



ISSUE 22 : FALL 2022
OPEN RIVERS :
RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

WOMEN & WATER : CONFRONTATION

<https://openrivers.umn.edu>

An interdisciplinary online journal rethinking water, place & community
from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

ISSN 2471-190X

The cover image is sunset in Seoul along the Cheonggyecheon stream. Image by Stefan K on Unsplash.

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Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community is produced by the University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing Services and the University of Minnesota Institute for Advanced Study.

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ISSN 2471-190X

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PRIMARY SOURCES

WOMEN & WATER: INSPIRATION AND RESOURCES

By Racquel Banaszak, Caroline Doenmez,
Caroline Gottschalk Druschke, Becky Jacobs, Shannon LeBlanc,
Phyllis Mauch Messenger, Lee Vue, and Anne Whitehouse

Note from the Editor

Over the past two issues of Open Rivers, we have focused on a single overarching theme: Women & Water. Yet even over two issues, we are only beginning to explore the myriad and complex ways women and water are intertwined.

With this awareness in mind, we asked authors from both issues to share a resource on this broad theme of women and water that they find provocative or inspiring. The collection of responses below offers resources ranging from a Facebook group to artwork to texts to lectures,



*“Niimaamaa” sculpture in Winnipeg by artists KC Adams, Jaimie Isaac and Val Vint (2018).
Image courtesy of Caroline Fidan Tyler Doenmez.*

all of which help these authors confront the ongoing challenges of the work they do with water professionally and personally. We hope this list might spark your curiosity and enrich

your own understandings of the entanglements of women and water.

—Laurie Moberg, Editor

Racquel Banaszak

Nitamising Gimashkikinaan—Indigenous Perinatal and Lactation Support Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/nitamising.gimashkikinaan/>

The relationship between pregnant and lactating mothers with their children mirrors the relationship between mother earth and the nourishing waters that support all life.

This support group is dedicated to Indigenous pregnant and lactating people, doulas, and supporters in order to restore support systems for Indigenous first foods, breastmilk. Indigenous breastfeeding practices have been impacted by colonization including access to safe drinking

water. The relationship between the health of our bodies and the health of waters and lands is inextricably connected to the health of our people. Indigenous breastfeeding is Indigenous food sovereignty.

The knowledge and support this group has given me has helped me to understand the role of women as water protectors and life givers. We must nourish the patriarchy so we can survive and carry on in our future generations.

Caroline Fidan Tyler Doenmez

“Niimaamaa” sculpture at The Forks in Winnipeg by artists KC Adams, Jaimie Isaac, and Val Vint. <https://www.theforks.com/attractions/niimaamaa>

I encountered this sculpture on my very last day of fieldwork in Winnipeg. It was early spring of 2020, and I was walking around an area called Niizhoziibe (meaning “two rivers” in Ojibwe) at The Forks. The sight of her soaring silhouette made me stop in my snowy tracks. I have held onto the image of this sculpture ever since, because she gives such vivid and eloquent form to the connections between women and water that are central to my research, which engages the Anishinaabe concept of women as “water carriers.” This term speaks to women’s abilities to hold new life, as well as their specific connections and caretaking responsibilities to bodies of water.

This sculpture, called “Niimaamaa” (“mother”) exemplifies these themes through the fluid,

rippling outline of her heavily pregnant body, as well as her location at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. Indeed, the artist statement explains, “Her pregnant form signals that she is a water carrier and she is positioned to gaze towards the horizon between the water and sky. Within the hair strands, the waterways of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers are traced, and seven-sister constellations marked to honor the sky and water worlds.”

The sculpture was created in 2018 by artists KC Adams (Anishinaabe, Inninew, and British), Jaimie Isaac (Anishinaabe), and Val Vint (Métis). Standing at an impressive height of 30 feet, Niimaamaa can almost see over the treetops to the memorial for missing and murdered



*"Niimaamaa" sculpture in Winnipeg by artists KC Adams, Jaimie Isaac and Val Vint (2018).
Image courtesy of Caroline Fidan Tyler Doenmez.*



*“Niimaamaa” sculpture in Winnipeg by artists KC Adams, Jaimie Isaac and Val Vint (2018).
Image courtesy of Caroline Fidan Tyler Doenmez.*

Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people nearby. Both figures, existing at this significant meeting place of two rivers, signal a sense of something rooted in place and enduring, but also something open, porous, and transformative on the edges of the earth, air, and water.

