GENDERING INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS IN FEDERAL SYSTEMS:
THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND
EMPIRICAL REALITIES

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INTRODUCTION

The inevitability within federations of overlaps and interdependence in the exercise by governments of the powers distributed to them has generally required the different orders of government to treat each other as partners. This has necessitated extensive consultations, cooperation and coordination between governments. (Watts 2008, 117)

In federal systems, interdependence is paramount. At its core, federalism a founding principle and state architecture which implements shared rule juxtaposed to self-rule (Wallner 2009, 646; Watts 2008). Although policy responsibilities are sometimes constitutionally designated for each level, the practice is often one of overlap and collaboration. Constituent units and central government, however, do not always cooperate nor even collaborate. They are, at times, embroiled in competition for scarce resources to gain political mileage, or simply (yet importantly) to do what is best citizens. Still, intergovernmental relations implements federalism. This is the site where high profile negotiations take place, as well as the minutia of intergovernmental administration within the public bureaucracy.

Feminist scholars have been the pathfinders in presenting the case that federalism matters for women (Trimble 1991; Teghtsoonian 1992; Vickers 1994; Chappell 2002). Due to their efforts, we now have a keen awareness that federalism structures both the policy advocacy efforts of women's groups and policy outcomes resulting in gendered consequences which sometimes have a negative impact on women's lives. We know too that federal political systems

can provide a context for policy innovation and multiple entry points into the policy process for policy advocacy. Scholarship must be persistent, however, since many questions remain, such as: How and why are policy processes gendered? Where are feminist policy advocacy efforts best placed? Under what conditions within federal systems are gains possible and more importantly, sustainable? Are some actors or networks within the governing system more open to the equality agenda than others?

This contribution is an attempt to more fully explore the inner workings of federal systems - the intergovernmental dynamics - so as to get a more nuanced understanding of policy processes. We offer a preliminary investigation of gender and intergovernmental relations in the Canadian federal system, and apply a feminist institutional approach which highlights the role of institutionally situated actors to theoretically frame and guide the discussion.

Why intergovernmental Relations Matter for Women

There are important theoretical and empirical reasons to gender intergovernmental relations. Demonstrated by a range of scholars (Dobrowolsky 2009; Brodie 2008; Brodie 1996; Bakker and Scott 1997; Bakker 1996; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999), it has been thoroughly established that women's historically "distinct" relationship to liberal-democratic welfare states has structured their access to social services and income security programs, their participation in the paid labour force, their presence in political and economic institutions, their capacity to control their sexual reproduction and to exercise full social citizenship. In effect, governing political parties, as part of their welfare state strategies and policies, have restricted women's choices and have legitimized their dual dependence on men and the state by reinforcing their subordinate role within the family and by ghettoizing them in low-waged, precarious forms of employment. Women's particular attachment to the welfare state has also structured social, economic and sexual relations between men and women, both within the public sphere of civil society and in the private sphere of the household.

Yet the welfare state has both protected and advanced women's equality, while also working against their emancipation. This contradictory dimension of the welfare state has also been amply studied reminding us that the state has been "…important in translating the demands of feminist movements and women citizens…interested in greater gender equality into material social changes and support for the cultural transformations associated with women's entry into the public spheres of work and politics" (O'Connor et.al.,1999: 2; See also Brodie 2008). The welfare state, constructed under social liberalism, provided an "idiom and discursive space" for women to "pronounce themselves as something different from and more than wives, mothers and dependent citizens (Brodie 2008, 151).

Women's life chances have been structured in gendered ways by governments, but have also been the beneficiaries of a plethora and quite expansive array of social, economic and labour policies and programs which generally, in some shape or form, have been developed in concert with federal and constituent unit governments. To be sure, some policy sectors are much more the product of intergovernmental activity than others – health care is a good example. Still, almost all of the programs and policy areas of import to women – child care, social assistance, legal aid, labour and training, education – have either been influenced, administered, developed

or funded through the coordination of various levels of government.

