

**The 'State' of Gender Analysis in Canada: An Interprovincial Comparison**

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**Abstract:** How do women's policy agencies (WPAs) mediate gender? Do they foster or constrain opportunities for transformative politics? In this paper we seek to shed light on these questions by analyzing gender equality policy machinery across the Canadian provinces. To do so, we engage two prominent theoretical frameworks in the area of gender and public policy, state feminism and critical frame analysis. In particular, we aim to interrogate the relationship between agency power and the ways in which gender equality is represented, as well as the role of consultative mechanisms in shaping these representations.

How do women's policy agencies (WPAs) mediate gender? Do they foster or constrain opportunities for transformative politics? These questions are longstanding, emerging from early debates in feminist public administration literature investigating the potential (or lack thereof) of state engagement and the 'nature' of the state itself (e.g., Stivers 1993, Eisenstein 1996, Ferguson 1984, McKinnon 1989, Brown 1993). More recently, studies confirm the importance of WPAs in articulating women's movement demands (e.g., McBride and Mazur 2010). At the same time, however, such agencies occupy a precarious position in the world of gender politics, accountable to both elected officials and community organizations (e.g., Malloy 2003) and other civil servants working in other agencies and department. Indeed, these "boundary spanning" organizations often face the impossible task of representing movement claims while reflecting the governing priorities of the government (see also Eisenstein 1996).

Related to these concerns are discussions about the conditions under which WPAs are successful in voicing movement claims. Specifically, studies have focused on agency characteristics (see McBride and Mazur 2010 for a recent overview), location within government (Grace 1997), and the broader political context (Teghtsoonian 2000; Bacchi and Eveline 2005). Moreover, what 'gender' and 'equality' mean vary over time and space (Verloo, Meier and Lombardo 2007, 2009). These terms are contested concepts that can be stretched and bent, intentionally or not, in ways that reflect "discursive affinity" with broader policy discourses that ultimately undermine gender equality goals (Hajer 1995; Bacchi 2009; Verloo, Meier and Lombardo 2009).

What has received less attention, however, is the relationship between agency characteristics and discursive politics. For example, do agencies with powers to recommend, review and enforce legislation adopt a more critical approach to broader policy discourse? Are stand-alone agencies more transformative than those housed within other ministries? Are agencies premised on consultative models more critical than those that are expert based? Specifically, drawing upon state feminist and discursive politics approaches to gender equality policy, we explore potential relationships between WPAs and policy discourse around gender and equality. From this perspective, we suggest that both gender and equality are concepts that must be unpacked and explored within the context of policy machinery (Verloo, Meier and Lombardo 2007). The ways in which WPAs construct gender and equality will shape who gets to speak, about what, and to what effect. Thus, policy discourse is a crucial variable in mediating gender relations. How WPAs shape and are shaped by discourse is the focus of our analysis.

Our paper will first provide a brief overview of the Canadian literature on gender policy. Second, we discuss the two theoretical frameworks informing our analysis and illuminate how they can complement each other. Third, we provide brief snapshots of the provincial gender equality policy machineries, followed by our detailed discursive analysis of the mandates of each agency. We conclude with some thoughts for future research.

## **Women and the State(s) in Canada**

Although a number of studies have explored particular policy fields and issues at the provincial level, to date, very little literature explores provincial gender equality policy machinery (for exceptions, see Teghtsoonian 2000, 2005, 2008; Malloy 2003; Masson 2006; Horne and Thurston 1999). Instead, academic interest has tended to focus on the federal level (see Brodie 2008). Federally, the gender equality policy landscape has shifted significantly during the past few decades. The expansive “Women’s State” that had been erected during the 1970s, premised on women’s policy agencies, an arms-length advisory committee, and programs to encourage and support the women’s movement, as well as specific programs and services for women, was gradually dismantled by both right- and left-of centre governments during subsequent decades (Burt and Hardman 2001; Rankin and Wilcox 2004; Brodie 2008).

By the mid-1990s, these initiatives had largely given way to a more integrated approach to gender equality in the way of gender mainstreaming. Unlike the largely ‘special measures’ architecture of the Women’s State, gender mainstreaming requires analysts to apply a gender lens to (ideally) all policies and programs *ex ante* (Bustello and Verloo 2009). That is, gender disparity is to be identified at the policy design stage and remedied before policies are implemented (Rankin and Vickers 2001). At the federal level, Status of Women Canada (SWC) is responsible for implementing and monitoring gender-based analysis (GBA), an expert-bureaucratic model that requires analysts to determine potential disparate impacts of policies for men and women at the level of policy design. Since 2007, all Treasury Board Submissions are required to demonstrate gender analysis.

Despite initial optimism for gender mainstreaming, it has yet to fulfill its promise to transform gender relations (Hankivsky 2008). International literature has also warned of the potential problems in shifting away from a multipronged electoral, bureaucratic and community-based approach to gender equality, towards an approach premised solely on bureaucratic politics (e.g., Squires 2006). To be sure, an emergent issue with GBA is the extent to which it has limited and potentially silenced claims among community organizations (Rankin and Wilcox 2004) and among other marginalized groups (Hankivsky 2005, 2006a).

In this paper, we shift attention toward the provinces. We posit that any analysis of gender equality policy machinery must take into consideration the role of provinces and territories in mitigating the effects of gender politics. Indeed, provincial jurisdiction includes areas that most acutely affect women and other marginalized groups, including social and labour market policy, education, social assistance, and healthcare service delivery. In addition, a policy geared towards the inclusion of gender is likely to be more potent when new programs and policies are introduced. Here again, Canadian provinces are the locus of most policy innovations and experimentations (see McArthur, 2007). Thus, the transformative potential of federal level gender mainstreaming is limited at best.

