

# AN EXPLORATION OF CITATION POLICY IN HISTORY COURSES AT MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

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Sara Ahmed calls feminist citations “bricks [...] through which, from which, we create our dwellings” (*Feminist Life* 16). When feminist ‘bricks’ are used, a house is created – a place of comfort and security. In contrast, the ‘bricks’ used in universities create “walls” – structures that constrain and limit; they keep things in place (Ahmed, *Feminist Life* 148). In this paper I will identify the types of citations, or ‘bricks’, used in three history courses at McMaster University: “2R03: U.S. History to Civil War” (2R03), “2T03: Survey of Canadian History Beginnings to 1885” (2T03), and “2TT3: Survey of Canadian History, 1885 to the Present” (2TT3). By examining each course syllabus, I will answer the question: do the history courses I have taken thus far reflect a diverse citation policy, like the one Ahmed practices in *Living a Feminist Life*? I will argue that that the classes do not, and instead privilege the voices of white men. I will then discuss the importance and function of citations and how the courses analyzed fail to fulfill the goal of building a diverse community as outlined in McMaster’s statement on Building an Inclusive Community with a Shared Purpose.

## AHMED’S CITATION POLICY

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed is aware of who she cites. She consciously chooses the work of those who have contributed to feminist and antiracist discourse while deliberately avoiding the work of white men, as a way of enacting feminism (*Feminist Life* 15). Therefore, her citation policy becomes one of conscientiousness and is centered around the voices of women and people of colour. In this essay, Ahmed’s policy will be the template to which my history courses will be compared.

## METHODOLOGY

Identifying the race and gender of the authors mentioned in the syllabi is difficult, if not impossible; there is little to no mention of race or gender of the authors, therefore, these factors were determined based on the names and photos included in author profiles. One could argue that this method is flawed, as it relies on a gender binary and reduces gender to physical appearance and race to skin tone alone. However, it is important to note that these assumptions reveal the way some bodies are able to ‘pass’ as a gender or race that is not their own and therefore enter into spaces that favour certain bodies and identities. Those who pass as white reap the benefits of white privilege, and those who pass

as men, the rewards of male privilege. Within academia, the ability to pass as a white man means that the values, opinions, and perspectives held by someone in this body will likely be valued over the knowledge produced by other bodies, such as women, and people of colour. Therefore, reference to race and gender below in relation to authors included on syllabi are determined by how they pass rather than their actual identity, unless stated. The citations examined are solely those included in the course syllabi and it is important to acknowledge that other reading materials are often included by teaching staff as the course progresses. This paper solely looks at syllabi based on the assumption that it offers an overall guide of how the course will be taught.

#### CITATIONS IN HISTORY COURSES

*History 2R03: U.S. History to Civil War*

Table 1: Citations in 2R03 Syllabus

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
Jacki Thompson Rand	Woman	Indigenous
T.H. Breen	Man	White
John Demos	Man	White
Jack P. Greene	Man	White
Benjamin H. Irvin	Man	White
Thomas Jefferson	Man	White
“Constitution of the United States”	Men	White
Mary Hershberger	Woman	White
Eric T. Dean Jr.	Man	White
Frederick Douglass	Man	Black
<b>TOTAL</b>	8 men, 2 women	8 white, 1 Black, 1 Indigenous

The syllabus for 2R03 offered in Spring 2018 reflects a citation policy that privileges the white male perspective. The materials that will be examined are the ten readings assigned in the semester schedule. Of these ten, two are primary material (The American Constitution, The Declaration of Independence), the rest are academic articles. I have chosen to distinguish between the primary sources from the other readings because one can argue it is crucial to include these two historical documents when teaching a course on United States history because they are documents that are vital to the foundation and organization of the U.S., so there is less flexibility when including these documents both authored by white men in the curriculum. However, they should still be included in the

citation examination because the professor still chooses whether to include them or not. Accounting for this argument, the results are the same whether primary sources are included or not: the citations reflect little diversity; one is by a black man and two are by women, one of which is Indigenous, the other white (see table 1). There are no Black women cited. Therefore, this citation policy privileges perspectives of white men. This is also the case in the following history course.