Navigating the intergovernmental dynamic – as a set of institutions and politics – is, therefore, crucial to reveal opportunities for women and groups to instigate change as well as identify the challenges to successful feminist policy advocacy. While the Canadian welfare state opened up space for women to advance their claims, women continue to be the poor, the care givers, the sexually vulnerable and the part time workers of the country who more acutely feel shifts in the economy and family dynamics. It remains an important task of the organized women's movements, therefore, to advance their policy ideas and demands since welfare states in Canada have undergone significant transformation under the exigencies of neo-liberalism and the subsequent rise of the social investment state. Neo-liberal priorities led to downsizing some aspects of the welfare state (such as budget cuts to Status of Women Canada) along with the interjection of New Public Management and private sector practices which have shaped policy language and policy outputs. The emergence of the social investment state, during the post-neo-liberal period when the Canadian government began to spend again, refocused the language and direction of social policy. Altered "patterns of spending" (Jenson and Saint-Martin 2006, 431) framed in terms of investments resulted in the "displacement of claims making in the name of women and a strengthening of claims for children, especially poor children" (Dobrowolsky and Jenson 2004, 155).

The decentralization efforts implemented by successive federal governments as part of neo-liberal restructuring, notably since the mid 1990s, are also of import to women since they invigorated the local level as a policy player. More than ever in a contemporary sense, it is crucial for analysts, and women's movement activists, to wrestle with provincial and territorial governments not solely as distinct policy regimes, but as collaborators with the federal government in the development and funding of policies. Moreover, during an era when the local level and municipalities have become important jurisdictions of both policy development and in relating directly with the federal government, it is necessary to include urban sites of as bone fide intergovernmental actors.

And because of a preference to exploit non-constitutional responses to federal-provincial disagreements and negotiation, relatively consistent and collaborative federal-provincial-territorial relations have emerged (Bakvis and Brown 2010, 492). This has meant that governments in Canada are increasingly engaging in negotiations and signing intergovernmental agreements (Johns, Inwood and O'Reilly 2008, 24; See also Johns, Inwood and O'Reilly 2006). Moreover, intergovernmental agencies have expanded their purviews and assuming responsibilities "traditionally the purview of line departments" in the monitoring and advising ministers around intergovernmental issues (Ibid., 24, 30). Currently, intergovernmental units or agencies (such as those dedicated in departments and within central agencies such as Finance in all jurisdictions – federal and provincial), "increasingly play both a vertical and horizontal coordination role, reporting enhanced interactions with multiple departments on various files and increased interactions with departments of both orders of government" (Ibid., 30). We can expect this broad scope of intergovernmental activity to continue, further institutionalized and buttressed by Conservative Party government's agenda of "open federalism" based on reigning in the federal spending power and respecting provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

Finally, there is an important normative argument as to why intergovernmental relations should be considered through a gender lens. Federalism in Canada was established and has developed in terms of territory wherein executives dominate and policy debates are framed in terms of jurisdiction. Within intergovernmental networks, Premiers, the Prime Minster and cabinet ministers are the accommodated and legitimate participants and even, one may even argue, the guardians of federalism (Grace 2011). Executive dominance has become even more institutionalized with the centralization of power at the centre, and the growth of the role and function of intergovernmental central agencies in the provinces and the federal government (Johns, Inwood and O'Reilly 2006, 32-33). It is the task of social movements and associated policy networks, then, to engage in a politics to re-envision federalism – to bring into the fold of intergovernmental relations voices and participants who bring with them ideas and identities that are social rather than territorial.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS - FEMINIST INSTITUTIONALISM

Historical institutionalism provides theoretical and conceptual encouragement to the study of women's interface with the political and policy processes associated with intergovernmental relations. We look to this variant of new institutionalism given it attends to the consequences of policy trajectories and the ways in which institutions mediate politics, but which also places our attention toward the actors who advance a politics through those institutions. It is a method which highlights macro and meso levels of analysis, understanding that the organizations and actors situated within administrative processes function as part of a wider set of governing institutions.

At the macro level, we look to federal structures as a starting point to further analyse the network of institutions and practices entrenched within, and informed by, intergovernmental relations. As Jill Vickers and Marian Sawer have pointed out, the on-going lack of closure and overall institutional newness of Canadian federalism provides space for feminists to interject contemporary critiques and alternative perspectives (Vickers and Sawer 2001). Moreover, Vickers and others have noted that, under certain circumstances, either collaborative or competitive forms of federal-provincial interaction can create opportunities that feminist activists (Vickers 2010). And yet, as many feminist scholars have pointed out, federal political arrangements and intergovernmental interaction have created structural barriers to women's successful policy advocacy (Grace 2011; Vickers 2010; Vickers 1994; Chappell 2002) since the interests organized into the system are territorially defined while public concerns of import to women, and those which depend of the federal and provinces to work together, are organized out. As part of the institutional method, especially concerning women's policy realities, we must not neglect analysing the state and macro-governing structures.