Niimaamaa is positioned over a pathway, so that you walk through her. If you pause underneath and look up, you are confronted with your own

wavary reflection in the bright pieces of metal that line the inside. You realize, then, that you are fleetingly a part of the sculpture, too; you are the one being carried. In this way, you're being asked to think about what gives you life, and in what ways you can give and protect other forms of creation. How can you honor the sources of your being and caretake the lands, waters, and relations that carry and sustain you?

Caroline Gottschalk Druschke

Johnson, Lacy M. 2022. "Lessons from Houston: Remembering and Reimagining Life with Floods." Metcalfe Institute's 2022 Public Lecture Series. The University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI, June 13.

We were aware of Lacy Johnson's work with the Houston Flood Museum when we were launching Stories from the Flood in 2018 and 2019. Associate professor at Rice University, Johnson's Metcalf Institute lecture offers a powerful and personal account of the differential

impacts of flooding on the people of Houston. Johnson touches on power, inequity, empathy, and vulnerability. Her work offers a shining example of collaborative and creative response to increasingly frequent and increasingly devastating floods.

Becky Jacobs

Bandora, Patricia Mhoja. 2021. "Dying for a Pee: Empowering Residents in Cape Town's Informal Settlement." *Place Journal* (December). <https://placesjournal.org/workshop-article/dying-for-a-pee-empowering-residents-in-cape-towns-informal-settlement/?cn-reloaded=1>.

This journal article drew my attention to the issue of gender inequality and access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in the context of the

shocking murder of a young woman in a public toilet in a South African informal settlement.

House, Sarah, Suzanne Ferron, Marni Sommer, and Sue Cavil. 2014. "Violence, Gender and WASH: a Practitioners' Toolkit Making Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Safer Through Improved Programming." *Humanitarian Practice Network* 60 (February 12). <https://odihpn.org/publication/violence-gender-and-wash-a-practitioners%C2%92-toolkit-making-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-safer-through-improved-programming/>.

This widely distributed toolkit is designed to provide resources to help readers understand the gendered power dynamics involved in WASH and how these dynamics can contribute to violence.

The toolkit goes on to offer suggestions for how people can minimize vulnerabilities and provide victim support.

Shannon LeBlanc

Yuknavitch, Lidia. 2011. *The Chronology of Water: A Memoir*. Portland, OR: Hawthorne Books and Literary Arts. <http://hawthornebooks.com/catalogue/the-chronology-of-water>.

Tsui, Bonnie. 2021. *Why We Swim*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books. <https://www.workman.com/products/why-we-swim/paperback>.

While different in genre and approach, both of these publications have made me think of the history behind water and our use of water for recreational and competitive purposes. When I was a competitive swimmer and when I swim leisurely now, I'm entering into a tentative agreement with a powerful natural element. I may promise to use its buoyancy to stay afloat while it may promise not to drown me. There is a matter of trust that's extended, and I also accept a lack of control over my body depending on the state of water and my

place in it. I find this understanding both liberating and terrifying. Both books discuss the trust humans have with water and the evolution of that trust on historical, societal and personal levels. The authors also speak to the problems that arise when water becomes an oasis for the elite and a mirage for others. Swimming has often been a privileged space for me, and it's not one that I consider often enough when I jump in, unafraid of what may lie beneath the surface.

Phyllis Mauch Messenger

Jensen, Anne. 2017. "Threatened Heritage and Community Archaeology on Alaska's North Slope." In *Public Archaeology and Climate Change*, edited by Tom Dawson, Courtney Nimura, Elías López-Romero, and Marie-Yvane Daire, 126-137. Oxford: Oxbow Books. https://youtu.be/nmGLs05_C50.

See video *Threatened Heritage and Community Archaeology on Alaska's North Slope*.

Messenger, Phyllis Mauch. 2019. "Libraries Burning." *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community*, no. 14. <https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/libraries-burning/>.

Archaeologist Anne Jensen excavates ancient coastal sites in Alaska that are being exposed by increasingly strong storms and thawing permafrost. She lives in Barrow and works for Ukpeavik Iñupiat Corporation, one of the largest corporations owned by Alaska Natives. She calls the ancient material that, until recently, has been frozen in time a "tissue bank" that can help us understand climatic cycles over millennia. Her dedication to working with local communities seeking to salvage their history is palpable and has stuck with me since hearing her speak at a 2018 Society for American Archaeology

Annual Meeting ("Salvaging Heritage and Data from Walakpa: A Case Study of the Walakpa Archaeological Salvage Project"). This and other articles by Jensen are referenced in my Open Rivers article, "[Libraries Burning](#)."

