I spoke with described lacking or even nonexistence policies at their companies. Further, an effective policy needs to be crafted with care to reflect the unique context of tree planting and needs to include multiple reporting options.

Finally, while the sheer existence of an adequate policy is an important dimension of any workplace's anti-violence approach, this policy needs to move beyond paper. This necessitates a cultural shift, particularly among members of management, to make tree planting camps safer places for women and gender-diverse workers.

### **4.3 Solutions in Gender Representation in Leadership**

Chapter Three highlighted that while on a planter level there is near gender parity in a binary sense, company leadership remains intensely male-dominated, leading to uncomfortable and unsafe feelings and circumstances for my interviewees. "Promoting gender equality has always been a critical part of violence prevention," (World Health Organization, 2009) and therefore my research will now turn to look at the ways in which women and gender-diverse people have been both challenged and successful in leadership positions in planting. This was a prominent solution discussed by my interviewees; to them, transformation through increased representation would help make the workplace culture feel radically safer.

Just as every interviewee wanted companies to have clear, comprehensive and embodied anti-violence policies, all my participants were deeply concerned about more women being represented in leadership roles. The culture of leadership in camps tends to reproduce itself by promoting men to leadership roles, discouraging women and gender-diverse planters from seeking such roles by silencing them, not offering them the same opportunities or making their jobs distinctly more difficult. My participants also identified that representation would not be a miracle, "band-aid solution" to these ongoing systemic problems, but would be a part of a desperately needed cultural transformation in the industry. Emma perceived this key solution when we turned to a discussion of solutions, saying:

I mean, I think, at bottom, it's having women in management positions. I think that's a huge part of why [my first company] sucks so much to work for, and why [my second

company] felt so much better... because the culture fucking sucks... it is hard to break that culture and that cycle unless you have a real intentional discussion about the kind of camp culture you want to have (Emma).

Emma compared her two seasons with radically different gender representations in management, and drew connections between a women-friendly management composition and a tangible increase in safety in the work environment. Emma also problematizes culture, and understands that “male-dominated occupations in forestry have created and elevated the importance of a *workingman*’s culture... dominated by values, norms, symbols and ways of operating that are oriented to men” (Reed & Varghese, 2007). These dominant ways of operating can actively discourage open reporting, exclude diversity and make these spaces unwelcome and unsafe for non-men planters.

Cameron, a non-binary crew boss who presented as a woman during the work season for personal safety reasons, noticed similar trajectories over their seasons. As the management composition moved from “boy’s club” to a more inclusive, “women”-friendly team over the course of three seasons when Cameron was crew bossing, Cameron increasingly felt safer and holistically happier both in their leadership role and in the workplace generally. Cameron shared:

[My fourth season] it was me and her and two other dudes [who were the camp crew bosses]. So now it was even. I felt a huge change. The meetings and the dick talk, all of that changed. It was awesome... [Then] my last year, we had three women foreman and one dude... And you can't even compare [the culture in management]. Still stressful, still hard sometimes, but no dick jokes, no rape jokes. They were nice. It wasn't a boy’s club anymore... paying attention to gender ratio to management and the camp as a whole is a huge solution... I think that having oppressed people and minority groups put into leadership and staff positions helps so much. If we need to hire more women, hire more women. It's not that hard (Cameron).

Just as Emma drew positive parallels between increased gender representation and increased feelings of safety, Cameron incrementally, then dramatically, noticed a difference in the management culture of their camp as gender representation increased season after season.

Cameron's challenging experiences working as one of the sole women-presenting people on the management team in their early years reflect that "having oppressed people and minority groups put into leadership" is a key part of cultural transformation. However, "trail-blazers" like Cameron do bear the burden of breaking into this representation with often no support from within the hostile environment. Therefore, while it is very true that it simply is "not that hard" for companies to be intentional in "hiring more women" (Cameron), it is also true that this solution is not quite so simple.

Indeed, as demonstrated in some of the adverse experiences of outright sexism, sexual harassment and gender-based violence faced by non-men crew bosses and supervisors in my pervious chapter, women and gender diverse planters in leadership roles are not given the same levels of respect, care or appreciation shown to their men counterparts. Broadly, studies of women in forestry in BC have noted that "masculinist organizational cultures may appear to invite women in, but express their distrust of equality and/or implicitly threaten those who seek to change the 'rules'" (Varghese & Reed, 2007). As widely noted by many interviewees, tree planting culture is "ruled" by its distinct lack of rules, allowing for productivity and predatory behaviour to often trample most other labour concerns, like standard health and safety protections (Harris, 2011). The representation of non-men in industry leadership is perceived as threatening to this status quo and the many freedoms that ongoing profit-interested, patriarchal industry operations allows its current leadership to take advantage of. As a result, women and gender-diverse planters in leadership positions face feelings of distrust or even violence as they attempt to advance or make changes within the industry. This conundrum was explored by my research participants. Taylor problematized the glorified "band-aid solution" of putting women in positions of power, saying:

Putting more women in leadership positions is always a helpful thing, but then the problem is that you are exposing them to violence and then they are on the frontlines. So the women who choose to be in leadership positions, they are now facing these attitudes even if they are in a power position and it's still affecting them as they battle with that in the industry. All of the normal answers like women in leadership and education are helpful, but I just don't know (Taylor).

Taylor was the only “woman” in their entire camp, let alone in management. Their assessment above speaks to the vulnerability “trail-blazing” planters can face as they face harmful, deeply-entrenched industry cultural attitudes. Similarly, Emma noticed that women in leadership at her camp were forced out by the harmful workplace culture, saying:

So many women at [at my first company] left or didn't continue because they just hated the environment. Not because they couldn't handle the work, or because they weren't capable of planting or because they didn't like the job. It is because the culture fucking sucks. And I think that is really unfortunate... fewer women see it as a possible career. Then the people that end up in positions of power there are men (Emma).

Steve, a company manager, noticed similar trends when trying to diversify the gender ratio on his management team. As we discussed over-representation of men crew bosses, he said:

It started with me noticing that really good potential female foreman that just weren't taking jobs. I think in 2016 season or 2017 season, I decided to go okay, we need to hit a target of like you know four female foremen. The potential is there. And I interviewed 20-30 potentials... not a single one would work for me... And everyone gave me varying answers. No one said what I now suspect, which is that women are treated differently than men in the management set-up in planting. I've always had female cooks, but the actual penetration into operational management, the female representation was really low and people would give different excuses... No one explicitly said anything, but from my understanding of it now, it was just that women didn't want to hang out with a bunch of macho, idiot boys for two months, and didn't want to deal with all the stupid bravado stuff... I had a camp in 2018 where the joke was it was the ‘boy’s club’ when you went into the office, but that is what it was (Steve).

As Steve describes, “women are treated differently than men in the management set-up in planting” because the cultural and structural existence of the “boy’s club” is exclusionary and harmful to gender-diverse representation, making leadership positions undesirable for many potential women or gender-diverse crew bosses or supervisors.

Another dimension of this “boy’s club” phenomenon is the typical gendered division of labour, wherein certain types of jobs are expected to be done by certain genders. Francis discussed how within companies and camps she has worked for, employers appeared to be opening the gates to more women in leadership, but in practice employers were engaging in tokenism. Employers gave women what Francis considered “soft roles” only, as opposed to “harder” bush skilled or decision-making roles that carry more tangible power within camp life, which were reserved for men. When discussing solutions, Francis said:

I would hope that employers would trust women in management roles a bit more. Some of the employers I've seen have a few token females in these flimsy roles to say, look we're gender neutral or pro-feminist or whatever the term would be. But trust a few more of them. If you think you have "enough", add two more. Trust them with the chainsaw. Make them go through the hoops, give them the training, but then trust them with it. Don't just give them the paperwork roles... It is an old, white male industry... it is shocking... women can [only] be the OH&S reps or first aid people, but they can't tow the truck, they can't get dirty like the men can. I don't know, it's a weird dichotomy to be around. I wish these companies would trust women more. Trust them when they are telling these stories, but also trust them with some of these bigger jobs that they normally reserve for men (Francis).

Francis saw that the “boy’s club” was maintained through “flimsy” false solutions; women candidates were tokenized and relegated to roles with little actual power. The status quo and typical gendered labour divisions persist, yet her camps and companies could attempt to claim a progressive status without addressing an unfair and even dangerous workplace culture for its non-men workers. For Francis, the powerful solution would be not only that companies begin to believe women when they come forward about gender-based violence, but also that companies begin to *believe in* women, trusting them with the same roles and responsibilities as men.