Another key reason to study WPAs in Canadian provinces is the variation in the

adoption of gender analysis at the provincial and territorial level (Hankivsky 2006b). Although the gender equality policy machinery at the provincial level is well developed and operate within the same federal system, we observe different organizational set ups and discourses. This reduces the elements we need to analyse to reach conclusions on how various provincial WPAs seek to reconcile the impossible task of representing the demands of both government and movement activists. How such organizations do so is the focus of our analysis.

In particular, we wish to examine the relationship between agency type and equality orientation. Does the power of an agency implicate a particular orientation of equality? Are stand-alone agencies more transformative than those housed within other ministries? Are agencies premised on consultative models more critical than those that are expert based? To answer these questions, we turn to two dominant approaches to feminist policy theory: state feminism and discursive politics.

### **Theorizing State Engagement: Policy Agencies and Discursive Politics**

Analyzing the degree to which policymakers are responsive to the demands of women's movements is the key domain of the state feminism literature (Hausman and Sauer 2007: 1).<sup>1</sup> Premised on an analytical template created by the Research Network on Gender, Politics and the State (RNGS), state feminism explores policy debate and subsequent state responses as a function of women's movement characteristics, the policy environment, and women's policy agency characteristics and activities (Hausman and Sauer 2007: 6).

The RNGS framework has been foundational in feminist policy studies, leading to important national and comparative work on gender equality policy machinery (see, for example, Mazur 2002, Mazur and McBride-Stetson 1995, Mazur and McBride 2008; Outshoorn and Kantola 2007; McBride and Mazur 2010). A number of hypotheses have emerged from this literature. As noted by Kantola and Squires (2012: 384), women's movements will be successful where they are cohesive and where they view the issue is of high priority. Similarly, characteristics of the policy environment most likely to generate success include a left-wing government and a fit between activists and policymakers (Kantola and Squires 2012: 384). Less clear, however, are the characteristics of the policy agencies and their relationship to success. Kantola and Squires 2012 (384) actually suggests that success is more likely determined by "external factors, namely the characteristics of the women's movement and the policy environment, than on internal factors, namely the features of the women's policy agency itself."

Despite its insights, the RNGS framework pays little attention to the role of discursive politics in giving shape to feminism(s) and debates therein or to policy agencies themselves, which has important implications for policy processes and outcomes. For example, most state feminist scholars adopt a minimalist definition of

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<sup>1</sup> The state feminism literature is extensive. For examples, see also Mazur and McBride Stetson 1995; Mazur 2002; Lovenduski and Baudino 2000, and for a more recent overview, Kantola and Squires 2012.

feminism, collapsing all feminist groups into those that simply share an understanding of women as a social group, advocate for women's rights, and seek to dismantle the gender hierarchy (Mazur 2002: 3; see also Outshoorn 2004). In particular, we have no way of knowing 'who' is speaking for whom and to what effect. While some have attempted to remedy this issue with reference to Squires' (2008) concept of the 'constitutive representation of gender' (see, for example, Kantola and Squires 2012), it has yet to open the RNGS framework to a new line of inquiry.

Similarly, state feminism theorizes that the frame 'fit' between the policy agency and women's groups leads to success (Sauer 2010), but is silent on the ways in which 'fit' is a function of knowledge/power that shapes state engagement. State engagement often requires using particular technologies of rule that cohere with pervasive state technologies (e.g., Grundy and Smith 2006). In addition, Teghtsoonian's work on policy agencies in British Columbia has revealed that left-of-centre governments were complicit in the neo-liberalization of women's policy machinery, thereby undermining the RNGS hypothesis about the importance of left of centre governments (Teghtsoonian 2000, 2005, 2008). Finally, a number of studies have exposed the ways in which gender equality has been co-opted to meet broader state objectives (Strategaki 2004; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). In these contexts, the 'fit' between the state and feminist movements might lead to nominal success, but would likely not lead to improved status of women. Instead, policy 'problems' and 'target populations' are represented in ways that reinforce hegemonic social constructions and subject positions (Bacchi 1999/2005, 2000, 2010). Without attention to discursive politics, then, our understanding of the relationship between states and feminist movements, the implications of strategic frames, and the lived effects of particular outcomes is partial at best.

Thus, what is missing from the RNGS framework is the importance of discursive politics in shaping policy processes and outcomes in key ways. More than simply 'fit', what Squires (2008) refers to as the "constitutive representation of women" shapes who gets to speak, what they say, and to what effect. Indeed, the ways in which WPAs represent gender equality will have very real effects on policy processes and outcomes (e.g., Grundy and Smith 2006). We therefore need to unpack the particular representations of gender and equality embedded within the very fabric of WPAs.

To do this, we import insights from discursive politics approaches, particularly problem representation and critical frame analysis (CFA). Focused on policy content, Bacchi's (1999/2005, 2009b) problem representation approach, or 'What's the Problem Represented to be' approach, conceptualizes policy as both text and discourse (e.g., Ball 1993). Instead of assuming "problem definitions", which assume a fixed, though not uncontested meaning, the approach interrogates "problem representations", which import particular understandings of gender and equality into policy texts, thereby opening – or restricting – space for transformative politics. CFA builds on this work, establishing an analytical template that exposes who is speaking, about what and to whom, and to what effect.

Building on insights from gender mainstreaming literature and feminist theory, CFA scholars highlight at least three different orientations of gender+ equality, including what they refer to as “equality”, “reversal”, and “displacement” (Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 33). The first orientation is premised on the notion that women have been absent from public life, including formal politics and labour market participation. Thus, remedies require special programs aimed at facilitating women’s participation in these spheres. Reversal, in contrast, is premised on the notion that women’s care work has been traditionally invisible or undervalued. Remedial measures, then, include recognizing and valuing social labour. In both of these cases, all women are absorbed into an ‘undifferentiated other’ and all men are constructed as equally privileged (Fraser 1997; Young 2000). Problematic then, is that hierarchies based on intersectional differences, including gender, are potentially reproduced by policies designed within these orientations.

