

# The Unpaid Labour of Love: Rebecca Blakey, Natalie Childs, KL, and Cynthia Spring on behalf of *GUTS CANADIAN FEMINIST MAGAZINE*

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**GUTS** is a digital, volunteer-run Canadian feminist magazine and blog. Its biannual magazine publishes literary essays and reviews, long-form journalism, interviews, fiction, and new media to further feminist discourse, criticism, and community engagement in Canada. The blog regularly posts informal and accessible content featuring up-and-coming feminist projects and persons of interest, short essays, prose, letters, reviews, updates, and rants.  
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**Interview by Rebecca Blakey (Senior Editor), Natalie Childs (Senior Editor and Managing Blog Editor), KL (Editor), Cynthia Spring (Co-Founding Editor and Managing Editor) with Marcelle Kosman (University of Alberta)**

**Rebecca Blakey:** Do you want us to ask the questions and then answer them? I can ask KL the first question.

**Kosman:** You know what, why not?

**RB: Who are you, what do you do, and why do you do it?**

**KL:** We are *GUTS*, an open-access, volunteer-run Canadian feminist magazine and blog. Our editorial collective is comprised of ten people with varying levels of responsibilities from social media to copy-editing, editorial managing, and blog. Representing that collective during this interview are: Rebecca Blakey (Senior Editor), Cynthia Spring (Co-Founding Editor and Managing Editor), Natalie Childs (Senior Editor and Managing Blog Editor), and me, KL (Editor). We all use she/her pronouns.

We produce a bi-annual online magazine and a blog. We are involved with *GUTS* because we are inspired by the wide range of thought and experience that exists within the young so-called Canadian feminist movement and we want to create and maintain an accessible forum for these feminisms to correspond with one another. We also want to support and work with *emerging* writers and artists and make space for those stories, perspectives, and theoretical approaches that are not being published in mainstream media. Speaking personally, that platform—making space for the voices excluded from mainstream media—is what brings me to *GUTS* and it's something that *GUTS* does really well. Like everything, media is unevenly distributed and what we do is give a megaphone to voices that are urgent and important to current discourses on feminism.

As a magazine we create a public; because it's online, it is publicly available and as such is open to the kinds of interactions that take place in public settings. It's important to *GUTS* to be interactive and to have our readership engaged with us—and us with them. It's a discursive space; a space of writing, of thoughtfulness; a platform in which our contributors can really take

up space that might otherwise be unavailable to them. Since oppression is unevenly distributed and can be really generalized, having a discursive form gives our writers a place to parse terms like 'systemic' and 'institutionalized,' demonstrating for readers the ways these oppressions are uneven, and our adversaries various. And, just as forms of oppression are not uniform, forms of feminism are not uniform, so *GUTS* strives for intersectional feminisms that can speak to one another.

**Kosman:** I really like this non-hierarchical approach to interviewing. KL, do you want to ask the next question?

**KL: Natalie, what is the connection between the magazine and the blog? Why are they separate, and what does having them separated allow *GUTS* to do?**

**NC:** What connects them is fairly straightforward, but has and will continue to change over time; *GUTS* has the same vision for the kinds of work being published on both the blog and in the magazine, even though the genres and forms of those works varies. The separation of the blog and magazine is the subject of ongoing conversations, but currently there are two main reasons: for editorial purposes, the first reason we keep them separate so that we can publish longer-form work on focused topics in the magazine, allowing the pieces in each issue to speak to one another; the blog, on the other hand, allows us more flexibility to publish shorter, topical pieces that wouldn't necessarily relate to one another, but could respond to current events. The second reason is financial. The granting bodies that help fund us restrict the allocation of funds to the work of 'magazines' (they're magazine grants) and are specific about not funding 'blog' content, so none of that money can go towards blog pieces. As a result, we've had to draw a stronger line between them; since we have fewer resources for the blog, the selection and editing processes for those pieces are slightly less rigorous. We're often curious, though, about whether our readers draw the lines between the two as clearly as we do.

**KL: Rebecca, can you describe how *GUTS* understands its feminism, or what our feminist praxis is?**

**RB:** As a collective, I understand *GUTS*'s feminism to be anti-oppressive, which is to say that it is anti-white supremacist, anti-cissexist, anti-heterosexist, anti-misogynist, anti-ableist, anti-colonial, and an-

ti-capitalist. Its mission statement is also a feminist one in that *GUTS* hopes to provide insight into the systemic forces and intersecting oppressions that isolate and endanger women and trans people in so-called Canada.

Our feminist praxis functions as both the theory behind the magazine and how we do business *as* a magazine in that we prioritize soliciting authors who write on these forces and oppressions from lived experiences. This praxis is also present in our editorial model of actively eschewing 'cultivation,' which we understand to mean the superseding of editors' agency or 'expertise' over that of the authors, and we actively resist the erasures implicit in such a power arrangement. We instead adopt a model of peer- or co-editing to help the author's voice and ideas to come through as clearly as possible, in all of their complexity, nuance, and strength rather than dictate our expectations for that piece onto that writer.