Cameron discussed this as well, noting that training non-men with “hard” industry bush skills such as those involving machinery or driving “would be a huge solution... To give people who

don't naturally come by skills just by being a man the skills that they need to feel comfortable doing a job” (Cameron).

Diversifying representation across roles and responsibilities in companies is a solution with numerous positive cascading effects. When women were in management or even “hard” skills roles, the workplace culture felt radically safer, as was evident in narratives shared by my interviewees. Josie actually shared that having a woman supervisor for her first few seasons made the experience extraordinarily positive:

I worked for this woman who is amazing... She was the most amazing introduction into this world that I could have had. She was really focused on having a very balanced camp in terms of gender, but also hiring [crew bosses] that were very open and inviting... Yes, the first whole season was really challenging, but I think it shaped my life in a way I am so grateful so... [And] I feel like every year I was with her, there was a conversation [about sexual harassment, assault and consent] because she made that a big part of her camp and awareness in the crews (Josie).

Josie’s woman supervisor was a key reason why Josie returned annually to the same camp, and eventually found success there as a crew boss herself. The supervisor was described as attentive to workplace issues beyond profits and partying. Because of this, throughout our conversation, Josie continually described planting as a positively life-changing place for her.

Indeed, my few interviewees who worked for women or gender-diverse supervisors said that it was a holistically positive experience, one which “shielded” them from the potential dangers of “wild, wild West” culture in this male-dominated realm. Indeed, the industry representative I spoke with had this positive experience, sharing that “the best supervisor I ever had [was a woman]. So, I got sheltered from a lot of the worst stuff” (Robert).

Similarly, Susie said that during the season where she worked for a woman supervisor, she noticed that “there was a lower tolerance for bad behaviour, for sure” (Susie). When Susie and I discussed solutions to ongoing power imbalances and subsequent gender-based violence

she experienced and witnessed in camps she worked for, Susie indicated that it would be transformative not only in the realms of safety and gender-based violence, but also in empowering other women within the industry to their full potential.

I do think a really big thing is still having more women or just non-cis men in management. I think it would feel like so much more of a safer space. If this kind of oppression was happening in camp, it would feel like a much safer space to address it if women were able to go to and address someone on management who understands their experiences, especially on a supervisor level. There are just so few women supervisors and they really set the tone for what is acceptable in camp. And so, having people like that to look up to, but also to go to would make a big difference. And making it a priority in management. Like maybe you'll have a bunch of dudes clamouring at you to be crew bosses, but having the restraint to be like no, I'm going to hire this number of women no matter what it takes. Because they are out there. There are lots of strong, capable women out there (Susie).

For Susie and my interviewees, increased gender representation would be transformative for not only for survivors seeking support after experiencing harm, but for any non-men planter needing someone to “look up to” in the industry. Indeed, in a study dedicated to better understand how to attract more women to post-secondary forestry management programs globally, it was found that “greater representation of women in the forest sector is considered as one of the best solutions to attract more young women to the industry” (Larasatie & al., 2020). However, in mirroring some of the findings from this thesis itself, the study concluded that:

The discontinued paths from women in forestry higher education and workplaces happens due to the perception of an unwelcoming environment, lack of sense of belonging, and lack of career opportunities. In other words, the women students do not experience [being] perceived as “fit” in the forest sector... but the question remains, how to get these women in [when] women will be attracted to enter the forest sector only if there is [already] visibility of women in the sector, especially in leadership (Larasatie & al., 2020).

This study calls this a “Catch-22”, and indeed lacking the representation needed to attract desperately needed diversity to the forestry sector broadly is clearly a conundrum within the world of tree planting as well. Interestingly, “hiring priority” for diversity can be a fraught topic

of conversation within the industry. When discussing a friend who was trying to recruit an all-trans crew of planters through KKR, Rebecca said:

If you go on KKR and type in ‘trans’, you’ll see this post got a lot of comments on it. A lot of dudes calling it priority hiring, and not inclusive hiring and, oh watch out this is illegal... If you go to KKR and look in the comments, it will show you right there that there are widespread various forms of discrimination in the planting industry (Rebecca).

In Rebecca’s words, discriminatory forces within the industry undermine equity efforts and other spaces that are intentionally being made safer for the most-marginalized voices in planting.

Equity efforts and “representation as transformation” solutions have positive ramifications beyond creating safer spaces for women and gender-diverse planters. There have been larger notable social and ecological benefits to gender diversity in BC’s forestry sector broadly (Stoddart & Tindall, 2010; Varghese & Reed, 2012; Larasatie & al., 2020). Previous FPE scholarship has also demonstrated that empowerment of marginalized voices in contested environmental arenas is a key part of broader ecological *and* social change (Rocheleau & al., 1997; Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). The positive downstream benefits from “women’s greater participation in forestry decision-making would not just flow to women [and other non-men], but also to the larger forestry community and thereby contributing to a more ecologically and socially sustainable forest system” (Reed & Varghese, 2007, pg. 524).

However, the experiences shared in this section do highlight how profound a solution increasing gender representation can be. To restate what Francis said, we need to “trust women when they are telling these stories, but also trust them with some of these bigger jobs that they normally reserve for men” (Francis). However, there are important considerations to bear in mind regarding the creation of actual safer spaces and Harley summed up some of the duality around this fraught topic: “I don’t think we should be hired based only on our gender, but I would feel much safer in an all women crew, definitely” (Harley). The safety that Harley wishes for has not

been prioritized by most industry decision-makers. There are well-documented cultural benefits to increasing gender diversity among leadership, including the creation of safer spaces, increasing open reporting, role modeling and overall improving workplace culture. As Lisa said, “we need more [women]... it would be solidifying the culture we need. It would be moving in the right direction, and it's what we need.”

#### **4.4 Solutions in Workplace Training**

The final major solution discussed by my interviewees at length was improved anti-violence workplace training. Employers have a legal obligation to provide anti-harassment and bullying workplace training (WorkSafeBC, n.d.). This section will discuss what anti-violence training efforts look like in the industry, and how my interviewees imagine further training could contribute to an overall culture shift in companies and camps. Participants discussed the importance of sexual assault and harassment training, but also discussed other forms of anti-violence education that could be culturally-beneficial in planting companies, such as consent training for planters, and anti-oppression training for management. This section is not an explicit exploration of what survivor-centred, trauma-informed training delivery would look like in planting, but I will highlight some aspects of “solid” training that were important to my interviewees.

Training was the first solution that Hana proposed when we discussed addressing gender-based violence in camps. To her, training is an opportunity to provide the same baseline understanding of acceptable behaviour to the entire planting community in a camp at the start of a season, bringing in clarity and accountability as important aspects of violence prevention in camps. She said:

I think more training is always good. And even basic training that describes what a micro-aggression even is. Because I find many people say certain things or behave in

certain ways because they don't take the severity of them seriously. But when we have more training and we give more language to these types of issues that are embedded in tree planting culture and our society broadly, it makes people take them more seriously. Like when we do give definitions to micro-aggressions, or assault, or consent. It just makes it more accessible to people to understand. And when we can stand by those definitions and write them into policies and make it clear to people that like this is how we're doing it and if you don't follow that, you will have to go. I think that that is really important (Hana).

It is also important that training has very recently become an ongoing solution that is used and promoted by the WFCFA. There have been two recent CBC articles (Trumpeter, 2019; Trumpeter, 2020) detailing the involvement of a women's resource centre based out of Smithers, BC. This third-party partnership was solidified between the WFCFA and the centre in 2019. This centre, called the Northern Society for Domestic Peace (NSDP) is contracted by specific companies and the WFCFA to deliver a Camp Security training. They offer what they call "sex assault prevention training... [which] encompasses consent and harassment, supporting victims and how bystanders can interrupt potential assaults" (Trumpeter, 2019). It has been interesting to note how the WFCFA and various companies heavily promote their relationship with the NSDP. While a WFCFA leadership has noted "protecting women is important... the Camp Security workshop is a step in the right direction" (Trumpeter, 2019), other industry leaders noted to me that the relationship between their company and the NSDP is good branding. Steve noted "maybe it's a bit of a PR thing now, but everyone knows when you say NSDP, that's a name brand thing... [and] if people don't feel comfortable talking to us, they can just reach out and talk to them" (Steve).

My interviewees held justifiable skepticism about this training and the tokenization of it as just "good branding." Some thought of it as a way for companies to shift or neglect their responsibility to take accountability for a culture shift. Just as "thoughtfulness" is required when developing company-specific, anti-violence policy, (WFCFA, 2017), an anti-violence advocate

from “Radical Silviculture” also energetically discussed how training should be delivered by company supervisors and crew bosses themselves. They would encourage thoughtfulness in culture shifting, thereby changing the “cowboy culture” to a culture that cares. This anti-violence advocate noted, “planters would recognize that, hey that’s my crew boss who’s creating a safe space” (Personal Correspondence with “Radical Silviculture” anti-violence advocate, 2021).