With this in mind, what critical frame analysts refer to as “displacement” is a more radical orientation to gender equality, based on what Fraser (1997) calls transformative politics. From this perspective, the very nature of gender is questioned, scrutinizing the binary of male and female and its connection to other marginalized groups. Policies developed in this orientation aim to trouble the ‘taken for grantedness’ of gender and social relations by encouraging, for example, men to engage in care work (Kershaw 2007, Fraser 1997). Thus, representations of gender and equality have important constitutive effects on both policy processes, by limiting how the issue is thought and spoken about, and outcomes, by shaping who benefits and loses, who is required to change, etc.

Similar to the RNGS framework, CFA has contributed to a significant body of research, largely focused on Europe, that documents competing visions of equality, and contradictions, tensions and inconsistencies within and across policy texts (see Verloo 2007, Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009 as examples). From this perspective, with an emphasis on discursive politics, the ways in which even expressly feminist policies might contribute to the oppression and marginalization of women is made visible (see, for example, Paterson 2010, 2011). What is missing, however, is the broader context in which these policies are made. For example, does it matter from where policy texts originate? Do WPAs, for example, tend to be more transformative than those policy agencies that do not focus exclusively on gender? Or, in contrast, do they simply embrace current norms prevailing in the civil service? In short, the relationship between gender policy discourse and broader governing and institutional discourses remains unclear.

We propose an approach informed by the RNGS framework and CFA approaches. We adopt the institutional configurations emerging from the RNGS framework, but subject them to discursive analysis. We begin with the assumption that gender equality is a contested concept, in which there are competing visions of the ‘problem’ of gender inequality and what to do about it, including inclusion, reversal, and transformation. As explained above, these orientations have important constitutive effects on policy discourse. It is not just about having an ally to present issues to the government, as argued by state feminist scholars; it is about being granted the legitimacy to participate in

the discussion. That is, the way in which the agency represents the ‘problem’ of gender inequality determines who participates, what they say, and to what effect. This is about constituting gender relations in ways that might benefit some while marginalizing others. We therefore suggest that in order to understand the role played by WPAs in gender politics we must expand our focus to their constitutive effects (Squires 2008).

This leads us to two sets of questions: First, what is the relationship between the powers of the agency and the discursive constitution of gender equality? For example, are agencies with the abilities to recommend, review, and enforce policy more transformative in orientation? Based on the state feminism scholarship, we expect that agencies with broad powers certainly will be more effective in representing women’s issues within government. But how exactly these powers relate, if at all, to the ways in which gender equality is constituted remains unclear. On the one hand, for example, broad powers enable representatives to develop and propose policies that might not otherwise be considered. On the other hand, however, the literature on women’s representation clearly documents the challenges facing femocrats once in office (e.g., Eisenstein 1996; Krook et al 2009). We thus suggest that broad powers are an important, but not sufficient, element of gender equality representation.

This leads us to other factors that will impact the discursive constitution of gender equality. Based on both state feminism and triangles of empowerment literatures (see Holli 2008 and Squires 2007), we expect the presence of consultative mechanisms to be an important factor in shaping representations of gender equality. Thus, our second set of questions includes the following: What is the relationship between the presence of consultative mechanisms and the discursive constitution of gender equality? For example, are agencies that are expert-driven, with limited mechanisms for consultation with community groups, more likely to be inclusionist in orientation? Conversely, are those agencies with rich mechanisms for consultation with and participation from community groups more likely to be transformative?

**Methodology**

We map out the gender equality policy machinery for each province using the typology by McBride and Mazur (2010: 29). They present two structural criteria for women’s policy agencies: First, it must be “formally established by government statute or degree”; and, second, it must be “formally charged with furthering women’s status and rights or promoting sex-based equality.” Therefore, a women’s policy agency is a state-based [agency], at any level of government, or in any type of organ (elected, appointed, administrative, judicial) that is charged with promoting the advancement of women and/or gender equality.” (ibid). This leads to a typology of WPAs (McBride and Mazur 2010: 52):

Type/Variation of Women’s Policy Agency	Characteristics
Ministry	Autonomous office in cabinet or sub-office in Ministry; politically appointed head;

<b>Administrative Office</b>	well-resourced Bureaucratic agency; not close to central power and may not have policy proposal powers; review and recommends policies; located throughout state bureaucracy
<b>Commission in the Political Executive</b>	Committee appointed by PM, President or government; proximity to leadership; temporally-bound
<b>Judicial Body</b>	Commission or office located in the Ministry of Justice
<b>Advisory Council</b>	Provide consultation for policy leaders in ministries or executive; may be permanent or very temporary; low on resources; proximate to power
<b>Legislative Council</b>	Body composed of elected representatives tasked with representing women's issues

Classification of agencies along these lines is based on several indicators, including the leadership and type of appointment (e.g., political, administrative, etc.), policy orientation/mission, proximity to decision-making power, policy making powers, and resources (McBride and Mazur 2010). We also investigate the degree to which these offices were consultative, based on the presence of formal links with community groups.

After mapping the gender equality policy machinery in each province, we apply discursive analysis informed by problem representation and CFA to the mandates, mission and/or values statements, and policymaking guides of each agency to determine how each represented gender and the problem of inequality. We then coded the agency as inclusionist, reversalist, or transformative based on the following questions: Who is constructed as speaking in the text? Who or what is being asked to change? Who or what is the reference point? Who or what is left unscrutinized?