Jensen's work is intimately connected to the needs and wishes of the local communities with whom she has worked for years. With them, she has watched the effects of climate change on shorelines and ancient sites. She has had to change her ways of working to meet the increasing pace of shoreline erosion and the thawing-freezing cycles that have affected those sites.

She not only seeks to engage the local community in the salvaging of their heritage, but also to educate the archaeological community in methods of working with Indigenous communities. She has been an early leader in alerting archaeologists to the growing impact of the changing climate

on archaeological sites around the world. Anne Jensen has been an inspiration to me, and I am glad that I could shine a light on her work. She exemplifies how her profession—archaeology—is closely tied to the effects of changing water patterns.

Lee Vue

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2015. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

Johnson, Ayana Elizabeth, Alex Blumber, and Frankie Myers. 2021. “The Tribe that’s Moving Earth (and Water) to Solve the Climate Crisis.” Produced by Lauren Silverman. *How to Save a Planet*, February. Podcast, 43:51. <https://gimletmedia.com/shows/howtosaveaplanet/5whko6o/the-tribe-thats-moving-earth-and-water>.

Tolber, Makshya. 2022. “Becoming Water: Black Memory in Slavery’s Afterlives.” *Emergence Magazine*, February 17, 2022. <https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/becoming-water/>.

These three pieces each provide deeper, more humanizing understandings of water and its value to humankind and this planet. Some of the

resources also emphasize the role that identity plays in how we shape our relationship with water.

Anne Whitehouse

Pak, T’ae-wŏn. 2011. *Scenes from Ch’ŏnggye Stream*. Translated by Ok Young Kim Chang. Singapore: Stallion Press.

The resource that has been most influential on my thinking about women and water is Pak T’ae-wŏn’s 1930s Korean novel, *Scenes from*

Cheonggye Stream, which is the subject of my [article](#) in this issue. However, there are two other resources that have also inspired me lately.

“Drown Your Tears”

See the video [“Drown Your Tears.”](#)

“Drown Your Tears” is a musical number from the Korean production of Frank Wildhorn and Jack Murphy’s musical adaptation of Victor Hugo’s novel, *The Man Who Laughs*. The Korean title is 눈물은 강물에, which roughly translates to “Tears in the River,” and the Korean version is translated by Kwon Eun Ah.

This musical number focuses on the female members of a troupe of poor, outcast carnival

performers. Prior to this musical number, Dea—a character who has been blind from birth—has just been through a traumatic experience that has left her shaken and even more terrified of the world. On a quiet evening by the river, the female performers wash their clothes and talk together, and two of the women try to encourage Dea and lift her spirits. They tell her to let the river carry her tears away and wash away her sorrow, assuring her that tomorrow will be better and that the trials and pain she experiences in life are temporary and will pass. At the song’s climax,

the women bring Dea into the (shallow) river and let her hands go, encouraging her to stand on her own. At first Dea is afraid and uncertain, but then she finds joy as she touches the water of the river and joins the other women in dancing in the river's flow.

I find "Drown Your Tears" to be a beautiful and moving representation of female relationships and community that arises at the communal gathering place of the riverside laundry site. The

moving water is an important part of the interaction between Dea and the other women here, a metaphor for their sharing one another's burdens and finding solace in each other. Being in the water is also a way for Dea to physically interact with the world again in a way that feels secure. The unbridled joy of all the women as they wash the dirt from their clothes and the pain from their souls is truly delightful to see.

Adele. 2015. "River Lea" 25. London: XL Recordings.

See the video [Adele - River Lea - Live at Glastonbury](#).

"River Lea" (2015) adopts a haunting tone and a heavy rhythmic beat as Adele sings about the way her toxic connection to the nearby river from childhood impacts her current choices and relationships. She sings, "When I was a child I grew up by the River Lea / There was something in the water, now that something's in me." Alluding to the industrial pollution of the River Lea, she describes that "something in the water" as having contaminated her own body and even harming those around her enough

that she "[stains] every heart that [she uses] to heal the pain." The image "the reeds are growing out of my fingertips" illustrates the deep and uncomfortable connection she has with the river, evoking a sense of environmental horror. She is separated from the river physically, saying that "[she] can't go back," but that the toxicity of the river will be something that she carries with her for her entire life. There's a sense of helplessness that the river's influence will continue to leak into her relationships and cause her to hurt others, but she also expresses a sense of power in accepting her relationship with the river. This song continues to be one of my all-time favorites.