**KL: Rebecca, what kinds of resistance has *GUTS* encountered to its presence online? How have you negotiated that resistance?**

**RB:** We are very lucky in that we have encountered little to no resistance to our presence online. On our website, we have control over what comments are approved or not approved, and the editors have the power to close comments on articles where moderating is too demanding. On Twitter, we tend not to engage with inflammatory egg accounts or people just trying to be funny. On Facebook and Instagram, because those comments are potentially permanent to visitors of the page, *GUTS* editors tend to engage with trolling in kind, either from the magazine's account or from our individual accounts. For example, on Facebook we had posted an interview with this person doing cool stuff related to gender equity at the University of Waterloo, and a dude commented: 'Think I figured out why these articles sound so vacant...[the interviewee in the article] sounds like a hipster talking about hipster shit.' I replied: 'thanks for ur contribution! perhaps u can leverage ur deep understanding of vacancy into a successful career as a landlord :)' and he didn't answer because I was just being cunt in kind.

Another great example occurred recently on Instagram where a dude commented on an article about white supremacy in the cosplaying community, writing: 'Masculinity is a pillar of western (European/White)

culture, that's just the way we are. Stop oppressing me shitlord.' Natalie responded: 'thanks for your insight :)' and, like the previous example, he didn't answer. Our priority is always that we'll engage with something if it demonstrates to our readers and authors that we have your back. We never want a situation where an author feels like they don't have our support. We stand behind our authors one hundred per cent.

Now I have a question for KL!

**KL:** OK!

**RB:** KL, who do you understand to be included in the *GUTS* community? How has *GUTS* actively worked to shape that community?

**KL:** We believe our community to include any current or former reader, writer, supporter, editor—anyone who has contributed to *GUTS* in any way. We shape and grow our community by soliciting work from authors and artists we love, linking to them and saying thank you publically in link roundups.

**RB:** Every Sunday we publish a list of links to exciting feminist shit happening on the Internet, and when we tweet about the list, we include the Twitter handles of those authors and creators, and we thank them for their work. When they respond, it gives us the opportunity to tell them we love their work and invite them to contribute to *GUTS*. At the discretion of the editors involved, we'll also engage kindly with people who take earnest umbrage with something we need to clarify or defend, or with those who genuinely want to learn.

**KL:** We choose topics for the magazine that we think would be of interest to the publics we want included in our community, so our calls for submissions and our issues also shape the community. Similarly, we foster communication and discourse by engaging online with like-minded publications. We really see that as expanding our community, even if we're only connected to them by shared politics.

**RB:** That's a super good point. We're really good Internet-friends with *cléo*; we're tight with *Briarpatch*...

**KL:** We've been linked to by *Bitch* and *The Toast*...

**Natalie Childs:** And we see all these publications as collaborators, not as competitors. We're excited about venues publishing good work.

**KL:** Cynthia, does *GUTS* have a public or audience that extends beyond its community? How do you negotiate that public?

**Cynthia Spring:** We're still negotiating our relationship with those who, as a result of their life experiences, have a complicated relationship to feminism. Members of this public might be people who care about feminist issues, but don't feel knowledgeable enough to join the conversation or are unsure if they themselves are in fact feminists; they might also be cis men, or people who are negotiating their own masculinity, or people who very reasonably don't identify as 'feminists' per se.

As a magazine, we're dedicated to thinking through how patriarchy and misogyny are systemic and, along with other systems of oppression, affect *everyone*, and we hope to have more engaging interactions with these audiences online. A successful example of this is the advice column, 'Dear BB,' that responded to a reader's question about how to fight rape culture as a cis man. These types of 'how to' resources are well received and we think provide an entry point into both the conversation and the rest of the content we publish. In exchange, we expect these audiences to take the time to learn how to listen to the complicated and personal stories that we publish, communicating these very lessons. As a result, we are not terribly patient with people who come to *GUTS* for explanations, but are not willing to actually hear what our contributors are saying.

**RB:** That happened in the comments thread for both 'That Guy Who Isn't You' and 'Dear BB: Dudes in Rape Culture.' Both of these articles have closed comment sections because they filled up with disingenuous questions from dudes wanting tailored advice for every possible situation they might find themselves in. Like, maybe one day, they'll get to a place where they can handle a systemic critique, but we can't take on the personal responsibility of educating them until they do. We all support and encourage each other to have solid boundaries when it comes to doing this work, especially when that work is so exhausting and entirely unremunerated.

**CS:** We recognize that marginalized people are often

expected to provide proof of their oppression or to offer resources on how to be good allies, and we want to resist those expectations.