Inclusionist organizations articulate the problem of gender inequality as women 'lagging' behind men. They seek to integrate women into social, economic, or political life without scrutinizing the structures that pattern women's participation. Reversalist agencies emphasize the special and unique qualities of being women. Inequality then stems from the limited acknowledgment of female qualities. The goal is to revalue women's work and contributions without interrogating or altering the sexual division of labour. Finally, transformative organizations challenge existing structures as oppressive and call for men to participate in change. They also emphasize the diversity of women's experiences and seek to represent a multitude of voices.

Before showcasing our results, a few caveats are in order. Given the breadth of material available, space and time constraints limited us from applying discursive analysis to specific policies. Thus, our paper should be considered as a first step in a much larger project that attempts to untangle issues of gender inequality across the provinces. Towards this end, we argue that the mandates/mission statements reflect broad



commitments on which to orient policy proposals and are therefore reasonable starting points for analysis. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that there might be contradictions and/or inconsistencies at the level of policy proposals and development. In the same way that some arenas of the state might be more likely to be feminist than others (e.g., Mazur 2002, Pringle and Watson 1998), some areas of gender policy might be more likely to represent equality in particular ways. For example, we might expect labour market policy orientations to be more inclusive, compared to social policy orientations, which might be more reversalist or transformative.

## **Mapping Women's Policy Agencies in the Canadian Provinces**

### *Provincial Snapshots*

To determine the type of women's policy agency from each province, this section utilizes the RNGS typology of women's policy agencies (McBride and Mazur 2010: 52-55). Two distinct patterns emerge: the existence of an 'Administrative Office' type in British Columbia (B.C.), Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and New Brunswick; and the existence of an 'Advisory Council' type within or alongside the women's policy agency in Manitoba, Québec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.), and Newfoundland and Labrador (NFLD).

### *Administrative Offices*

All provinces have established women's policy agencies. Some provinces have assigned the women's portfolio within a larger ministry, with its form and function in line with an 'Administrative Office'. In particular, the provinces of B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario have (re-)located the women's portfolio within another ministry as administrative offices "not close to central power and [without] policy proposal powers" (McBride and Mazur 2010: 53). Their role adheres to a more expert-bureaucratic approach, where the mandate of the agency is to "review and recommend to the heads of departments where they are placed" (McBride and Mazur 2010: 53). Their administrative resources vary, but include research budgets and subsidies for women's groups.

These four provincial women's policy agencies can be characterized as administrative offices by several indicators set forth by the RNGS framework. For example, they are housed within a larger ministry, where their role is characterized strictly by reviewing and recommending policies to the minister. The ability to propose policy is limited; experts within the 'women's portfolio' branch are tasked with working with other government departments to provide 'more information', 'research' and 'analysis' on women's issues. Reviewing and recommending does not extend to proposal of policy to the minister or the executive council. The proximity to decision-making is further than if it were a stand-alone Ministry. However, New Brunswick is an exception when it comes to the placement of their Women's Issues Branch in the bureaucracy. New Brunswick's WPA is a stand-alone department in the executive council, but much like the 'Administrative Offices' in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, its abilities

only include recommending and reviewing policies from different departments in the bureaucracy.

Consultation takes different forms amongst these four provinces, but do not necessarily entail engagement with women's organizations. For example, the websites of the agencies in B.C. and Saskatchewan do not mention consultative mechanisms with women's organizations, emphasising instead consultation with other expert-bureaucrats. In Alberta, the women's policy agency aims not to engage with women's organizations in a systemic manner, but to *facilitate* engagement *amongst* women's organizations by establishing a directory of addresses, phone numbers and issue areas. In Ontario, collaboration with women's organizations is defined as funding opportunities, but not necessarily consultation on policy, priorities or issues (Ontario Women's Directorate 2011, October 17).

### *Advisory Councils*

In the remaining provinces of NFLD, PEI, Nova Scotia, Québec and Manitoba, an advisory council – with the exceptions of Nova Scotia – exists alongside the WPA (commonly referred to as 'secretariat' in these provinces) in the bureaucracy. Under the RNGS framework, 'Advisory Councils' "provide consultation for policy leaders in ministries or the executive with people and organizations from outside government" (McBride and Mazur 2010: 54). Their role is limited to reviewing and recommending policy proposals "coming from other... departments", and does not include the mandate to propose policies (ibid.). Variation of advisory councils depends on the "placement in the institutional hierarchy" (ibid.). In NFLD, PEI, Quebec and Manitoba, the advisory council exists with the expert-bureaucrat secretariat as part of the provincial WPA machinery.

The advisory councils of these provinces share similarities and differences, with variation contingent on its relationship with the expert-bureaucrat women's policy agency. The advisory councils in PEI, NFLD, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Quebec have legislative standing, and are arms-length organizations, funded by the expert-bureaucrat WPA. As such, their vision and mission share the same language as the WPA, although their mandate emphasizes less expert-bureaucrat methods of policy analysis. The mandate of advisory councils in these provinces broadly share statements of providing advice to the minister responsible for the corresponding women's policy agency, reviewing and recommending legislation affecting women based on consultations with women's organizations and facilitating dialogue and consultation with women's organizations across the respective provinces.

Unlike the expert-bureaucrat secretariat, the advisory council emphasizes its role as the "community arm" to the provincial government and communities (Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women 2011: 5; Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, undated), its "independent studies that acts from within...and independently" (Conseil du statut de la femme 2013), and in some cases, includes explicitly the inclusion, promotion and practice of *feminist* analysis (Prince Edward

Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women 2011: 5; Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women Newfoundland and Labrador 2011: 4). Thus, advisory councils' mandates in these provinces provide potential mechanisms to bring forth issues not captured by expert-bureaucrat modes of policy analysis and research.

While all provinces emphasize the need for council members to reflect regional, cultural and ethnic diversity, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and NFLD place more emphasis on regional representations in the council, whereas Quebec designates members based on "different sectors of activities" and by region (Conseil du statut de la femme 2013), and PEI emphasize intersections of difference (ethnicity, race, age, sexual orientation, class, Aboriginal, etc.) (Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women, undated).