Tree planting camps are often small, isolated and transient communities, and camps are geographically and logistically far from any external support, from police to third-party resources. Most often, there are limited internet or phone communication options available, and “getting out” of camps can prove logistically challenging. Individuals in management are the ultimate decision-makers and gate-keepers within these communities and training can promote safety from within. Therefore, thoughtfully-designed, in-house anti-violence awareness training would provide camps with practical tools to address incidents of gender-based violence and “remind people that we are a small, remote community. We need to be respectful of everyone's privacy, feelings, sexuality, whatever, and promote that good community” (Brenden).

However, once the season has begun, the priority is placed on planting trees, leaving insufficient time, money or energy for these community-wide conversations. Current training programs in many camps have been described to me as “very minimal... it wasn't in depth” (Emma) or something online that you just click through (Francis). Monica said that, “you're falling asleep... watching these stupid PowerPoints and you're not super receptive to the information. It's like whatever, let's get it done, so we can sign the sheet and move on. That is very common in planting” (Monica). Besides lacking in engagement, current training delivery may be lacking a survivor-centric grounding that is both crucial to violence prevention, and

effective in trauma-informed care. Emma also added that beyond the limiting factors of time, attention and the negative attitude towards training generally, she noted that:

In the opening remarks about sexual assault and sexual harassment [made by management], I found them to be very inadequate... I don't think it's a personal fault of theirs, of them not taking it seriously, they just didn't have the knowledge to speak to. One of their remarks was just like, oh its 2019 and we don't do stuff like this anymore and in response to talking about sexual assault. Like sexual assault, don't do it, we don't do this anymore. And I was like, that's not enough. And also, that's not true. These incidents do continue to happen, and so you need to explain what that includes, you need to talk about it plainly. It just felt to me like the people who were speaking to it weren't equipped to actually speak to it in a way that named it for what it was (Emma).

Indeed, despite the intentions of her company leadership, the speakers delivering the training seemed uncomfortable with the material, and lacked the ability to fully address gender-based violence in a comprehensive or caring manner. The notion that “we don’t do this anymore” contains elements of survivor-disbelief and accountability-dodging, whilst also not informing the community of important aspects of anti-violence prevention, such as what behaviour is acceptable or how survivors would be cared for. In Emma’s eyes, training is an opportunity to create community-wide understanding in a remote place and in a clear manner of what gender-based violence is, what the community standards for acceptable behaviour are, and how the company would handle incidents when they occur.

Interestingly, Taylor both wanted, and held justifiable skepticism towards, increased training. Despite a mandatory and basic sexual harassment training developed by their company at the beginning of the season, Taylor was made more unsafe by the completely inadequate responses that they received from management when seeking support after being targeted daily with sexual harassment from men on their crew. Taylor explained how the language and skills taught in anti-violence training need to be actually embodied and followed through by the decision-makers in camps. They said this:

Well, I don't know how [changing the culture] could be done. I think sexual harassment training, that is more rigorous, is good, but I am really not convinced that would change the perspective of someone like my crew boss. I do love to see more training and discussion always, but I am just not sure systemically how to do that... Education is always important and is a huge part of any systemic oppression, but with [my crew boss and company owner], I don't think it would change. [My crew boss] would say things that were robotically supportive to me as a woman coming to tell him about these issues I was having with the guys, but it was not actually helpful... [And] when I emailed the owner and told him about what I had experienced, the details, and I just never heard back... So that was an interesting response. It's not a response at all... I think these guys just need to retire. I'm sorry if that's not helpful (Taylor).

Education is an important aspect of systemic change, but the “cowboy culture” around Taylor was deeply entrenched and deeply harmful and Taylor expressed that no amount of training could change the “cowboy culture” of her company.

Conversely, after planting for several companies where there was no training, discussion or awareness of sexualized violence in planting, Diana moved to a company where they began the season with a camp-wide discussion of safe spaces and gender-based violence in camps. She felt grateful for this change, and felt noticeably safer, saying:

[The company] instantly were like we recognize the #MeToo movement, we want our camp to be a safe environment, we have a woman, our cook, who is a safe person to come speak to [if you don't feel comfortable coming to management] and they have actually been trained as a safe space person. And then also all of their crew bosses had to do some sort of training or discussion about how they were going to acknowledge sexual assault, all given right off the bat on day one. That was so refreshing (Diana).

Diana's positive experience with training brings to light several essential aspects of effective and trauma-informed approaches to gender-based violence. Her company communicated survivor believability and highlighted multiple options in the resources available to people who might experience harm during the season. An independent, supportive person was given extra training and support to act as a safe person to disclose or report to. Also, the entire management body engaged in additional pre-season training about anti-violence prevention. Overall, Diana felt her company addressed the issue with clarity, believability, action and care.

Abby, a camp supervisor, also discussed how updating and ongoing training would be an essential part of her leadership strategy against gender-based violence in seasons to come. She highlighted her understanding that for training to be effective, it must be ongoing throughout the season, rather than a singular, “ticking the box” conversation. Abby said this:

After [a sexual assault occurred in our camp], we felt like it was important to go over training and policy again because there is so much information getting thrown at you at the beginning of the season. And so the more it can be circled back to, and be planter-specific throughout the season, the safer it can be... it's about raising awareness to have people look out for one another instead of it being a problem that is like over there, like only shitty companies have sexual assault... And then among planters too, raising awareness about it can help to create a better environment in camp. I don't know if that is a naive way to look at it... I am hoping this will translate into a more positive experience for a lot of people (Abby).

Lisa, now a company manager, was also hopeful that implementing more rigorous and recurrent training would help make her camp a safer space, especially after she received multiple disclosures from former employees who never came forward during the time of their incidents when working in Lisa's camp. Lisa views recurrent training as an opportunity to have conversations which could nudge all individuals in camp to care about this issue, and to feel comfortable coming forward, thereby creating a safer, more caring culture.

I think making this conversation more central, not just to orientation meetings, but throughout the season because people need reminders. Especially going through the season and it's been a few months and you are getting really comfortable with the people you are with in camp... [As a company] it's only been in the last two years, where we've actually addressed harassment, and what it means and what is welcome behaviour and what is unwelcome behaviour and a few guidelines here and there, but not clear enough, I am totally learning... So you need everybody to care. Or else it doesn't happen. You need everybody to care or nothing changes... we need to help them understand that the language that they use and the decisions that they make count. It's empowering individuals to create a new culture. (Lisa).

Ultimately, effective training can move more individuals in a community to care, while also increasing awareness, fluency and skills in addressing gender-based violence. Hopefully,

leadership across the board are recognizing that increased training is an important avenue of cultural change, because as Robert shared:

The greatest protection we can have is training the people who are confronting these issues in-person ourselves... We need to, as companies and individuals, to confront the issue, monitor it, and empower our workers and support them when we feel like it will be a potential problem and intervene early. Don't wait until somebody comes and tells you that they've been assaulted at 3am. At the first sign of something going wrong, [management] needs to be active in the workplace and not condone those foundational behaviours that lead to sexual assault (Robert).

What is indeed “hammered home” is that training remains a pressing part of solutions. This section has explored my interviewees perceptions and experiences with anti-violence workplace training in tree planting. Overall, the planters I spoke with believe that anti-oppressive training and workplace sexual assault training would be a keystone of violence prevention generally in camps. They felt that in-house training would be an especially good opportunity to discuss a culture shift. Training must become more than merely “good branding” or something you are forced to click through. Instead, thoughtful, company-delivered, community-based training discussing consent and care culture were found to be the most effective and safe-feeling for my interviewees. Training should focus upon the responsibilities of decision-makers and gate-keepers in camps, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to prevent, minimize and respond to gender-based violence. The tenets shared in training must become embodied by members of camp leadership. Training for planters at the beginning of their contract can contribute to reshaping a culture and creating safe spaces for all, that can continue for the rest of the season and beyond. Just as everyone is trained and expected to “plant good trees”, planters, crew bosses, camp supervisors and company owners alike should be trained about “good behaviour” or rather accountability, community safety and care.

#### **4.5 More Problems & More Solutions**

There are some other solutions that trended less frequently in my research conversations. These solutions include reducing partying, having alternative “safe people” in camp to seek support from, making tree totals private and addressing personal relationships between management and planters. Furthermore, after holding so many stories where inadequate hiring practices lead to incidents of harm, as a researcher I would add that the industry should standardize reference check processes. This section will explore these other important solutions in a brief, comprehensive manner.

