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Editorial: Women of the Arctic

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Editorial

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In 2020, the global community marked the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, and the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration* and *Platform for Action*, a landmark agreement that sought the removal of all obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life – including economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making. The Declaration and Platform affirmed that equality between women and men is both a human rights issue and a necessary prerequisite for sustainable development and peace within and among nations.

However, for many, 2020 will be remembered for the COVID-19 pandemic and less as a celebration of gender equality, although these issues are inextricably linked. The pandemic has deepened existing gender inequalities and exposed and amplified social, health, economic, and political vulnerabilities globally (United Nations Women, 2020; UN Women, 2020), including in the Arctic. Many of these inequalities risk a rollback of fragile gains for women over the past decades (United Nations Women, 2020; UN Women, 2020). One example includes significantly altered work and care dynamics (Collins, Landivar, Ruppanner, & Scarborough 2021; Lyttelton, Zang & Musick, 2020; Milliken, Kneeland, & Flynn, 2020; Staniscuaski et al., 2021), including in academia and scientific research (Cui, Ding, & Zhu, 2021; Myers et al., 2020; Staniscuaski et al., 2021), where studies have traced a notable decrease in the number of manuscript submissions by female authors (especially among early career researchers), contrasted by an overall increase in total submissions by male authors during the period of the pandemic (see data for 2020 in Malisch et al., 2020; Viglione, 2020). Often, these experiences are different and further exacerbated for those facing intersecting systems of oppression including gender, race, ethnicity, ability, age, economic class, sexual orientation, and/or dependent status (Malisch et al., 2020; Staniscuaski et al., 2021; Yavorsky, Qian, & Sargent, 2021).

In an Arctic context, the pandemic has greatly affected the research capability of the scientific community (Petrov et al., 2020) by limiting travel (e.g. for fieldwork and conferences) and direct contact as a means of protecting the health of researchers and northern communities alike. As Petrov et al. (2020) highlight, "consequences of the prolonged gap in field research will resonate for decades across scientific disciplines, through policy decisions, and into economic investments . . . " and " . . . will have lasting effects on communities as the current health, food security, and economic issues become exacerbated." At the same time, this moment provided a unique opportunity to reflect on past, present, and future research in the Arctic, including how to make it more equitable (Petrov et al., 2020).

With these current realities in mind, we are delighted to see the release of this Collection of the *Polar Record* dedicated to research on "Women of the Arctic" and broader issues of gender equality in the region. This Collection was originally inspired by insights raised on panels and in conversations at "Women of the Arctic: Bridging Policy, Research, and Lived Experience" – a side event organised by the guest editors of this Collection at the 2018 UArctic Congress in Helsinki – which brought together over 100 participants from across the circumpolar North (for an overview of the event see Smieszek, Prior & Matthews, 2018). Since then, the issue of gender equality in the Arctic has become increasingly prominent.

Furthermore, the contributions to this Collection are timely given an increasingly vocal understanding that gender equality is fundamental to sustainable development in the Arctic – in research, policy, and most importantly, everyday life. Gender equality was a priority of Iceland's Arctic Council (AC) Chairmanship (2019–2021), which culminated in the publication of the milestone *Pan-Arctic Report on Gender Equality in the Arctic*, a part of an international project under the AC Sustainable Development Group (SDWG) on Gender Equality in the Arctic (GEA), at the Council's Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavík in May 2021. The *Reykjavik Declaration*, following from this meeting, includes by far the strongest statement on gender equality in the history of the AC to date – it encourages the "mainstreaming [of] gender-based analysis in the work of the Arctic Council and call[s] for further action to advance gender equality in the Arctic." In a similar vein, the European Union's 2021 *Joint Communication on a stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous Arctic* has noted its commitment to supporting "a better understanding of gendered and human insecurities associated with climate change, environmental changes, migration patterns, and industrial development" through Arctic science, and by ensuring that "women's voices are heard in drawing up policies applicable to the Arctic." The national Arctic policies of some Arctic states

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(such as Finland's Arctic Policy), as well as scientific funding schemes (see for example the new Horizon Europe Gender Equality Plan), increasingly encourage and, at times require, the integration of a gender lens into analysis and decision-making.

Written prior to the war in Ukraine – and the subsequent pause of the Arctic Council announced by Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the US in a Joint Statement on March 3rd (U.S. Department of State 2022) – this Collection provides a snapshot of some of the many important issues related to gender equality in the Arctic today. As such, it contributes to growing academic discourse on gender equality in the Arctic, including the existing repository of *Polar Record* publications on gender (see Skaptadottir, 2004 and Begum, 2016) and women (see Dowsley, 2015; Nicol, 2007), as well as the *Polar Geography* Special Issue on "Gender in the Arctic," edited by Otto Habeck and Vladislava Vladimirova, and the *Nordic Journal and Law and Society* Special Issue on "Gender Equality in the Arctic and the North," edited by Åsa Gunnarsson and Eva-Maria Svensson.

As a part of this Collection, ***Seag, Badhe and Choudhry*** (2020) provide an introduction and overview of recent initiatives in polar research, and the need to focus on intersectionality in diversity, equality, and inclusion initiatives in polar scientific work.

One of the key findings of the *Pan-Arctic Report on Gender Equality in the Arctic* (2021) is the need for accessible, comparable, gender-, sex-, and ethnically disaggregated data within and across Arctic states (Oddsdóttir et al., 2021). ***Timothy Heleniak***'s (2020) contribution on the changing sex composition of the Russian North, specifically the reasons for the considerable decline of the male sex ratio, during the post-Soviet period (1989–2010) helps to fill some of these lacunae.

Three other contributions take different avenues to explore the role of gender in Arctic narratives. ***Sohvi Kangasluoma*** (2020) applies feminist theory to draw attention to the gendered foundations underpinning the justification strategies of Norwegian and Russian fossil fuel companies for their Arctic operations. ***Carol Devine***'s commentary on "Mapping Antarctic and Arctic Women" (2022) reflects on how cartography often documents the worlds, stories, and accomplishments of men and the ways in which Arctic and Antarctic maps can be remade to include women's stories through female place names and toponomies. *Finally,* ***Brittany Main*** (2020) reviews M. Jackson's *The Secret Lives of Glaciers*, a book that explores Icelanders´ perceptions and opinions of what is happening with Icelandic glaciers through a feminist lens.

Despite the recognition that gender is fluid and non-binary, we also recognise that the contributions to this Collection primarily take a binary approach to gender. This reality is more broadly visible in the repository of the Polar Record and, to a large extent, also reflects the state of Arctic scholarship to date. So, while this small Collection provides some new perspectives, it also points to an urgent need for a greater understanding of experiences beyond the gender binary; this includes different definitions of sex and gender across the Arctic, as well as the experiences of the LGBTQ2S+ community.

The guest editors hope the Arctic's scientific community will find this Collection to be an informative and useful contribution, and that, moving forward, it will serve as both encouragement and a signpost for further research, exploration, and reflection on the multifaceted, gendered, and intersectional realities of life in the Arctic. Ultimately, the research presented in this Collection, and its improved understanding of gender-related issues, aspires to support the advancement of gender equality for everyone who calls the circumpolar North their home.

About the authors

Drs Malgorzata (Gosia) Smieszek and Tahnee Lisa Prior are co-editors of this Polar Record Special Issue on "Women of the Arctic." Together with Leena Rantamaula, they are co-founders and co-leads of the non-profit association *Women of the Arctic* (ry) (www.genderisnotplanb.com), based in Rovaniemi, Finland. Smieszek holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Lapland. Prior holds a Ph.D. in Global Governance from the University of Waterloo.

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