Variation also exists around the relationship between the advisory council and the expert-bureaucrat secretariat. For example, while NFLD has an advisory council alongside their Women's Policy Office secretariat, which resembles an RNGS 'Ministry', Nova Scotia's advisory council absorbed the expert-bureaucrat Women's Directorate in 1996 (Nova Scotia Archives 2011). NFLD's Women's Policy Office (WPO) is a "central agency", able to develop, review and recommend by "ensuring that the impact on women of all legislation, policies and programs is brought to the attention of the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, Cabinet, Cabinet Committees and departments" (Women's Policy Office 2012). Unlike advisory councils in the rest of the provinces, Nova Scotia's stand-alone advisory council has the ability to "propose legislation, policies and practices to promote equality of opportunity and status" (Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act 1989).

Quebec, PEI and Manitoba fall in between these two variations, with an existence of an 'Administrative Office' and an 'Advisory Council'. Quebec's WPA is similar to NFLD's WPO, with a mandate to propose, recommend and review policy proposals and legislation. However, instead of a stand-alone agency, Quebec's Secrétariat à la condition féminine (SCF) and its arms-length Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF) is placed within the Department of Employment and Social Solidarity away from the central executive council. In addition, the agency includes four permanent regional offices for ongoing consultation and education. Manitoba and PEI are similar in their vision, mission and mandate, with an administrative office tasked with recommending and reviewing policies and an advisory council to bring forth new issues to the secretariat and Minister. However, PEI's Advisory Council not only advises the secretariat, but also produces reports critical of the government of the day. Through 'Equality Report Cards', the PEI Advisory Council "assess[es the] Province's progress towards women's equality" cross-departmentally and based on policy issues the Council deems priority (PEIACSW 2011: p. 1).

Besides their WPAs, all provinces have a minister responsible for the status of women, and the WPA reports to the minister. These women's policy agencies are usually multi-issue and share some form of mandate to review and recommend policies which the agency deems as important to the status of women.

To sum up, then, there is considerable variation across the provinces in terms of their gender equality policy machinery. While all provinces have a women's policy agency, the main difference is the establishment of an advisory council alongside the administrative, expert-bureaucrat office of the women's secretariat. Provinces such as B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and New Brunswick are characterized by the existence of only an 'Administrative Office', with expert-bureaucrats reviewing and recommending policies. Meanwhile, NFLD, PEI, Manitoba and Quebec's women's policy agencies include the existence of advisory councils, complementing the more expert-bureaucrat methods of research and policy analysis with consultative mechanisms and 'feminist' goals.

Even where similar organizational entities exist, differences with respect to powers, mandates, and composition arise. For example, the two stand-alone offices in NFLD and New Brunswick have very different mandates and allocated powers. Similarly, some agencies situated within ministries have broad powers and mandates, such as Quebec. What do these differences mean for the ways in which gender equality is discursively constituted? Is there a relationship between these two trends and its discursive politics, and how gender equality is constituted?

### *Discursive Analysis*

In this section, we deploy discourse analysis drawing on problem representation and critical frame approaches to determine the ways in which WPAs constitutes gender equality. To do this, we interrogate mandates, policy documents, research originating from the agencies, position papers, and press releases and code them as 'inclusionist/integrationist', 'reversalist', or 'transformative'. Our theoretical framework leads to two sets of questions concerning the relationships between WPAs and the discursive constitution of gender equality: First, what is the relationship between the powers of an agency and its orientation towards equality? For example, are agencies with powers to develop, propose and review policy more likely to be transformative? Second, what is the relationship between consultative mechanisms and the discursive constitution of equality? E.g., are expert-bureaucratic agencies more likely to be integrationist? Conversely, are consultative agencies more likely to be transformative?

*What is the relationship between the powers of an agency and its orientation towards gender equality?*

By and large, all of the agencies represent gender equality as an issue of integration/inclusion. The agencies tend to leave economic, social, and political system unproblematized and instead focus on measures that would 'level the playing field' for women. There is still considerable variation across sectors and issue areas that opens space for either reversalist or transformative representations.

With respect to the relationship between the powers of an agency and its

orientation towards gender inequality, the data is limited. Only NFLD, Nova Scotia and Quebec have the powers to develop, propose and review policy. Newfoundland's Women's Policy Office (WPO) envisions, "...true social, legal, cultural and economic equality for women in the province...", but after a review of their initiatives, there is a strong emphasis on inclusion with a hint of reversalism. For example, in the WPO's Annual Report 2011-2012, it is noted, "As part of the development of a gender lens, the Office promotes the message that women and girls experience the world differently and may have different needs than men." In contrast, a Scan of Gender Equality Policies and Practices in Natural Resources (2011: 5), despite being overwhelmingly integrationist, explicitly notes the importance of family responsibilities as a factor in women's labour market participation and suggests addressing the "role of men as fathers."

The mission statement of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women also presents a more transformative approach. For example, it stresses "full equality", women's agency in decision-making, and equal sharing and valuing of household and caring labour. However, different initiatives supported by the NSACSW offer varying representations of equality. For example, the GroundWorks program is integrationist, offering skills upgrading in trades and technology for low-income women. This suggests that the path to economic security is through employment in non-traditionally female sectors. In contrast, a reversal orientation is witnessed in their defense of women leaders: "We need more women in government decision-making. Women's place in public decision-making is vital for two reasons. First, many policy decisions affect women differently than men. Their perspectives may not always be included in that decision-making. Second, women's talents are needed: Women offer much in every sphere of life, including government."