#### ***4.5.1 Party Culture***

As noted in myriad ways throughout interviewees’ words, partying is often deemed an essential part of the tree planting “adult summer camp” experience (Ekers & Farnan, 2010). Anti-oppressive activism reminds us that harm reduction, not abolition, is the best way to keep people safer (Ankors BC, n.d.), and indeed the planters I spoke with agreed that eliminating partying completely within most planting contexts would be a doomed endeavour. Partying has structurally become a cultural cornerstone of the job. However, in tree planting and bush camp contexts, there is an obvious increase in vulnerability that comes along with under-regulated, “no rules” remote partying.

Lily shared that “planting camp parties can get really crazy and people get up to dangerous things... if that was somehow under control it would make people safer and also address mental health” (Lily). Likewise, Hana shared:

Planters can get loaded drunk and get crazy and stupid. It is super risky to do that, if something bad happens, we are upwards of an hour or more to a hospital, even by helicopter. I think just having that limit on drugs and alcohol and partying, it signals to planters like we are watching and we do have a threshold that you can't cross with certain types of behaviour. It helps planters understand that other types of behaviour are not tolerated such as different types of sexual harassment and assault (Hana).

Indeed, many of my participants expressed views and wishes about reducing how “crazy” bush camp parties are allowed, and expected, to become. Again, nearly everyone acknowledged that partying was an essential part of the industry, but they also expressed wishes for clear ways it could be safer. Robert shared that he viewed routine partying as a place of extreme vulnerability for people to experience harm:

With the parties and celebrations, it is a part of the industry. People work really hard and they are so focused, they are so literally focused on this job on a superhuman level unlike any other job in the world, that there is a great cathartic experience of getting completely unstructured, letting loose and having a wild party... [but] that creates a lot of the vulnerabilities. When you put a real predator in that situation, then it is like a kid in a candy shop (Robert).

It is undeniable that tree planting can be an extremely challenging occupation. In the eyes of most planters and management alike, the allure of wild partying is deemed necessary to retain and pacify a workforce undertaking the labour of planting trees. Most planters I spoke with had the attitude that “I don't see it as a problem if the camp culture seems safe and respectful” (Emma). But in camps where the culture is not safe and not respectful, and partying continues to be a “free for all”, as Robert highlighted, women and gender diverse folks will continue to be vulnerable to people wishing to cause harm. Likewise, Diana shared:

Honestly, the way to ensure safety is limiting partying... It gives this curtain of alcohol and drugs where no one is paying attention, and it really eliminates the ability for someone to stay totally safe... But people really value [partying]. They value it more than the safety aspect. And I do value it too, it allows anyone to come out to planting and tree planting is so amazing... you cross paths with people who are really special from all different walks of life and that's why people love it so much. Drinking and drugs can enhance that, and I do believe that creating a community or safe drug culture can be really beautiful. But like, at what cost? And so, the dialogue about what dangers that party culture brings with it is overlooked. Or is maybe purposefully ignored (Diana).

Putting the onus on party culture itself as responsible for perpetuating ongoing gender-based violence removes the accountability of perpetrators, management and power systems. However, most of my participants really welcomed any conversation around what safer partying could look

like in their camp. They also said that management should be acting in a responsible manner during this party time, and not participating heavily in the party itself or turning a blind eye towards dangerous ongoings for the sake of reckless fun. Some of the considerations around safer party culture discussed briefly by my participants included having a designated sober driver on party nights. This person could support people in distress, could have naloxone training and importantly could drive into town if needed, implementing a few minimal aspects of harm reduction. There could also be safer drug resources in camps. Further, having a designated curfew or “time to put out the fire” was effective in Hana’s camp in discouraging parties from getting out of control.

#### ***4.5.2 “Safe” People***

Another emergent solution being utilized by many companies in their camps is having designated “safe” people. Other times called planter reps or ombudsperson, safe people are “people who you can speak to if you experience sexual assault/harassment and don't feel comfortable bringing it up to management” (Robin). For most of my participants, the introduction of safe people is “a very recent thing. It’s the first time in planting people have been trying to create safe spaces or at least that discourse be carved out in a camp space” (Susie). Many felt like it should be “standard practice to have an ombudsperson in camp and that should be regulated across the board. People need to have someone to talk to, whether that has to do with safety or harassment, that’s not management” (Dana).

However, having “safe” people does not automatically translate to an increase in safety. Oftentimes, these individuals are nominated volunteers and unpaid for this massive additional responsibility. These individuals often still also need to plant trees every day, and are not formally trained to act as support people in a trauma-informed manner. The lack of

compensation and training for “safe people” is problematic. The language of safe people indeed conveys a measure of safety, but if the people charged with receiving and handling sensitive incidents such as sexualized violence lack training, scope, time, trust, ability, resources and care, then companies can brand themselves and reassure themselves that they are far safer than they actually are in practice.

“Safe people” could be a great option for people seeking support, but they could also give a false sense of security. “Safe people” are meant to be representative of the planter body in camp, but ongoing cultural power dynamics of nepotism and “planter politics” could mean that unsafe people end up in these roles, as was Steve’s experience. Also, since “safe people” are also often planters who both potential survivors and perpetrators “live and work alongside in camp... these situations are really vulnerable and you don’t always know if you can trust that ‘safe person’ [to be a safe person]” (Harley). As Monica said:

Every camp or at least company [I’ve worked for] has an ombudsperson and they are usually the one to go to with these more sensitive issues and then they are meant to go to management. But then this leaves room where like, all these planters who don't know what's gone on and also management doesn’t know if the ombudsperson aren't dealing with it properly, and then this victim is left suffering alone, because nobody else knows (Monica).

“Backdoor” reporting strategies like safe people in camp to report could be a key *part* of a company’s approach to tackling these issues, but they cannot be the sole option, particularly if those “safe people” are untrained and unpaid specifically for their important role. As Monica shared, an incomplete solution creates an opportunity for further violence and silence. However, having many options, including a support avenue such as “safe people” is essential when facing an issue as deeply entrenched as gender-based violence in tree planting camps.

#### ***4.5.3 Privatizing Tree Totals***

Furthermore, given planting has been described as “capitalism... and a bit of tang” (Blue Collar Group, “A Camp Called Mudslide”), one way to minimize the pervasive capitalistic influence in interpersonal and cultural interactions in camps would be to keep tree totals private. Many of my interviewees shared sentiments and experiences where they were made to feel less valued, powerless, and small when working in camps where individual tree totals were essentially communal knowledge. In these camps, my interviewees felt as though the number of trees you can plant in a day is reflective of your personal value in the socio-cultural camp environment. Rebecca’s advice to incoming planters was about trying “to find a company that doesn't talk about numbers and isn't number orientated... that creates toxic space.” Conversely, this thesis contains many stories where hyper-competitive and ego-driven camps have been known to accept predatory behaviour from high-balling planters without recourse because their earning potential outweighs the harm they potentially can cause. Through minimizing or making private the communal monetary valuation of individual labourers, companies can start to shift away from the toxic consequences of a competition-orientated, profit-driven culture.

#### ***4.5.4 Power Hierarchies in Personal Relationships***

This thesis has also explored in depth various problematic and dangerous vulnerabilities when sexual relationships between planters and their supervisors or crew bosses are normalized and unregulated. In most workplaces outside of the bush, these power-over relationships would be considered unacceptable, and often workplace policies include statements which prohibit these types of relationships from occurring (Ending Violence BC, 2019, pg. 8). Despite how problematic power-over relationships can be, in interviews and in the formal policy consultant work within the industry that I have undertaken since working on this thesis, I have found that companies do not want to ban these relationships from happening as this is seen to limit freedom.

Participants also noted that banning these relationships outright could lead to further vulnerabilities for both planters and supervisors as much needed transparency could be replaced by a need for secrecy. However, anti-oppressive and anti-violence workplace training could help to clarify for management and planters that free, prior, informed, and ongoing consent is critical when engaging in these sorts of relationships, even though any relationship where there is a power imbalance cannot ever truly be considered consensual (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2019, pg. 8). Companies need to be attentive to these power-hierarchies, and provide options for people with less power to access alternatives, such as moving crews.