As well, historical institutionalism is an approach which has also been highly productive in reminding analysts that institutions are embedded in a particular socio-political context and that past decisions and policy choices often have lasting consequences (Thelen and Steinmo 1992, 3). In the historical institutional tradition, they are understood to have transformative power. As Louise Chappell notes, an institutional approach is keenly interested in "…examining

the way institutional arrangements shape political behaviour" (2002, 8), although new institutionalists disagree with arguments that institutions can be easily manipulated by actors (Lecours 2005, 8).

At the meso level, an analysis of intergovernmental relations necessarily directs our focus on the bureaus and agencies of government and treats them as a key analytical variable since organizational cultures, policy frames, formal and informal processes and norms of behaviour pose a formidable challenge for women's groups who not only advocate reform, but also wish to contribute to a rewriting of history that counters accepted institutional practices. However, as Kathleen Thelen cautions, institutional change can take place even under perceived times of institutional stability (Thelen 1999; Thelen 2004; Streek and Thelen 2005). The analytical endeavour of historical institutionalism is to uncover interactions amongst institutionally located actors, or negotiations within various sites of institutional activity which open up possibilities of change (Thelen 2004). Path dependencies can also be disrupted in reaction to critical events or emerging political rationalities. Institutions continue to "…evolve in response to changing environmental conditions" (Thelen 1999, 387).

That said, new institutionalism does not theoretically consider institutions to be gendered, nor does the approach empirically analyse institutions of government and the machinery of the bureaucracy as perpetuating gendered power relations. A significant feminist literature in the field of organizational analysis and feminist institutionalism has provided valuable insights by analyzing institutions through a critical feminist lens which are neatly applied for our purposes here (Acker 1990; Acker 1992; Goetz 1992; Grant and Tancred 1992; Staudt 1997; Stivers 2002; Kenny 2007; Krook and Mackay 2011).

From both a methodological and theoretical perspective, bringing feminist theorizing to this understanding of institutions tightens the analytical trajectory. We conceptualize institutions as "…instruments of social organization that exercise collective power over a number of generations" (Vickers, Rankin and Appelle 1993, 133-134), understanding power to be stratified by a nexus of oppressions unevenly distributed within society and the economy. In part, this power is embedded in bureaucratic rules and practices located in institutional sites within the state, and which are diffused throughout the intergovernmental system. Here gender is understood in terms of the work of Joan W. Scott's two propositions: that "gender" is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scott 1986, 1067). To argue that a policy outcome is gendered refers to the way in which "…advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are pattered through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker 1990, 146). A "gendered institution" means that gender is present in the "processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power" within that site (Acker 1992, 567). Norms and values within institutions shape the behaviour of actors buttressed by "…well-defined guidelines about how men and women should act and the value that is ascribed to masculine and feminine behaviour" (Chappell 2002, 11). These differences and distinctions, however, are not always transparent.

Practices and internal cultures of government rest on a gendered "logic of appropriateness" (Chappell 2006) based on neutral principles of merit and assumptions that "neither the sex of bureaucrats, nor of policy recipients, makes a difference to the objectives of policy, to the ways policies are implemented, or to the ways in which the interests of men and women are institutionalized in public administration" (Goetz 1992, 6). And often the interests of women, Nancy Fraser would argue, become depoliticized within bureaucratic structures due to "expert needs talk" or administrative discourses that translate politicized needs into manageable needs or as we often refer to it, social services. Once in the administrative surround, for example, women's "need" for child care becomes decontextualized from the social and recontextualized within the bureaucratic confine. As a result, expert redefinitions "reposition" the needs of the people in question into individual, managed "cases" rather than as "members of social groups or participants in political movements" (Fraser 1989, 179).

These discourses and practices are enduring. Theories of bureaucracy and public administration explain this durability by suggesting that policy developers employ terms and categories to maintain the universal formulation and implementation of public policy which serve to maintain the legitimacy of administrative experts in liberal constitutional democracies (Stivers 2002, 41-50). By doing so, bureaucratic objectivity is ensured so that the state acts as a neutral arbiter and so that subsequent public policies apply equally to individual citizens. In the rational-legal bureaucratic context of the liberal state, practices and policy language are assumed to be uncomplicated and unproblematic.