Recommended Citation

Banaszak, Raquel, Caroline Doenmez, Caroline Gottschalk Druschke, Becky Jacobs, Shannon LeBlanc, Phyllis Mauch Messenger, Lee Vue, and Anne Whitehouse. 2022. "Women & Water: Inspiration and Resources." *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community*, no. 22. <https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/women-water-inspiration/>.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24926/2471190X.9755>

About the Authors

Racquel Banaszak (Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe) is a visual artist and educator based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She currently attends the Master of Heritage Studies and Public History program at the University of Minnesota. She earned a graduate certificate in Native American Studies from Montana State University (2018) and a bachelor of science degree from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (2012). Her work focuses on Indigenous histories, representation, and Indigenous Education for All.

Caroline Fidan Tyler Doenmez is of Kurdish and English settler descent and was raised in the Mo-nadnock region of New Hampshire. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota, a visiting scholar in the Department of Native American and Indigenous Studies at Dartmouth College, and she currently holds the American Association of University Women (AAUW) American Dissertation Fellowship. Her dissertation research, based on fieldwork in Manitoba, examines the reclamation of birth by Indigenous doulas.

Caroline Gottschalk Druschke is a professor of rhetoric in the department of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she also serves as Chair of Water@UW, an umbrella organization that connects water scholars across the UW-Madison campus and across the state. Gottschalk Druschke's research, teaching, and community work are centrally focused on the questions of how people change rivers, and how rivers change people.

Becky L. Jacobs is the Waller Lansden Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Tennessee College of Law in Knoxville, Tennessee, near the Tennessee River. She teaches and writes in a number of interconnected areas, including environmental and natural resources law, the built environment, and infrastructure; conflict resolution; public health law; trade and transnational/global business issues; gender and the law; and development issues. She often approaches these topics from an anthropo-legal/socio-legal perspective, exploring the motivations and conditions that animate societal responses to, and society's influence on, the development of the law and adopting the intersectionality necessary to interrogate human/ecological interactions and interdependencies.

Shannon LeBlanc holds an MFA in creative nonfiction from Emerson College. Her essays have appeared in *Catch & Release: Columbia Journal Online*; *What I Didn't Know: True Stories of Becoming a Teacher*, an anthology published by Creative Nonfiction and edited by Lee Gutkind; an "Albums of Our Lives" column on *The Rumpus*; as a Reader's Choice finalist in *Memoir Magazine's* #MeToo edition; and on The Bangalore Review. She lives in Louisville, Kentucky. You can follow her on Twitter [@ShaNini86](https://twitter.com/ShaNini86).

Phyllis Mauch Messenger is an anthropologist and archaeologist who has published numerous books and articles on archaeology and heritage. In addition to editing for *Open Rivers*, she is currently completing a novel about a young female archaeologist working in the 1980s on a salvage archaeology project in the Sulaco River valley in Honduras. She spent time during summer 2022 watching her three-year-old grandson learn to cast and canoe on lakes in northern Minnesota, on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, her favorite place in the world.

Lee Vue is a communication strategist committed to social impact and using a racial equity lens to advance narrative change. When she's not immersed in creative and communications projects, she's exploring wild places and waterways, teaching BIPOC communities how to paddle in collaboration with local environmental nonprofits, and coaching high school badminton in St. Paul. She currently serves as a board member for Camp Menogyn, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, Youth Leadership Initiative, Ann Bancroft Foundation, and BMPP Giving Circle with a deep commitment to uplift the voices of communities of color in the climate, philanthropy and social justice movements. She graduated from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities with a degree in political science and resides in East St. Paul.

Anne Whitehouse has a master's degree in Environmental Humanities from the University of Utah. She was raised in Washington State by the Sammamish River, and she has found solace in walking along rivers and streams ever since. She enjoys writing creative nonfiction, reading, eating good food, and hiking. Anne is currently studying Korean in South Korea, where she lives near Cheonggye Stream. The main things she misses from home are her rough collie (Liesey) and tortilla chips.