#### ***4.5.5 Oversight of Hiring Practices***

Finally, many of the stories of harm shared by my interviewees have included persistent vulnerabilities in the casual hiring practices that pervade the industry. Hiring tends to happen “word of mouth” or through Facebook platforms. Furthermore, as previously noted in Chapter 3, my interviewees had the impression that even if companies were doing reference checks, (which many are not), the reference was more about productivity rather than character. Especially mid-season when bodies are needed to fulfill contracts and “just get trees into the ground”, the threshold for good character diminishes greatly. This directly led to known predatory individuals continuing to work in the industry and live-in remote camps. As Monica said, “if they don't catch that in the hiring process, then it's dangerous for the other planters.” I have observed and propose that reference checks need to be designed to “catch” this information, meaning the person hiring needs to complete full reference checks with past employers in a manner that is as attentive to character considerations as they are to productivity considerations. Companies can and should share information about potential predators in a manner that is sensitive to provincial privacy

laws<sup>13</sup>. The WFCA and the SAC are representative structural bodies that should help guide how individual companies can minimize the ease of mobility that people who cause harm can take advantage of, and shift the cultural emphasis in reference checks (or lack thereof) from productivity and planting skills to safety and care.

Overall, this final section has noted an array of solutions that are connected to culture shifting and structurally creating safer spaces in tree planting. Party culture, “safe” people, private tree totals, transparency in power-over relationships and adequate reference checks are all aspects which shape the culture inside a bush camp, and further are interrelated to the structural and cultural inequities that prevent all workers from feeling safe and supported in the workplace. Companies should look to these practical solutions, as well as other creative, progressive ideas, to reshape away from “rape culture” or “cowboy culture”, moving ultimately towards a “culture that cares” (Rebecca).

#### **4.6 Regulating a “Culture Shift”**

The solutions presented in this chapter are not a singular fix; they each represent a proportional structural or cultural change that companies could, and should, implement to culminate in safer spaces for women and gender-diverse workers. However, it remains that there is little external oversight to ensure companies are accountable to these changes. This section will explore the tensions behind why interviewees overwhelmingly targeted solutions at a company level and the political or economic reasons that support the under-regulation of tree planting, making a culture shift all the more pressing, and complicated.

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<sup>13</sup> Under BC’s Privacy Laws, employers can disclose information about someone’s past behaviour when “there are reasonable grounds to believe that others in the work community may be at significant risk of harm based on the information provided” (Ending Violence Association of BC, 2019, pg. 80). Accurate record-keeping of these “reasonable grounds” and other employee information is best practice (Middlemiss, 2016).

In conversations held for this research, everybody echoed that ultimately solutions to ongoing gender-based violence in planting are “all about culture” (Lisa). Leanne Simpson explains how neoliberal work culture and governance “facilitates the extraction of natural wealth from the ground and into the market... They’ve decimated... because of the high dollar. They don’t *care*, because they look north and they see lots more pristine territory that they can rip up [emphasis added]” (Klein, 2013). We live in society where colonialism, cisheteropatriarchy and violence are not only ongoing, but these systems have codified, normalized and valorized non-consensual relations and a lack of care (Konsmo & Pacheco, 2016; Veltmeyer & Bowles, 2014; Samaran, 2019). Tree planting is undeniably a primary resource industry beholden to a globalized forestry economy, wherein the financial bottom line - increased production, growing profit, and market expansion - firmly remains the priority and incentive, creating ample space for problematic, non-consensual relationships and power dynamics between industry, landscapes and labourers. For some planting companies, this also leaves few financial resources for labour welfare or anti-violence initiatives in camps. Like other resource industries in Canada, care and consent are routinely devalued for the sake of profit accumulation and the maintenance of cisheteropatriarchal power, and the lack of external support encourages this lack of care. It is historically women and gender-diverse actors who bear the burdens of harm, resulting in exclusion, sexual harassment and sexualized violence in hostile fields (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015; Cirefice & Sullivan, 2019; Landau & Lewis, 2019; Welch, 2014).

My interviewees want a culture shift. Tree planting is repeatedly referred to as “cowboy culture”, the “wild, wild, west” or a “boy’s club.” Whether they described it actively as “rape culture”, or some of the other toxic cultural tropes described above, interviewees all clearly identified how harmful it *felt* to live in a bush camp where the culture could be incredibly

dangerous, hostile and adverse for them. The tone of these discussions about a “culture shift” in the industry was urgent, pressing and important, but accountability pathways for this shift were much more difficult to name. My interviewees want to labour and work in “culture that cares” (Rebecca). The solutions that have been presented in this chapter though the voices of interviewees all have the ability to shift cultural norms and structural power in camps themselves, but ultimately these solutions rely on the goodwill and financial capacity of planting company management themselves to initiate, with little external oversight.

While accountability structures are crucial to motivate a culture shift, increasing external regulation does not seem to be a government or industry priority, nor is it something my interviewees discussed. There are economic, political and cultural barriers to increasing regulation in the industry. As previously noted in section 2.5, tree planting camps are remote, siloed operations wherein establishing adequate external regulations has proven difficult.

Following the Kharia scandal in 2010<sup>14</sup> (CBC, 2011), industry watchdogs noted that the “lacking regulations of the silviculture industry, and the enforcement of these regulations, have completely failed not only [abused] workers but all British Columbians” (Harris, 2011, pg. 20). The report insistently highlighted that adequate regulatory enforcement of general health and safety standards needs to become a government and forestry sector-wide priority. Furthermore, the “economic imbalance of power between [the silviculture and timber harvesting sector] that created a barrier to safety” (Harris, 2011, pg. 20) continue to prevail. The recommended changes to the “low bid model where cost is the primary consideration in awarding a contract” (Harris, 2011, pg. 4) could mitigate the economic pressure planting contractors face, but practically this

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<sup>14</sup> The Kharia scandal revealed a tree planting company subjecting marginalized workers to ongoing “slave-like” conditions near Golden, BC. Lacking regulations and the system through which planting contracts are awarded to companies were found responsible for this “failure” (Harris, 2011). Also see section 2.5 Legal & Regulatory Obligations.

change “doesn’t seem to be the case by most accounts” (WFCA, 2013). Tree planting companies continue to feel economic pressure as forestry-sector subcontractors, and these profit-motivations continue to rule decision-making, leading to under-regulation in the sector (WFCA, 2013; WFCA, 2020b). These structural, profit-motivated decisions filter down and influence the lived experiences of women and gender diverse tree planters, as highlighted in Chapter Three.

In addition to the political and economic challenges with regulatory enforcement in tree planting, my interviewees were not interested in broader regulatory processes as a part of the solutions they imagined and desired. This is perhaps because external regulatory bodies are not understood by survivors or tree planters to be safe or accessible (Lorenz & al., 2019; Hastie, 2019). Moreover, interviewees aimed solutions at their company because it was often the inaction or failure of their company management that they felt doubly harmed by. Survivors of harm in planting camps often felt “Institutional Betrayal” (Gorask, 2019; Crocker, 2020) and were re-traumatized after their company failed to help keep them safe or address their concerns. Company-level solutions are the most straightforward place to begin imagining change, as this change and its impacts could be immediate and significant for the survivor and future planters.

Additionally, ingrained cultural attitudes in tree planting support the insular focus on company self-regulation. Most industry actors and planters alike reject external regulations and the introduction of bureaucracy into the bush (WFCA, 2018). Francis, a tree planting veteran, said this:

I think it borders on too bureaucratic at some point... It just feels like people do this job to get back to some basics. Like to pay some bills. And then bringing more bureaucracy into it doesn't help it. And planters shit on it. I shit on it all the time. More people in OH&S positions takes away from the tree price because that is money that the company skims off of the top.

Francis' thoughts illuminate economic resentment, mistrust, internalized neoliberalism and other learned habits that avoid looking towards government agencies for solutions. Importantly, introducing external sources could undercut the financial objectives of planters and companies who already are economically disenfranchised in relation to forestry more broadly (WFCA, 2020b). On the whole, despite an apparent need for outside health and safety protections or resources to ensure that anti-violence obligations are fulfilled, interviewees were distrustful of external aid. In fact, an industry representative shared this:

We can't rely on all these external sources to protect us. We need to as companies and individuals, to confront the issue [of sexual assault], monitor it and empower our workers and support them when we feel like it will be a potential problem and intervene early (Robert).

The ability of a neoliberal state, or what Robert calls “external sources”, to adequately regulate an equally neoliberal industry is a question that is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Robert's company-levelled call to action indeed aligns with the cultural notions of freedom from normal society and mistrust of bureaucracy that are deeply ingrained in planting. While “external sources” such as increased WorkSafeBC engagement, increased attention from the BC Human Rights Commission or other state interventions potentially threaten the culture of freedom that planting enjoys, it is precisely the harmful effects of this culture that need to shift.