Many feminists, however, argue that the state does work to the benefit of certain interests and that the objective rational-legal bureaucratic context *is* highly problematic. They offer their own explanation arguing that language is not a "...neutral and transparent means of representing reality...rather, language is assumed to codify an androcentric world-view" (Ehrlich and King 1998, 165). The feminist project highlights the point that it was men of a particular capital class who had control over "naming" and therefore the institutionalization of "meaning". Language, then, becomes one expression of gendered social relations which are conveyed by political and policy institutions, subsequently framing policy discourses articulated by actors. Over time, the overt reasons for the sexist and discriminatory aspects of public policy are sometimes forgotten. The language and meaning, however, persist often under the guise of a gender-neutral, ostensibly objective policy language.

Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Christina Gabriel uncovered, for instance, that the selection model for new immigrants is highly gendered, and even sustains female dependency, although it is "…not the result of overt discrimination on the basis of sex but rather the way in which rules, regulations, and practices produce different outcomes for men and women" (2002, 50). One example they demonstrate is how the points system (which determines whether a person is admitted into Canada as an immigrant) takes into account particular types of occupational experiences which when gendered are revealed to favour men's employment histories and educational backgrounds (in the public sphere) rather than women's.

Some studies have found, however, that the policy discourse is not necessarily neutral – meaning is attached during the policy process. My own research in the area of federal child care

policy development found that during the Social Security Review in 1994, governmental authorities defined and framed child care around promoting "healthy children" rather than about advancing women's equality as advocated by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (Grace 2011). As well, in her study of violence against women, Andrea Levan recounts how governmental authorities framed policy issues quite differently than grassroots women's groups and why the "bureaucratization of women's issues" left feminists:

> …struggling against an analysis of wife-battering as a phenomenon caused by "individual pathology" or "faulty family interaction," a view that overlooked the role of misogyny, of women's economic dependency, of institutions such as the family (seen as private and sacrosanct), and of the widespread acceptance of violence as a way to maintain and control (1996, 329-330).

Ideas and values are devised and become embedded in institutional settings, unless they are derailed by a new or emergent paradigm such as neo-liberalism and social investments as was the case during the Social Security Review. Yet, as Judith Grant and Peta Tancred have argued, state bureaucratic apparatuses are themselves implicated in gendering because the "structural relations of gender inequality are inscribed in state institutions, policies, and actions" (Grant and Tancred 1992, 117-119). To support their position, they look to the work of Rianne Mahon and her conceptualization of the "unequal structure of representation" which suggests that specific social and economic productive forces are hierarchically structured within the bureaucracy - that is, class contradictions are "inscribed in the very structure of the state" (Mahon 1984, 39). To Grant and Tancred, *dual structures of unequal representation* ensure that, within the *first* structure, women's voices as a potential counter force, are segregated into women's policy agencies, and in the *second* unequal structure, women's unequal socio-economic status is replicated in the "gendered hierarchy" of every department and branch in government (Grant and Tancred 1992) . That is to say, unequal structures of representation are institutionalized by the relative powerless position of women's policy agencies (e.g., Status of Women Canada) and through the relative powerlessness of women in all government departments and agencies. This "dual structure of unequal representation" is a reflection of women's inequality within society and the economy.

In sum, feminist institutionalism draws our analytical attention to both structures of federalism, and the language and policy frames which are advanced by actors as part of established policy processes within the administrative state and as part of intergovernmental networks. Ultimately, it is a theoretical framework informed by three crucial assumptions: First, that societies are divided along gender, class, race, ethnicity and other relations of inequities that structure power hierarchies. Second, the state, household and the economy - with an emphasis placed on women's unpaid work within the family and concomitant sexual division of labour as part of capitalism's drive for both productive and reproductive labour power - both structure and maintain these divisions and gender hierarchies. Third, that the institutions within the bureaucracy are both a reflection of gender social relations and perpetuate women's socio-cultural and economic life chances via seemingly objective, gender-neutral language and androcentric rules, regulations and administrative practices.