**RB:** And similarly there are numerous authors whose experiences we do not share and therefore we are unable to answer on their behalf—but that doesn't mean *they* are responsible for further educating readers. We often append to our articles a list of relevant titles for further reading. You read the piece; you can do your own education.

**NC:** A lot of the pieces we publish ask readers to do some work in coming to and understanding the article.

**RB: Cynthia, what are the affordances and restrictions of working online?**

**CS:** Working online allows us to produce content quickly; it's less expensive than printing, which makes it possible to pay our writers and artists an honorarium; and it allows us to work from anywhere.

Working online also affords us the ability to participate in an online conversation that many people are contributing to right now. But, at the same time, we are aware that we live in an era where readers expect a high level of content for free and without advertising. This requires us to be constantly thinking up creative solutions for remaining open-access, ad-free, and independent, while continuing to be able to pay our writers—and, maybe one day, pay ourselves.

We currently get all our money from grants and donations, and this allows us to pay our writers and cover basic costs, but we're still unable to pay the editors for their work. While this is a problem faced by a lot of independent online magazines (the problems are different for print), it's incredibly important to us, as a feminist magazine, to pay our editors and contributors fairly for their work because that labour is feminized and precarious and under-valued. So far, a universal basic living wage appears to be the best solution.

**RB:** We tweet at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regularly.

**CS: Natalie, what is the role of digital technology in GUTS? What tools, platforms, sites, etc. do you work with?**

**NC:** Something that's really important to the *GUTS* origin story is that the founders, Nadine Adelaar and Cynthia Spring, built the *GUTS* website in 2013 using WordPress Content management system. Nadine and Cynthia spent a lot of time developing the design and structure of the website and now, in addition to managing it, Nadine is in the process of building us a new one to address the evolving needs of the blog and magazine.

As a digital magazine, everything we do is implicated in digital technology. We rely heavily on social media platforms to promote our content because overwhelmingly that's where we see new readers learning about *GUTS*. Facebook is the main platform we use, but TinyLetter, Instagram, Slack, and Twitter are all tools we use in building our brand and getting readers to the site and accessing content.

**Kosman:** What's TinyLetter? It sounds very hip and I'm very old.

**NC:** It's a way of sending newsletters. Right now, we're primarily using it for calls for submissions, not so much for distributing content (but that's something we might do in the future). As a far-flung editorial collective, we also rely a lot on Slack, which is a group chat app that allows us to discuss and keep organized a range of topics despite our geographic distance.

**RB: Natalie, can you describe your collective editorial practice? Why is collectivity important to GUTS?**

**NC:** Collectivity is hugely important for the sustainability of this project—specifically our ability to continue doing this work—and for maintaining the quality of the magazine and blog. We aren't a non-hierarchical organization; we have different roles and responsibilities, and we trust one another in those roles to make decisions. At the same time, we're always there for each other when one of us needs help with or is unsure about something.

In practical terms, the editorial collective process for each issue entails discussing and choosing the topic together, and then we write a call for submissions. After the submission deadline, we each review every submission and then, through an extensive process, we narrow them down to the ones for the issue. Each accepted piece is assigned an editor who collaborates one on one with the writer thereafter. Cynthia has been our

managing editor for the last few issues, which means she coordinates between editors and writers, copy-editors, and artists to get everyone in on deadline.

Supporting one another is crucial to working collectively, and a lot of that is providing one another with emotional support. The editorial process can be extremely draining, especially when we're dealing with triggering or sensitive issues, so having peers who understand what you're working on and its importance means that they can assist you in both technical and emotional ways. Support also means challenging assumptions that we hold and helping each other work through those preconceptions.

It's important to acknowledge that our respective abilities to participate in the production of the magazine and the blog change over the years because *GUTS* is a volunteer project. On a practical level, then, working in a collective allows us to shift roles—new people come in, others step back—in order to accommodate the changes happening in other parts of our lives.

**RB:** The insatiable demand for labour, energy, and resources is just misogyny. Feminized people are expected to work for free and love it, so it's very complicated to exist at this intersection where I love the work that I do for *GUTS*—I love the work that we *all* do for *GUTS*—but I understand that this unpaid labour is complicit in a misogynist system. As long as people are willing to do the work unpaid, people will continue to insist that that work be done for free.

I also want to acknowledge that we're very lucky to have the support of our community. We had a massively successful Patreon campaign, and now we can afford an increase in the rate we pay our writers! I was floored by how quickly people committed to funding *GUTS*.

**KL:** And the rate that we pay our writers is tops. \$100 per article is more than a lot of literary magazines—if you get paid anything—so we're really proud of that.

**Kosman:** I have to say that it has been an absolute pleasure for me to watch the four of you interview yourselves. Thank you all for the opportunity to learn more about *GUTS* and your feminist praxis.