Although regulatory labour protections could help rectify ongoing gendered power imbalances that precipitate harm, there are cultural, economic and political challenges with implementation. Despite this, I believe that increased regulation of health and safety practices could greatly serve women and gender-diverse labourers, so as long as the planter is not financially burdened and meaningful trust could be created. For example, a recent study of gender diversity in mining found that framing sexual harassment as an occupational health and safety issue could make cultural changes around sexism and diversity more attainable for

workers and management alike (Peltier-Huntley, 2019, pg. 19-21 & pg. 102-103). The solutions my interviewees argue for are not regulatory in nature, but given the conditions and context of planting, it is difficult to imagine robust solutions happening voluntarily across all tree planting companies without external oversight. Also, state or industry-subsidized financial aid or resources for individual companies to implement towards anti-violence initiatives could contribute to meaningful change. Future research could investigate how regulatory incentives or government interventions could increase company accountability and solutions-implementation in a manner that is sensitive to the unique labour conditions of the industry. Future research should explore the capacity of administrative bodies such as the BCFSC, SAC and WFCA and their internal auditing protocols and regulatory oversight regarding labour protections, especially regarding measures specific to this anti-violence context.

The multitude of solutions presented and analysed in this chapter are tools to carve out safer spaces in a remote, often hostile workspace. The focus now needs to be on how these tools will be taken up and used by companies. We need many solutions because the problem of gender-based violence is complex and entrenched. However, regulatory oversight or state intervention may be necessary to ensure the quality and effectiveness of these solutions. My hope is that every shift, effort and change move us closer to a culture that does indeed care about the lived experiences of women and gender-diverse workers, along with a structural framework to support it.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter responds to the experiences of harm previously acknowledged and analysed in this thesis and begins to imagine a different landscape of power. After experiencing gender-based violence, “survivors often need social, legal, mental health, and physical care. Yet, there

are numerous societal and cultural barriers that often delay or prohibit survivors from seeking care. It is imperative that we include survivors' voices while looking for alternative ways to serve their needs" (Munro-Kramer et al., 2017). Structural power imbalances and harmful cultural practices need to be addressed so women and gender diverse people can safely and freely work in any field, including planting. Hana shared this when discussing the urgent need to address these issues: "This shit is really hard hitting. And I think we just need to give the industry a slap in the face and be like this is what is happening, and you need to realize this happens, and do something" (Hana). This chapter is grounded in believing survivors, and hearing the solutions that they identify. Echoing Hana, it is time for tree planting companies to make time and resources to do the same.

Indeed, the solutions critically analysed in this chapter emerge from a body of interviewee lived experiences with violence and oppression in the tree planting field. As such, my interviewees identified solutions aimed at the company level; there is not any notable data regarding interviewee desires for increased regulatory protections. Instead, company policy was a prominent theme, and interviewees insisted that policy was an important if basic first step. While an anti-violence workplace policy can take on many forms, interviewees expressed that a policy should be well-communicated, avoid language that would discourage open reporting, provide clear definitions of violence and related topics, and most importantly should be embodied by management and the larger bush camp community. Another solution discussed at length was the importance of increasing gender representation in leadership positions in camps, without exposing "trail-blazers" to harm as initial women and gender-diverse leaders in camps could bear the burden of forging these new paths. Overall, this solution is seen by my interviewees as important in making spaces feel safer, also decreasing barriers to open reporting,

and cultivating a more caring industry culture that would encourage even more gender diversity in camps. The final major solution identified was a desire to have more comprehensive anti-violence workplace training. Components of this include training that is designed to be as engaging as possible, and should target power-holders in companies. Finally, planting companies could look at other culture shifting aspects including discussing the role of party culture in the community, training non-management “safe people” to provide supportive care to people who experience harm, examining personal relationships where power asymmetries prevail, stop the communal sharing of tree totals and standardizing reference checks.

There are tensions between external regulation and the current industry culture, shedding light on why interviewees overwhelmingly targeted solutions at a company level. This makes a “culture shift” all the more necessary, and all the more difficult, to implement. However, this is an industry capable of responding to change quickly with dynamic solutions, on broad scales and in collaboration with state decision-makers. Indeed, amid COVID-19 sweeping in the province in March and April of 2020, right before the “biggest” planting season of all time, the industry was halted due to justified public health concerns from northern and First Nations communities (Parfitt, 2020). During this stalled pre-season time, industry leadership was able to secure permission to operate from communities and health authorities, secure public funding to help them do so “safely”, and organize uniformity to a transient workforce to perform “essential” work in a manner that provincial health authorities deemed safe. Operations went ahead, and camps looked radically different from previous seasons. Policies were made, rules were enforced, and the industry congratulated itself once the season ended about how “safe” things were (Kurjata, 2020). The scale of this effort and mass mobilization of a corporately-disparate industry demonstrates that tree planting companies and the various agencies that “regulate” them

are indeed very capable of reacting to pressing societal changes on broad scales quickly, and in very concrete ways, to keep people safer when their season was under threat. What if this same collaboration and energy could address gender-based violence?

As long as patriarchy and capitalism prevail, the power dynamics that facilitate these grave harms will continue to occur across our society. However, the industry has obligations too, and is capable of handling experiences of harm on their landscapes in a caring and accountable manner. Silviculture is a liminal industry, with allegiance to the deep capitalism of resource industries, but this industry also has responsibilities to the land, and to the tree planters who seasonally call this industry home. I wonder too: How can the industry play a role in positively changing the culture internally, whilst also setting an example for all primary resource sectors externally, so that we can have safer, more equitable, and less hostile work environments for all?

Planting may be a siloed industry where corporate contractors operate largely independently from one another, but there is undeniable universality to the stories shared by survivors, women and gender diverse planters who have experienced harm in the bush. There needs to be care in any response to gender-based violence as companies seek to change their culture. Lisa has become an advocate in the industry for gender-based violence justice. When we discussed the challenges that she faces while advocating for solutions, she shared this:

Hopefully, the culture catches up fast. We need them to understand that the language that they use and the decisions that they make count ... These people keep telling me to slow down, but they don't understand that it's too late. It's too late. We have to run. We have to run now. We have to, because *we missed our chance to keep people safe*. We're, like, 20 years behind everybody else. There is so much to do. We need to move together in this direction now.

## Chapter Five - Planting A Way Forward

*“The work is more than just about the amplification of survivors and quantifying their numbers. The work is really about survivors talking to each other and saying, 'I see you. I support you. I get it.’”*  
– Tarana Burke

*“I feel like at this point, knowing everything that I know, I would actually tell people to just be really, really careful when they're out there. I feel like we are still in the stages where we are still really warning women that like you need to be careful out there. You're sleeping in a tent. Find a friend, buddy system. Yes I would just tell them to be careful... I don't think we are there yet.”*  
- Eva

### 5.1 Research Overview

This thesis offers insights into the power dynamics of gender, patriarchy and capitalism in the reforestation industry in BC. This research has been centred on a primary resource industry with under-enforced legal, social and environmental obligations to the land it operates on and the labourers who operate within it (WorkSafeBC, 2013; Forest Act, 1979; Marchak, 1995; Human Rights Code, 1996, 13). Within the larger neoliberal context of the forestry sector in BC, these non-market regulatory obligations have been avoided by industry decision-makers (Young, 2008; Marchak, 1995, pg. 88; Cox, 2021). However, after holding over 20 stories that deeply emote harm, pain, solutions and healing related to experiencing gendered harm in the outdoors, I firmly believe these obligations need to be adequately addressed by industry leaders and upheld by better state regulation. It is through personal narratives and perspectives gathered from tree planters themselves that this thesis has analyzed systemic power imbalances in the bush, and the gender-based harm that can occur therein. This study addresses an important gap; the lived experiences of women and gender-diverse planters have yet to be researched in a meaningful or intersectional way.

I am so grateful to have been a member of the Political Ecology lab group in the School of Environmental Studies at UVic, an academic community that brings meaningful and

intersectional perspectives to challenging systemic issues. Grounding my methodological commitments to transformative justice in FPE provided a multi-disciplinary approach to feminist anti-violence research. It has offered my research the rich space to weave narrative-based inquiry alongside an anti-capitalist critique of a unique primary resource industry. Indeed, these are local issues with global roots (Rochaleau et al., 1997). The radical strength of FPE is that environmental trends are explored through political, economic, social, and cultural forces, with an explicit understanding that gendered power permeates every sphere of resource control (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). A core concept of this academic approach is *care* (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018, pg. 20). This foundation has provided a critical, fruitful and supportive contextual background for an exploration of my research questions: 1) What power systems interact to render women and gender-diverse people vulnerable to gender-based violence in the tree planting industry; and 2) How can these power imbalances be addressed so that women and non-binary planters can find safety, support and fulfilment in the silviculture industry?