EMPIRICAL REALITIES

Intergovernmental relations in Canada are often characterized as a bargain between the federal and provincial governments, each navigating the political terrain to protect, maintain or enhance their interests and authority within their constitutional spheres (Bakvis, Baier and Brown 2009; Simeon and Nugent 2008; Telford, Graefe and Banting 2008). The overall level of centralization or decentralization, the relative degree of collaboration or competition between levels of government, and the ability to reach agreement over cost-sharing arrangements and program development in any given policy area are shaped in general terms by how vigorously the government of the day in Ottawa seeks to deploy the spending power and on how strongly and effectively provincial governments oppose federal efforts to assert this role.

For example, after the signing of the Social Union Framework Agreement in 1999 between the federal government and provinces, federal-provincial relations have been less hierarchical due to provincial assertion in their constitutional spheres of authority combined with the federal government's willingness to collaborate (Meekison, Telford and Lazar 2002, 5). Although discussions between them have, at times, been uneasy, federal and provincial governments regularly interact collaboratively. Indeed, as Peter Graefe argues, federal officials and provinces have found a way to work amicably and even productively with each other in setting priorities in a variety of policy areas (Telford, Graefe and Banting 2008, 90-91).

The intergovernmental interactions through which such processes develop involve both formal and informal relationships (Johns, O'Reilly and Inwood 2007). Participants in formal relationships include relevant government departments which develop and administer the policy, as well as government bureaus specifically tasked with managing and engaging in intergovernmental interaction between the levels of government (e.g., Intergovernmental Relations Secretariats in the provinces). Other formal institutions include forums which both promote and organize meetings between first ministers (e.g., the Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat and the Council of Federation). While these formal mechanisms are significant in institutionalizing political interaction between first ministers, the informal realm of intergovernmental relations is also important. As noted by Johns and colleagues, behind the public and often dramatic meetings of politicians there are on-going telephone calls, conference calls, emails, lunches, dinners and sporadic meetings which often take place every day between intergovernmental officials within government departments and intergovernmental relations agencies . These "behind the scenes" activities have been characterized as the "on-going and stable, cooperative relationships between officials" (Johns, O'Reilly and Inwood 2007, 34-35). Yet, from a feminist institutional perspective, it is clear that informal actors, which would surely include women's groups, would not be present to set the agenda or problematize policy debates and discussions in terms of gender before they are presented to the public for consideration.

There are long-standing criticisms of the practices and processes comprising executive federalism and intergovernmental relations because they are seen to involve "undue secrecy in the conduct of the public's business" (Meekison, Telford and Lazar 2002, 6). As a result, accountability is often blurred since agreements are negotiated behind closed doors and there is

little or no opportunity for public debate. Although agreements struck between first ministers in various policy areas (e.g., internal trade, health, the environment) often receive ample media attention and are heralded as examples of "making federalism work" (Johns, O'Reilly and Inwood 2006, 629), they result from discussions between governmental actors which take place within the administrative state and are almost entirely hidden from public view. These processes are not subject to legislative scrutiny nor or they open to input from civil society, further entrenching the inability of interjecting a discourse and politics which can effectively derail or realign the political preferences of formal (state-based) actors.

Social Union Framework Agreement

And this was the case when The Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) was signed in 1999 by all provinces and territories except Quebec. When the CHST subsumed all transfer payments, except equalization, into one block fund, provincial Premiers reacted vigorously and quickly demanding the restoration of funding. They worked as well to rebuild relations with the federal government to set a new agenda for intergovernmental collaboration. The agreement identified three priority areas: health care, post-secondary education and social assistance, with introductory principles confirming 'fundamental values' of equality, respect for diversity, fairness, individual dignity and responsibility and mutual aid (Canada 2002). Indeed, the agreement stated that federal and provincial governments were to work in partnership with 'individuals, families, communities, voluntary organizations, business and labour' so that Canadian could have meaningful input into social policies and programs. After years of deficit reduction, SUFA was welcome change to the days of animosity under deficit reduction. The National Council of Women of Canada (2002) supported the principles and some feminist activists felt that SUFA provided more flexibility since the development of 'new initiatives' could be undertaken with agreement of a majority of provinces rather than securing the unanimous consent of all ten (White 2002).