Quebec's Secrétariat à la condition féminine (SCF) is a case where its ability to develop, propose and review is complemented with its transformative understanding of gender equality. Quebec's governmental policy on gender equality includes all three orientations of equality. For example, the policy on gender equality supports "the ideal of gender equality, which entails both correcting existing gender-based inequality and eliminating all gender-based discrimination. This ideal means equal rights, equal obligations and equal opportunities" (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2007: 24). The policy also recognizes the need "to address the problems caused by *systemic discrimination* or inequality that create gender-based disadvantages at the economic, social, political and legal levels, or with respect to health" (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2007: 24, emphasis ours).

From this broad understanding of gender equality, seven guidelines – reflected in the current 'dossiers' of the SCF – are presented as policy priorities:

1. Promoting egalitarian models and behaviour
2. Achieving gender equality in the economic arena
3. Achieving a better balance between responsibilities at home and at work
4. Achieving health approaches tailored to women's specific needs
5. Achieving respect for women's physical integrity and their safety across all aspects of life
6. Achieving greater participation by women in decision-making bodies

7. Taking action towards gender equality in the regions based on their specific needs (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2011: 9 – 10)

Unlike purely integrationist orientations, these guidelines emphasize the role of both women and men in the advancement of gender equality. In particular, the first guideline – promoting egalitarian models and behavior – situates at the core of advancing gender equality the need to challenge the “gender division, which reinforces sexual and sexist stereotypes, [and] has an impact on the learning of social roles, values and the behavior of people of both sexes” (ibid., 33) – echoing the vision of displacement which aims to interrogate “the gendered world itself” (Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 33). For example, in the preamble to work-family balance, emphasis is not placed solely on targeting women since the objective of the policy is to encourage “an equal distribution of family tasks and parenting” (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2013a, April 30, translation ours). Thus, gender equality is represented not only as an issue concerning women and men, but the role of men (and women) in interrogating taken-for-granted understandings of care work and labour market participation.

However, at the same time, the SCF trend towards integrationist understandings of equality, particularly in the area of women’s political participation. The most recent 2013 campaign to encourage women to participate in public life *Mayor or Councillor, Why Not You? (Mairesse ou Conseillère, Pourquoi Pas Vous?)* cites statistics of women ‘lagging behind’ in public life, and sets a goal of achieving better parity, defined as 40% to 60% (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2013: p. 2). Thus, this issue area aims to ‘solve’ the problem of sharing power in government institutions and being visible in public life by encouraging more women to participate.

As we expected, then, there is no clear relationship between the powers of the agency and its representation of gender equality. Given these challenges, we expect a more important factor to be the presence of consultative mechanisms.

*What is the relationship between consultative mechanisms and the discursive constitution of equality? E.g., are expert-bureaucratic agencies more likely to be integrationist? Conversely, are consultative agencies more likely to be transformative?*

Similar to our first set of questions, the evidence is unclear. Agencies lacking consultative mechanisms tend to be inclusionist/integrationist across the board, thus offering affirmative support for the first sub-question. For example, the splash page of the Maternal, Child and Health Engagement Branch in the Ministry of Health notes, “Women in BC have made social, economic, and political gains in many areas, however further opportunities for advancement exist.” While BC deploys “Sex and Gender Analysis”, with some attention to diversity, their approach and supporting documents reaffirm, rather than interrogate and/or challenge the gender binary (see British Columbia 2009). This representation of gender equality is also present in Saskatchewan, Ontario and Alberta. For example, Saskatchewan’s Status of Women seeks to “address gender equality gaps in the province by leading work with government ministries, crown corporations, agencies and others to identify changes that will modify and shape programs and services to respond to the emerging priorities for women and their

families.”

In all of these cases, there is no questioning of the broader structures that mobilize bias against women, such as the distribution of caring labour. Often, key issues were degendered and/or stripped of their socio-political contexts. As an example, research by the Status of Women Office in Saskatchewan on unpaid work explains, “Many external factors affect the amount of unpaid housework that is done. These include an increase in the number of people who live in condominiums and apartments where maintenance requirements are less than for a typical detached dwelling, an increase in the number of yard maintenance firms and housekeepers hired to do house and yard work, more use of “labour saving” products and services, and more meals eaten in restaurants” (Status of Women, Saskatchewan 2009: 4). Such an approach fails to scrutinize the gendered and gendering effects of the labour market.

This approach is especially apparent in the Women’s Issues Branch of the Department of Human Services in Alberta, which, focuses on economic issues and violence from an integrationist perspective. However, it is notable for what it does not say. For example, the website includes links to research and publications from other jurisdictions and levels of government, but reveals few initiatives of its own. One exception is the Labour Market Profiles for Women, which documents the advantages of women working in Alberta. Emphasis on violence is also interesting. On the webpage, the following quotation from the Beijing Platform for Action (1995: paragraph 112) is the first passage to greet viewers: “Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women is a matter of concern for all States and should be addressed.” These silences serve to scrutinize the notion that women are ‘unequal’ in the first place, and, in those cases where women are prevented from enjoying their “human rights and fundamental freedoms”, it is because of (individualized and personal rather than collective and systemic) violence.

Thus, from the analysis of the Canadian provinces, there appears to be a relationship between the predominance of expert-bureaucratic structures and an integrationist representation of equality. Less clear is the relationship between consultative mechanisms and the representation of equality. As noted above, all of the agencies are largely integrationist; however, some issue areas revealed hints of reversal or transformative discourses. These different representations of equality appeared in those jurisdictions where advisory councils operated alongside policy offices. Moreover, the discourses stemming from these agencies are much more likely to trouble the gender binary by emphasizing difference across groups and intersectional oppressions. In addition, agencies operating in the presence of advisory councils were much more likely to have adopted gender mainstreaming mechanisms. These findings suggest a potentially important role for the institutionalized recognition of women’s groups in enabling policy agencies to challenge dominant policy discourses.