## **5.2 Chapter Summaries**

Chapter One explores how my research was designed to further contribute to breaking the silence around gender-based violence by centring the experiences of women and gender-diverse tree planters. My research was also designed to contribute to industry-wide transformation, with the voices of marginalized planters who have experienced harm grounding this change. Women and gender diverse planters' "lived experiences are sources of knowledge... [that] can inform our understanding of the social world" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, pg. 775). I spoke with 17 women and gender-diverse tree planters about their experiences and perceptions of gendered oppression and violence in the industry. I also spoke with three men who hold leadership positions in tree planting. These were semi-structured interviews with snowball-sampled

participants conducted in a trauma-informed manner (Knight, 2019). Interviews were manually transcribed and coded for emergent themes. I want to acknowledge that personally carrying these stories as a researcher often felt like a tremendous gift, and often felt tremendously heavy.

The second chapter of this thesis presented key contexts for understanding the reforestation industry in BC. I provided an overview of forestry in BC, with its profit-driven mandates and larger situation within the extractivist context in BC. This second chapter also outlined cultural and structural dimensions of the current-day planting industry, and discussed the regulatory and legal labour obligations that the industry is beholden to. Outside of academic sources, sexual harassment and assault faced by women workers in the industry was detailed in a WFCFA report (2017). Here, industry leadership detailed their “new” awareness that sexual harassment and assault are serious and largely unacknowledged issues facing women in the industry, but this response was gender essentialist, largely focused on material and legal protections for contractors, and lacked a critical, trauma-informed understanding of sexualized violence. My literature review then detailed how past scholarship has discussed the cultural and structural dimensions of an industry determined to brand itself as a “Canadian rite of passage” (Ekers & Farnan, 2010). Past scholarly explorations were largely uninterested in acknowledging harmful or intersectional vulnerabilities in gendered power inequities in planting. The exception to this was the most dated academic source, a public health thesis from 1996, which described the specific and heightened health risks that women tree planters face as a result of sexual harassment and assault in the field. A news article entitled “Bush Workers Deal With Sexual Harassment in the Middle of Nowhere” (Fox, Oct 31 2018) was the first to signal ongoing sexual assault and harassment in the industry and point to the bush work world being one that is unsafe and unwelcoming to women. Since then, a few other news articles have been written to open this

issue up to the public. However, no academic study or news article has specifically centered on the voices of women *and* gender-diverse workers, nor have previous studies highlighted any solutions to these issues. Furthermore, these pre-#MeToo investigations lack an intersectional feminist approach and do not locate the lived experiences of women planters in the complex structural and cultural domains of power within which they labour.

My third chapter addresses my first research question: *What power systems interact to render women and gender-diverse people vulnerable to gender-based violence in the tree planting industry?* Structurally, my chapter follows a similar flow to my interview conversations; I start with the beginning of a tree planter's experience. There are structural vulnerabilities within tree planting camps, such as inadequate HR practices, nepotism, and the reproduction of male-dominated industry management. When combined with harmful, profit-driven cultural attitudes about productivity, rugged freedom and reckless "cowboy culture", this creates a "perfect storm" (Eva) of factors that precipitate widespread accounts of gender-based violence. These cultural and structural power imbalances entwine to systemically marginalize and silence women and gender-diverse planters who experience harm in the bush. My interviewees' stories show how any industry so tunnel-visioned towards profits and partying does not make holistic safety or survivor-focused practices a priority. As a result, real experiences of harm continue to be invisibilized and silenced. These profit-driven and patriarchal domains of gendered-power need to be addressed at all levels of the tree planting industry.

Chapter Four addresses my second research question: *How can power imbalances be addressed so that women and gender-diverse planters can find safety, support and fulfilment in the silviculture industry?* My intention for this chapter is to uplift the many solutions both shared and problematized by women and gender-diverse tree planters who have experienced, and are

most likely to experience, harm within the silviculture world. Interviewees shared that the sheer existence and implementation of a “solid” sexual harassment and assault policy and accompanying procedures was important to them. This is welcomed as an opportunity for companies to take a stance against gender-based violence, contributing to violence-mitigation and accountability structures. Moreover, my participants highlighted the importance of, and problematized, the many positive downstream effects of intentionally-increasing gendered representation in powerful leadership positions in camps. Participants also wished for improvements to workplace training, including sexual assault and harassment training, anti-oppression education and consent training for all involved in the industry. Other solutions that emerged included a discussion about harm reduction in party culture, the implementation of non-management “safe people” to report to in camp, making tree totals private, addressing power-over personal relationships and standardizing hiring protocols. All of these solutions-orientated aspects were identified as powerful culture shifters, with the ability to help progress the industry away from “cowboy culture” towards an industry culture that is more caring and responsive towards gender-based violence. Furthermore, despite the tension between the industry and external regulation, state intervention or other outside accountability measures could contribute to ensuring companies do take responsibility for addressing gender-based violence in camps.

### **5.3 Limitations & Future Research**

As previously discussed in my limitations section of Chapter One, my thesis is unable to fully address the unique experiences of the most marginalized voices regarding gender-based violence in tree planting. The voices from planters who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour are missing from my sampling. There is also an absence of trans representation in my sampling. Outdoor spheres and industries, from ecological conservation to adventure guiding to

bush work, are very often dangerously unwelcome spaces for marginalized individuals (Thompson, 2021; Winter & al., 2019; Dorceta, 2015; Cronon, 1996; Kongsmo & Pacheco, 2016; Vakoch, 2020; Graham, 2020). Future scholarship needs to further investigate the structural, representational, cultural and systemic barriers to full, equal and safe participation from underrepresented voices in many outdoor spheres, from primary resource extraction to outdoor recreation. Future scholarship should seek to elevate both stories and solutions, in a manner that is culturally-safe and trauma-sensitive, from marginalized voices to inform research and solutions.

Future research should also specifically investigate the intensity and prevalence of gender-based violence in Eastern Canadian tree planting. This was highlighted to me by some of my research participants who shared their adverse experiences working there. Indeed, one participant said this about Ontario and Quebec:

I am not sure if you are talking to people from Ontario, but that is a story that needs to be told, because Ontario is its own unique beast of huge problems. There is a lot of really fucked up shit that happens in Ontario. Quebec as well but mostly Ontario... Like people not getting paid. And the party culture is more wild in Ontario. Planters in BC tend to be a bit more serious, more career planters. Whereas Ontario it is a bunch of young people in rookie mills... they really have that “party hard” and “hard as fuck” culture. All that stuff... It's crazy. It's just wild (Harley).

The poor labour conditions that are a widespread, pressing issue in Ontario and Quebec planting camps is a frequent discussion topic in online tree planting communities like KKR and “Radical Silviculture.” I speculate two things: First, tree planters make far lower piece-rate per tree wages in Eastern provinces, meaning that physically the job is more demanding and higher productivity and lower overhead costs are an even bigger necessity for planters and companies to remain financially successful. Further, the increased physicality of this lower wage labour attracts younger, more inexperienced and more vulnerable labourers, but also allows predatory

individuals to remain in this workforce because their productivity and longevity is highly-valued. Rebecca echoed this speculation, saying, “A lot of men will stick around in the Ontario camps instead of moving on to other better companies, or to BC, because it’s easier for them to get positions of authority and feel powerful and get with the younger women that come around” (Rebecca). I hypothesize that this would heighten many of the profit-driven power imbalances such as those involving “high-ballers” as revealed in this BC-based study. Secondly, the forestry management practices in Ontario are less regulated than those of BC forestry (Naturally Wood, 2018; Sweeney, 2009b). Given the absence of structural oversights which accompany under-regulation of ecological and social obligations in favour of material gain, I believe this could culminate in an increased atmosphere of recklessness, risk-taking and unchecked party culture in Eastern planting companies and their remote camps. Further investigations which uplift the voices of people who have experienced harm in the Eastern planting industry is needed if the reforestation industry across Canada is to become a safer, more equitable workplace.

As previously noted, this research centres women and gender-diverse tree planting experiences in the field. Therefore, an analysis of external regulatory protections is limited in my data. Interviewees described non-regulatory solutions aimed at the company-level, precisely because they felt betrayed when their companies failed to believe them, failed to make space for their stories, and failed to keep them safe. Also not surprisingly, the insular, individualistic and profit-driven culture of tree planting is so strong that there is bias against any “outsider” structures that could limit the idealized “freedom” and profits that planting provides. However, increased regulatory protections could actually nudge lagging companies into action surrounding workplace gender-based violence, forcing them to take up the company-levelled solutions analysed in the work, and ensure that accountability measures are followed. Regulations that are

appropriately designed (ie. trauma-informed, survivor-centred, practically-enforceable) could mitigate the worst effects of capitalism that dually exploit both the human and nonhuman world in primary resource industries. Future anti-violence research in this industry should investigate how accountability and enforcement structures could help mitigate the exploitation and harm felt by its labourers.