*History 2T03: Survey of Canadian History Beginnings to 1885*

Table 2: Citations in 2T03

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
Charles Mann	Man	White
Cornelius J. Jaenen	Man	Unknown
Carolyn Podruchny	Woman	White
Catherine Desbarats	Woman	White
Alain Beaulieu	Man	White
Harvey Amani Whitfield	Man	Black
Scott See	Man	White
Julia Roberts	Woman	White
Patrick J. O'Connor	Man	Unknown
Donald Fyson	Man	White
Jeremy Ravi Mumford	Man	White
<b>TOTAL</b>	8 men, 3 women	8 white, 1 Black, 2 unknown

An analysis of the citations within History 2T03 offered in Fall 2018 reveals a similar citation pattern. There are eleven required readings for this course. The race of Patrick J. O'Connor, and Cornelius Jaenen are unknown given that there are no certified biographies with a photo available online. An assessment of the sources reveal they are primarily written by white men, with only three out of eleven sources by white women, and one by a black man (see table 2). In this case, no sources are written by women of colour. So far both classes examined fail to lay 'bricks' of diversity as Ahmed does in her citation policy.

*History 2TT3: Survey of Canadian History, 1885 to the Present*

Table 3: Citations in 2TT3 Syllabus

<b>Author</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
John Douglas Belshaw	Man	White

The final history course, History 2TT3, was offered in Fall 2020. Unlike 2R03 and 2TT3, this course does not cite the reading material under a semester schedule, rather it cites one textbook under "Required Reading Material" (Nurse

2020) and notes that other readings will be provided on Avenue to Learn. The exclusion of the additional reading material citations from the syllabus under the label 'Required Reading' suggests these readings are not central to the course, even if the professors intended to use them as so. As previously noted, I am looking at citations within course syllabi, therefore, the articles that are uploaded on Avenue to Learn are not included. The textbook is the sole citation for 2TT3; a textbook written by a white man. As a result, the prevailing perspective offered is the same as both 2R03 and 2T03: the view of white men.

#### IMPORTANCE OF CITATIONS

Ahmed states she will avoid using the work of white men in her citations (*Feminist Life* 15). In contrast, the history courses predominately use the work of white men – thirteen out of twenty-two citations (60%) are written by members of this identity group. Ahmed notes that the term 'white men' does not refer to the racial identities of individuals, but rather a structure that continues to value white men's contributions and make spaces for them, both historically and currently ("white men", 2014). Ahmed's view that institutions are built for white men reveals that a certain type of voice is valued more than others. Linda Alcoff discusses this idea in her article "The Problem of Speaking for Others" by theorizing the process in which value is attached to certain voices and subjects.

Alcoff coins the term "rituals of speaking" to denote the practice of who is speaking/writing to whom, about what, in what context (12). She argues that "rituals of speaking are politically constituted by power relations of domination, exploitation, and subordination" (Alcoff 15). Using this idea to look at Ahmed's articulation of the university as an institution of white men, it is clear that the 'rituals of speaking' within higher education are made up of white men, which is why she practices a diverse citation policy that only cites women and people of colour. The 'rituals of speaking' within the history courses examined reveal the citations consists of white men speaking about colonial history, both in the US and Canada, while subordinating the voices of women, and people of colour. Only five sources are authored by women (22%), of which one is written by a woman of colour. There are only three sources by people of colour (14%). Therefore, it appears that the voices of women and people of colour, especially women of colour, are being suppressed.

One could argue that if the author's material is about oppressed groups, then the voices of women and people of colour are not excluded. However, if this is true, then another problem arises; the white men would then be speaking about experiences of oppression they have not lived or cannot relate to. To do so would be "speaking for" or "speaking about" racial or social groups to which they do not belong to, which are two problematic practices articulated by Alcoff

as lead to a misrepresentation of and a reassertion of dominance over those who are already disadvantaged (23).

Instead, Alcoff suggests “the practice of speaking with and to others” (23). Professors can speak with or to the experiences of oppressed people by allowing their voices and work to be included in the course reading lists instead of the many white men whose voices are heard too often. In history courses specifically, this would mean shifting focus from Eurocentric narratives of history to ones that look at the actions of people who are not white men in history, as well as recognizing the effects of nation building, colonialism, and imperialism on women, people of colour and LGBTQ+ communities. It would also mean the citations become more diverse: more women, people of colour, and women of colour in citations.

The idea that citations are important in creating diversity is also voiced by Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne who argue that “the choices we make about whom to cite – and who is then left out of the conversation – directly impact the cultivation of a rich and diverse discipline, and the reproduction of geographical knowledge itself” (955). Although Mott and Cockayne focus on citation practice and politics within the domain of geography discourse, their theorizations can be applied to other departments, such as history. Mott and Cockayne also draw on the work of Butler to explain how citations operate as a “form of performativity” that *do* rather than are reproduced naturally (964). Citations as performative suggest that the act of choosing which to use has meaning and power (Mott and Cockayne 964). This sentiment of citation as power, echoes the thoughts of Ahmed and Alcoff, who suggest there is also suggest an underlying power dynamic in choosing who gets to speak (Ahmed, *Feminist Life* 15, Alcoff 12).