The National Children's Agenda was heralded as an important policy outcome of SUFA which included the establishment of the National Child Benefit (NCB), a federal program targeting child poverty developed just prior to the signing of SUFA. The NCB was federally funded, receiving $15 billion between 1998 and 2004 (Bakker and Brodie 2007). Along with other child care accountability mechanisms, the NCB's implementation was tracked as part of the SUFA public reporting process. However, as Lynell Anderson and Tammy Findlay argue based on their findings in the child care sector, program evaluations developed in closed intergovernmental processes are highly problematic since standards are set by governments (as was the case under SUFA) which do little to ensure accountability to citizens (2010). This is why child care advocates, they go on to report, recommend that "governments use additional mechanisms such as reporting to Parliament/legislatures, legislated standards and auditing, and continue to see the federal spending power and conditionality as critical for public accountability" (Ibid., 436).

Under the guise of reinvigorating the Canadian social union, SUFA was much more about decentralizing the federation, protecting provincial jurisdiction and harnessing the federal spending power, rather than being about responsive social policy. Greg Inwood put it well when he noted that SUFA was a manifestation of new public management to instill within the public services, and Canadians as program beneficiaries, an ethos of efficiency, fiscal accountability and transparency through performance measurement and citizen empowerment (Inwood 2000: 133-36). Funds transferred to provinces as part of the National Child Benefit have been clawed back from payments to social assistance recipients, and the agreement offered very little in the way of setting up processes for citizen engagement.

SUFA was ultimately, a product of executive federalism. The principles were largely symbolic and the content established by politicians and other formal intergovernmental actors advancing governmental priorities. As well, evaluation mechanisms were set up through a Ministerial Council, an intergovernmental body established after SUFA to track implementation, but which put in place an administratively-managed process with civil society groups receiving letters of invitation to make submissions. There were no in-person consultations nor community-based methods put in place to reach women beyond established policy networks. SUFA established an era of intergovernmentalism which has continued to marginalize women's advocacy groups from the policy process and the political system. Under the Conservative government, adherence to a strict understanding of the division of powers, coupled with a low-key approach to intergovernmental relations and the selective use of the federal spending power (Teliszewsky and Stoney 2007: 39-40) is a form of elite accommodation amongst formal policy actors which has continued to situate the progressive women's agenda beyond the confines of the intergovernmental system (Grace 2011).

Moreover, the discourse and language is significant. While the Social Union Framework Agreement was to be about encouraging a new social union, it was squarely about investing in Canadians to produce an "active society", and most certainly framed ultimately around children – not women as caregivers, nor women as a collective who often bear the brunt social dislocation. Further, the discourse of open federalism and "respecting provinces" was used to politically justify a neo-liberal and Conservative Party agenda of ensuring no new national policy development, further entrenching a territorial vision and practice of federalism (Teghtsoonian 1992). One can even argue that SUFA has led to an era of negotiation and bargaining through a form of collaborative federalism with governments engaging in "cartel-like collusion" to protect their interests and political priorities (Painter 1991, 270) which severely inhibits thinking about public policy through a gender lens, and producing public policies which continue to only marginally attend to the lived realities of women.

CONCLUSION
Intergovernmental relations are often difficult to analyse because they include a wide array of institutions and actors, and they are often conducted behind closed doors (Grace 2011; Sawer and Vickers 2010). Intergovernmental administration quite literally involves "hundreds of meetings each year, millions of dollars' worth of agreements negotiated monthly, countless of

informal contacts, and a varied and complex intergovernmental machinery" (Johns, O'Reilly and Inwood 2007, 22). It is also a challenge to glean lessons through comparison across jurisdictions given significant differences between federal systems (Gamkhar and Vickers 2010; Vickers 2010, 427).

This paper has attempted, however, to offer a theoretical framework and a measure of empirical evidence to reveal that intergovernmental relations are gendered and which function and produce outcomes that are detrimental to women and equality-seeking groups. While there is much more to analyse, a feminist institutional approach has highlighted that macro and meso level practices are significant in structuring and institutionalizing policy processes. They too work to further embed a policy language and discourse which frames women in universal and degendered terms as individuals, citizens or members of families or of a non-governmental organization. This discourse, emerging from a regime of unequal gender relations structured by federalism and perpetuated by intergovernmental processes, firmly constructs a conception of women as a subject of the state, which only impedes understanding and engaging with women in terms of their social and political identities and their lived realities.

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