#### **5.4 The Power of Story & The Power of Care**

There are many stories I carried and heard throughout this research process that could not explicitly be included in my writing. Furthermore, due to the limited scope of an MA thesis, I also was unable to have conversations with all the tree planters to whom I was referred. But most revealingly, when casually explaining my research to acquaintances or friends in a social situation, particularly within planting camps, I always received knowing nods, interweaving stories, names of harmful individuals, and disclosures of people's lived experiences of sexualized violence, both in the planting industry and beyond. In many ways, I feel like I became the "whisper network" itself. All of these stories could not be explicitly included, but they happened, they matter and I believe them.

I want to highlight the #MeToo story-sharing that occurs in the online Facebook community "Radical Silviculture." Several of my interviewees also mentioned being attuned to the #MeToo-type conversations ongoing in this group, and I have followed these posts closely since undertaking this research topic. Within this online planting community, women and gender-diverse tree planters share stories, support and solidarity online regarding gender-based violence in the industry. In my experience, this group is well-moderated and protected to be a safer space dedicated to the wellbeing of non-cis-hetero men tree planters. This online community carves out intentional space for inclusivity, equality, and workers' rights within the

silviculture industry by focusing on gender diversity and community care. I am grateful for the existence of this safer space, and I am proud to be a member. Members post and comment on many meaningful things in this forum, they have self-organized working groups regarding assault and harassment in the industry, and have spoken on behalf of women and gender-diverse planters at the 2021 WFCAs conferences.

Disturbingly, less than every few weeks or so, a different member will post a personal disclosure of gender-based violence in the industry. These distressing posts will be flooded with #MeToo-type comments, as well as sincere messages of support, solidarity, advice, love and healing. In these personal stories, I notice all the same trends explored in my chapters – a culture of care and belief is minimized by capitalistic, patriarchal forces, and powerful individuals abuse their position in camps to continually silence those less powerful around them. Continually seeing these posts on my personal social media, and working intimately with my own array of research stories, have reminded me every day about how widespread and affecting gender-based violence is. This has been heavy to carry. It has also reminded me that healing, care and transformation are infinitely possible.

Nora Samaran, scholar and author of “Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture”, discusses the importance of healing rape culture with care culture, and helping all people to build a world freer from systemic gender-based violence. Samaran asks “What if... we could care for each other in concrete, meaningful ways, and could protect one another from systemic harms and forms of structural violence, even as we’re struggling to dismantle them?” (Samaran, 2019, pg. 14). What if transformation meant that women and gender-diverse planters were affirmed and listened to, while they could continue to contribute to

this primary resource industry? What if we could prevent more unacknowledged harm from occurring, and make space and time for meaningful care in camps?

As I reflect upon the hours of grappling, puzzling, hard work and tears that this research has involved, I have conflicting concluding thoughts. I have always tried to honour and centre my research participants throughout this work. I want to hold space for the words of my interviewees, which remind me how amazing it is when marginalized people not only survive, but thrive, in these hostile environments. These environments, however, just should not be hostile in the first place. My research has affirmed that people who have experienced harm hold both stories and solutions, and that survivors know best how to build safer spaces. My very final interview question asked my research participants what advice they would pass along to future planters entering their first season in the industry. These responses were telling and touching. I'll end now with sharing pieces of this indispensable wisdom, from research conversations that will never leave me:

I would say to just trust your instinct and your gut. I had some pretty clear warning signs. Warning signs within my own body. So really trusting that. And not just blaming myself or my past trauma for the instincts I was feeling...We have developed these instincts in order to keep us safe in bad situations (Taylor).

I feel like at this point, knowing everything that I know, I would actually tell people to just be really, really careful when they're out there. I feel like we are still in the stages where we are still really warning women that like you need to be careful out there. You're sleeping in a tent. Find a friend, buddy system. Yes I would just tell them to be careful... I don't think we are there yet (Eva).

Look up. Just look around and breathe. And like, just enjoy it and like let the shit that comes into your brain flow through your body and into the dirt... And knowing what I know now, I would say, stay safe. Please, stay safe (Lisa).

Trust your body. Be kind to it and listen to it as well. And you can do it (Rebecca).

Have a strong network of friends inside and outside. Befriend the girls, and remember your friends on the outside. Because this world is going to feel like it is all you have at some point, and it's not. And do what is best for you. I think I did what is best for me and

that is why I am still here... I didn't say anything and that worked for me, but if screaming at the top of your lungs and losing your shit on someone works, do that, especially if they harmed you. Deal with it in the way that works for you... And if you want another piece of advice, it's create your own world. Because the planting world can get messy (Francis).

Definitely don't quit. And don't be afraid to speak up. Know your rights before you go in. Know how to assert yourself and don't feel discouraged when everyone looks at you like you're an idiot, because you're not. Your feelings and what you're saying are valid and real, even if the people in planting camps are making you feel like they aren't... Be an advocate for yourself, for your peers. Because we are all oppressed. Men and women and non-binary folks (Harley).

To not doubt themselves. Ever. And not compare themselves to any other person that is there because you can do it, and you will do it, and you will be amazed by what you are capable of when you allow yourself to take that risk and really work hard. And let the experience take over and change you. Because it is like nothing else you will experience (Josie).

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**Appendix A: Table 1 - Table of Interview Participants**

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Planting history at time of interview</b>
Abby	She/her	Planter/Crew Boss/Camp Supervisor - 10+ seasons - 1 company
Brenden	He/him	Camp Supervisor - 10+ seasons - 1 company
Cameron	They/them	Planter/Crew Boss - 5 seasons - 1 company
Dana	She/her	Planter - 5 seasons - 2 companies
Diana	She/her	Planter - 2 seasons - 3 companies
Emma	She/her	Planter - 2 seasons - 2 companies
Eva	She/her	Planter - 7 seasons - multiple companies
Francis	She/her	Planter/Crew Boss - 10+ seasons - multiple companies
Hana	She/her	Planter/Crew Boss - 5 seasons - 1 company
Harley	She/her	Planter - 5 seasons - 3 companies
Josie	She/her	Planter/Crew Boss - 4 seasons - 1 company
Lily	She/her	Planter - 4 seasons - 1 company
Lisa	She/her	Planter/Company Manager - 10+ seasons - 2 companies
Monica	She/her	Planter/Crew Boss - 10+ seasons - multiple companies
Rebecca	She/her	Planter/Crew Boss - 4 seasons - 3 companies
Robert	He/him	Industry Representative - 10+ seasons - multiple companies
Robin	She/her	Planter - 6 seasons - 9 companies
Steve	He/him	Company Manager - 10+ seasons - 1 company
Susie	She/her	Planter/Crew Boss - 6 seasons - 3 company
Taylor	They/them	Planter - 1 season - 1 company

## **Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

### ***Interview Guide for Women and Gender-Diverse Tree Planters***

1. How did you first hear about tree planting? How did you come to work as a planter?
2. What was the hiring process like? Were your references asked for?
3. What was your experience like overall? How did it vary between seasons/companies/crew bosses?
4. What was the gender representation of your crew, camp, supervisors and company?
5. Did you ever notice a division of labour between hard or soft skills?
6. Can you describe a typical day in camp in your experiences?
7. How are days off/nights off organized? What was the party culture experience like?
8. Were there conversations or trainings around workplace discrimination, harassment or violence?
9. Was any sort of sexualized violence policy communicated to your planting camp?
10. Given that this is a study about workplace gender-based violence, is this something you wish to speak to experiencing or witnessing?
11. Can you describe a time where you felt unsafe?
12. Have there been cultural shifts around issues such as workplace harassment, party culture, consent etc. since you have been associated with the industry?
13. What solutions do you imagine being possible for these issues of gender-based oppression?
14. What advice would you give another person about to start their first season planting?

### ***Interview Guide for Industry Leadership***

1. How did you first hear about tree planting? How did you come to work in the industry?
2. What has kept you in the industry for this long?
3. Can you describe the gender makeup of your crew, camp and company season to season?
4. How would you advertise or describe the culture of your company to prospective planters?
5. How does your company vet incoming planters? What is the reference process like?
6. What do you look for in a planter when hiring?
7. How are people promoted/rewarded internally to management roles?
8. Can you describe the gender makeup of your crew, camp and company season to season?
9. Given this is a study of gender-based oppression in the industry, can you speak to that in your experience?
10. What makes for a successful industry leader?
11. Are there conversations or trainings in your induction/basic training around workplace discrimination, harassment or violence?
12. What solutions do you imagine being possible for these issues of gender-based violence?