A reversalist representation of equality was especially prominent in Manitoba. This is most apparent in their document entitled, *Women in Manitoba: Leading Transformative Change* (2013) in celebration of International Women's Day in 2013. The importance of female leadership is attributed to women's unique qualities: "Transformative change happens when people, organizations and communities work together toward a shared vision. Women lead at all of these levels, in a variety of ways. Informally, women support and mentor other women and share traditions, skills and values in their communities. Women also lead organizations and movements by providing needed resources and services, shifting social norms and demanding change. Women lead institutions and governments by sitting on boards, seeking election and making key decisions as senior management. [...] Women play unique, important leadership roles in families, communities and institutions all over the world." This was echoed in their "4 Girls Only" series, which celebrates women and girls' unique contributions to public life. Similar representations appear in Nova Scotia, particularly with respect to unpaid work and women's leadership, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland.

Quebec is a case where reversalist and transformative visions of equality co-exist. For example, guideline #3 of the Québec government's plan on gender equality – achieving work-family balance – is guided by the transformative approach of "encouraging a more equal sharing of parental responsibilities" (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2013, April 30). A closer look at the policies and programs implemented under this issue area include both reversalist and transformative policies. The two main "pillars of work-family balance" policy include reversalist policies of making childcare more accessible through the \$7-a-day subsidy, but exist alongside programs which explicitly target men to engage in care work, such as the creation of a parental insurance regime (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2013, April 30). Furthermore, information campaigns such as *Conciliation Travail-Famille (Work-Family Balance)* aim to engage businesses, communities and parents to equally share the care burden. Thus, work-family balance policies include programs which aim to challenge (and reverse) the 'male norm' as the breadwinner by relieving the care burden of women through childcare access, but also interrogate (and transform) the gendered understandings of 'work' and 'care' to include men's role in care work.

Within a number of provinces, transformative representations of equality tended to appear in anti-violence initiatives where men were asked to take responsibility for violence and advocate for change. The policy offices in Manitoba, Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec have adopted anti-violence strategies that target men in an attempt to change attitudes and behaviours. To date, these initiatives are largely "symbolic" (see Schneider and Ingram 1993), in that they are focused on exhortation rather than substantive policy measures. However, the initiatives do reflect a larger shift in the discourse of violence against women away from victim blaming and scrutinizing women's responses to violence. What is interesting here is Ontario. As noted above, Ontario does not have an advisory council. It does, however, have a Domestic Violence Advisory Council which enables consultation with respect to violence.



This transformative representation of equality is present in Quebec's initiatives on economic equality, unlike in administrative offices such as Ontario's WPA. The SCF not only represents economic inequality through integrationist understandings of pay equity, but also through recognition of gendered labour segmentation and women's over-representation in precarious and part-time work (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2013b, April 30). For example, the SCF provides the context of women's over-representation in the service sector where they are "less valued in terms of remuneration", with more men working in the field of natural and applied sciences (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2011: p. 39). The prognosis for this labour segmentation goes beyond integrationist initiatives to 'train more women' to occupy traditionally male careers, but to diversify educational choices of women, men, girls and boys. The SCF's gender equality *Action Plan* targets more women to be trained in trades and occupations with higher wages and rates of job retention through the program *Hats Off To You! (Chapeau les filles!)*, similar to other provincial programs; however, unlike other provincial programs, it also aims to "break down traditional roles...offering boys new models of masculinity...men must be more represented in sectors like early and primary education...it is important to encourage women and men to choose fields in which they are still under-represented" (ibid., p. 41). Thus women and girls are not simply 'lagging behind' in labour market participation; women and girls are represented as systemically restricted from pursuing more lucrative career options in a gendered labour market.

In addition to these initiatives, Prince Edward Island's Interministerial Secretariat represented equality in transformational terms is a number of programs. Where the anti-violence initiative is oddly de-gendered, the approach to gender-based analysis (GBA) offers transformative potential in its attention to and troubling of the role of men in the sexual division of labour. The document, *Honouring Our Differences: Gender and Diversity Analysis* (2012: 4), showcases the work of male feminist and originator of the White Ribbon Campaign, Michael Kaufman, which attempts to engage men and boys in social change. Moreover, the Secretariat has adopted Guidelines for Gender Inclusive Communication, which calls attention to and destabilizes the tendency to privilege male perspectives.

Prince Edward Island is not the only province to adopt GBA. Indeed, all of the provinces with advisory councils, except Manitoba, have adopted GBA. In contrast, only one of the provinces with only a women's policy agency, British Columbia, has endorsed gender mainstreaming. Moreover, the approaches adopted in PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and NFLD are reflexive, asking analysts to interrogate their own values and assumptions, and emphasize diversity among women and men. Quebec's approach also emphasizes diversity across women; however, what is unique is its heavy emphasis on their whole-of-government, "cross-cutting" approach, which "covers the entire civil service *as well as* local and regional decision-making bodies" (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2011: p. 27, emphasis ours). With the exception of PEI, the approaches to GBA are largely linear and focus on "better information", which potentially limits the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming (see Bacchi and Eveline 2003, Paterson

2010). However, that GBA has been adopted in these areas is an important dimension of gender equality policy machinery. Indeed, GBA can illuminate the gendered and gendering effects of policy and, where acted on, potentially transform social relations.

Gender mainstreaming can be particularly effective where diversity is considered (Hankivsky 2005, 2006). As noted, attention to diversity troubles the gender binary by exposing the fact that all men are not equally privileged and all women are not equally marginalized. Rather, attention is focused on the multiplicative effects of difference and the ways in which policies might benefit some groups at the expense of others, thereby reproducing systems of oppression. Even where GBA has not been adopted, as in Manitoba, those areas in which an advisory council exists alongside the policy office are more likely to pay attention to the diversity of women.