#### **MCMASTER STATEMENT ON COMMUNITY OF DIVERSITY**

In Ahmed’s book *On Being Included Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, she explores the concept of diversity and its application within university spaces. She discusses how those she interviewed say that the documents and structures created to foster diversity are important tools of embedding diversity into the institution (*On Being Included* 29). Although useful, sometimes the existence of statements that describe the university as diverse act as a way for institutions to appear diverse, which “allows inequalities to be concealed and thus reproduced” (Ahmed, *On Being Included* 72). Ahmed calls these types of statements “non-performatives” (drawing from the work of Judith Butler) since they fail to do what they say they do (*On Being Included* 119). It is therefore challenging to embed diversity into an institution, and it is work that requires persistence, especially when institutions have an overwhelming “whiteness” to it

(*On Being Included* 25, 33). This term is related to the idea of ‘white men’ as an institution, as articulated in her other book *Living a Feminist Life*, mentioned, and explained earlier in this paper. The existence of ‘white men’ as an institution, or of ‘whiteness’, can lead to feelings of estrangement, alienation, and discomfort when one senses they do not belong (*On Being Included* 38-40). These feelings of discomfort are ones I have felt before, as a woman of colour attending a white institution. I rarely see the experiences of people like myself represented in courses I take, and I am constantly learning about the work of white theorists, especially in my history and sociology courses. This dissatisfaction is what encouraged me to look deeper into the importance of citation practices and is what provoked me to write this paper.

In the McMaster University Statement on Building an Inclusive Community with a Shared Purpose, it states: “in seeking to build an inclusive community with a shared purpose, McMaster University strives to embody these values: A Diverse Community is one that enables us to learn from our differences and that affirms our shared accountability for achieving access, equity, and meaningful inclusion of under-represented groups at all levels of the campus community” (“McMaster University Statement”). Although McMaster has this statement that outlines its intent to be inclusive, it fails to be so at a citational level. The course readings of these three second-level courses show that there is little diversity in the authors and perspectives cited. It is important that McMaster makes changes at a citational level if they are committed to creating diverse spaces within classrooms, as said in their Statement.

#### **CHALLENGING EXISTING CITATION PATTERNS**

Ahmed’s citation policy is one that is focused on the gender and racial identity of authors in citations. Aside from articulating her own policy and urging readers to be aware of who is cited, she fails to offer detailed guidance on how readers can create a better citation policy for themselves. However, Mott and Cockayne provide many ideas for how readers can ensure diversity in their own citation practices that extends beyond race and gender diversity. They suggest writers count their citation list and pay attention to “how many women, people of colour, early career scholars, graduate students, and non-academics are cited” (Mott and Cockayne 966). They also attest to the pitfalls of this practice since it assumes “gender or cisnormativity” based on names (Mott and Cockayne 966). In addition, they recommend writers keep both the first and last name in reference letters to maintain awareness of the author’s genders and to allow for non-Anglophone names to be shown (Mott and Cockayne 967-8). Mott and Cockayne are including an awareness to gender, race, status, and language

when discussing citations, which attests to the multilevel forms of suppression and domination that can occur in citation practices.

Keeping in mind the arguments put forth by Ahmed, Alcoff, Mott and Cockayne, I argue that McMaster should develop a guide for educators to use so that they can create course content that reflects an array of perspectives and voices. This guide should discourage a citation policy that is based on using sources that are highly cited, citing their self or a particular group of others exclusively, and to instead encourage professors to cite a diverse number of groups and people (women, people of colour, non-academics, etc.), and knowledge in different formats (not just academic papers), as informed by the works of Ahmed, Alcoff, Mott and Cockayne. The goal of this type of guide is to allow professors to continue to express academic freedom when crafting their content but to bring an awareness to the politics of citation, and to urge them to more inclusive in their own citation policies to create a diverse learning environment.

#### CONCLUSION

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed opts for 'bricks' of empowerment instead of oppression when crafting her citation policy. In doing so, she makes it clear that citations are political; they are a site of power and privilege. Alcoff, Mott and Cockayne argue that citations reveal what knowledge, produced by whom, is privileged. The three history course examined do not use a citation policy like the one Ahmed uses in *Living a Feminist Life*. Instead, they privilege the voices and contributions of white authors over other groups. It is important to be aware of citations used so that one is aware of the types of perspectives being taught in a classroom in relation to race and gender. A diverse citation policy is needed if spaces are to truly become diverse and inclusive, which starts by challenging the whiteness that exists within institutions. McMaster University would benefit from encouraging professors to have citation policies that are diverse in authorship like Ahmed's, so spaces can be inclusive for all. To be a feminist is to practice feminism, to question structures of oppression and to work towards changing them; one way we can do this if we hold our selves and others accountable for the citations used in authorship.

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