At the same time, however, we must be aware of representations of diversity that potentially undercut the transformative potential of policy. For example, Québec's former Minister responsible for the SCF, Christine St-Pierre, equates gender equality as a "profound value forging the identity of Québec society" (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2011: p. 4) and hence, the need for gender equality to be a government priority. This connection between gender equality to Québec values has led to a discourse which tends to 'other' immigrant populations as the 'problem' to the goal of gender equality (see Bilge 2012). Indeed, one of the dossiers/issue areas of the SCF, 'Equality and Culture', represent immigrant populations within "the context of growing cultural and religious diversity, and a certain resurgence of religious fervour..., which can be a source of friction where the exercise of women's rights is concerned," (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2011: p. 37). Such representation of new immigrants as a potential threat to gender equality lead to anti-violence programs which "carry out activities aimed at raising awareness...on Québec values, including the clear message of zero tolerance for domestic violence, among adult Francophones who have recently arrived in Québec as well as immigration candidates" (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2012: p. 5). With respect to policies of Aboriginal women, rather than unpacking dominant and colonial discourses which a diversity mainstreaming approach aims to do (see Hankivsky et al. 2012), the SCF aims to improve the status of Aboriginal women within the integrationist confines of "economic development of their community" (Secrétariat à la condition féminine 2013c, April 30).

In short, there is some evidence to suggest that where there are mechanisms for consultation, policy agencies tend to represent particular issues in ways that move beyond the inclusionist orientation of equality. This suggests that there is an important role for formal consultative mechanisms to provide space in which to scrutinize and potentially trouble inclusionist discourses that share discursive affinity with broader governing discourses.

## **Conclusion:**

In closing, while all of the women's policy agencies across Canada represent equality as a problem of inclusion, there is considerable variation with respect to

particular issue areas and policy fields. In this paper, we attempted to shed some light on the relationship between these variations and agency type. While it is clear that more work needs to be done in this area, we did find evidence to suggest that agencies with more expansive powers tend to represent equality in ways beyond inclusion.

Concomitant with more expansive powers in these women's policy agencies are also the existence of consultative mechanisms, such as an advisory council. Throughout our analysis, we find that agencies which lack consultative mechanisms are more likely to represent equality as inclusion, whereas agencies operating alongside advisory councils are more likely to represent particular issues, especially violence against women, in reversal or transformative ways. Put differently, agencies without consultative mechanisms are more likely to represent issues which reflect the neoliberal governing priorities of the day, and reflect similar "discursive affinity" to 'gender' and 'equality'. On the other hand, agencies with consultative mechanisms vary more on how 'gender' and 'equality' are represented, are able to bring forth and represent a wider variety of issues beyond integrationist perspectives, and are also tasked with bringing forth issues not previously on the government agenda. Thus agencies with consultative mechanisms may allow more 'space' on the agenda to discuss policies and issues beyond broader governing priorities. Furthermore, these agencies were much more likely to have adopted gender mainstreaming mechanisms and to approach gender from a diversity perspective, thereby challenging the gender binary and opening space for more transformative approaches to gender equality.

What this tells us is that there is more to state feminism than just institutional factors, as the RNGS framework suggests. Moreover, discursive politics matter, but play out in different ways in different institutional contexts. For example, despite the existence of consultative mechanisms and diversity perspectives to GBA in five provinces, these five provinces vary on how policies pertaining to racialized women, immigrant women and Aboriginal women are represented vis-à-vis the representation of issues relevant to middle-class, white women. This leads to women's policy agencies to diagnose/propose and emphasize different 'problems' and 'solutions' to differently constructed categories of women.

Thus, our framework, which integrated insights from RNGS and discursive approaches, enabled us to view a) the broader institutional context in which policymaking takes place; b) the discursive politics of policymaking; and c) the ways in which processes and content are linked through a complex and diffuse matrix of power in which alliances are both strategic and discursive. Future work will need to untangle historical configurations and contexts, key players in both community groups and politics, as well as 'authoritative knowledges' in the arenas of gender politics.

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<http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/WI-DQF/pdf/en/CelebrateWomen.pdf>

Facing the Economic Imperative: New Brunswick's Five Year Wage Gap Action Plan, 2005-2010  
<http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/WI-DQF/pdf/en/5YearWageGap-e.pdf>

### **Nova Scotia:**

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women  
<http://www.women.gov.ns.ca/>

NSACSW Brochure

<http://women.gov.ns.ca/assets/files/Publications/brochures%20and%20invitations/NSACSW%20GeneralBrochure%202013%20for%20web.pdf>

NSACSW Guide for Girls

<http://www.women.gov.ns.ca/girls/default.html>

GroundWorks

<http://www.weesociety.ca/index.php/Programs/GroundWorks/C12>

Government Administrative Histories Online: Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. 2011.

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/gaho/authority.asp?ID=6>

## **Prince Edward Island**

Interministerial Women's Secretariat

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/sss/index.php3?number=1026113&lang=E>

Advisory Council on the Status of Women

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/acsw/>

Honouring Our Differences: Gender and Diversity Analysis

[http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/IWMS\\_GDA2012.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/IWMS_GDA2012.pdf)

Guidelines for Gender and Diversity Considerations in Policy Design and Implementation

[http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/css\\_genderpolic.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/css_genderpolic.pdf)

Guidelines for Gender Inclusive Communication

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/GenderGuideline.pdf>

Information For Women and Men in an Abusive Relationship: A guide to finding services that can help you, 2013 Edition

[http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/IWMC\\_INFO\\_2013.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/IWMC_INFO_2013.pdf)

PEI Equality Report Card. Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women. 2011.

[http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/acsw\\_erc11\\_eng.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/acsw_erc11_eng.pdf)