

## 'More Explosive Than Any Terrorist's Time Bomb:'<sup>1</sup> The RCSW Then and Now

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Comments welcome.)

The *Report* of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women remains a “landmark” report in the 40 years since its publication (Canada 2006, 21; SWC 1995). The document has figured as a “watershed” for the public perception of women’s place in Canadian society (Bird 1974, 316; Burt, Code and Dorney 1993, 159-160; Paltiel 1997, 27). Described as the first “success” of second wave feminism (Black 1988, 26; Prentice, Bourne and Brandt 1996, 414, 416; Timpson 2001, 26), this marker event has been regarded as the ‘blueprint’ for the second wave of the nation-wide women’s movements across Canada and to a lesser extent in Quebec (Kome 1985, 87-8; Vickers, Rankin and Appelle 1993, 26). A liberal feminist document embodying the dominant ideology (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail 1988, 12; Speers 2001) this public face has been examined critically from various standpoints from its point of origin (Dixon 1971; Findlay 1993; Sangster forthcoming; Farsoun and Mann 1974). It became a foundational document in Women’s Studies read by several generations of activists and academics (Eichler 2002; Andersen 1972, 1-3). It also *Report* also laid groundwork for the emergence of Women and Politics as a subfield in Canadian political science (Bashevkin 1985, 28; Brodie 1985). Yet scholarship about the RCSW has continued to rely almost exclusively over the past 40 years on the reflections and recollections of two of its chief participants, the Chairman and the Executive Secretary, for authoritative accounts of what happened (Bird 1997, 1990, 1974; Begin 2001, 1992, 1988, 1977), without exploring the Commission’s own documentation. Third parties have accepted the interpretations of interested parties without recourse to original sources. This lack of scholarly scrutiny suggests one compelling reason for thinking more about the RCSW remains to be learned than has been reported in the literature.

Despite the *Report*’s having remained a milestone against which women’s equality has been measure in the last half century, its relevance today shifts the inquiry to different questions than has been asked before. Does the false universalism of “Canadian women” irreparably taint what the Commission produced? Is the *Report* an early example

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<sup>1</sup> The title comes from a newspaper article by journalist Antony Westell announcing the tabling of the RCSW *Report* barely two months after a declaration of a state of “apprehended insurrection” used to justify use of the War Measures Act in mid-October when it had appeared that national security was under threate from domestic enemies. Women had previously been regarded as one such potential enemy, a fear put to rest by the document’s moderate tone. The *Report* had its own formidable source of power nonetheless.

of a gender mainstreaming strategy gone wrong? How did the RCSW fit or not fit into a pre-existing and overarching policy framework that precluded radical social transformation? Translating women's equality-seeking demands into public policy involved processes of negotiation that have yet to be studied. While negotiation in and of itself did not guarantee any actual increase in women's social capital, attending to the *Report's* recommendations and the Commission's limitations may usefully guide a reconsideration of what the RCSW means today and for the next forty years of policy evaluation and revision.

The contested account of the RCSW put forward here contextualizes the *Report* as having been produced in a setting in which assimilation to one of "two founding races" was the dominant metaphor for describing the Canadian population. Heteronormativity was rigidly enforced and social change was regarded as a slow process of democratization spanning several centuries, with the mid-twentieth century figuring as the mid-point in that long saga, according to journalist Anne Francis, the professional name of RCSW Chairman Florence Bird (1950). Taking the long, historical view implied that equality for women was not a quick fix that could be accomplished in a decade or two. Rather it was an historical process to be revisited at regular intervals to take the measure of what had been done and remained to be done. Understood in this way, what can be learned from the Commission 40 years later is that work remains to be done on social inclusion, diversity of women's lived experience and new mechanisms for inducing the desired result.

### **What the *Report* Achieved**

Nearly four years after the Commission's appointment, and at a cost of 1.9 million dollars, a one-volume *Report* containing 167 recommendations was produced followed by publication of ten short research studies. Early commentators praised the report for challenging the historical pattern of masculinist entitlements, as did Marxist Marlene Dixon, who pointed out that if women were to get more, redistribution would need to occur, and resistance could be anticipated along the lines of pre-existing social divisions related to class and status in addition to gender. Like class struggles, struggles involving gender would encounter resistance because the surrender of the authority to wield economic, political and social power involved costs (Dixon 1972). Men had been systematically favoured over most women in income, presence in national life at all levels and rewards such as top jobs; less clear was how structural sources of inequality could be tackled (Marchak 1971; Morton 1971). The RCSW's recommendations sought law reform, public education to promote changes in social attitudes, the end to discriminatory practices, public spending on programming that would benefit women and machinery to carry on this work.

Within a few years one-third of the 122 federal recommendations had been implemented, another third had been implemented in part, and still another third remained completely undone (CACSW 1974, Appendix). Twenty-five years after the *Report* Status of Women Canada indicated the majority of recommendations had been implemented, "fully" or in part with the implementation of some of them having "exceeded the original scope of the recommendation," and others "not implemented" because their usefulness had been overtaken by other developments (SWC 1995, 1).

**Table: Women's Equality, 1970 and 2010**

<b>1970 Recommendation</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>2.* Women and the Canadian Economy</b> Establish non-discriminatory labour force participation between the genders, including rates of pay, and conditions of employment between men and women doing the same work	
Rectify lower rates of pay to women by removing discriminatory enabling legislation. Women earned 54 cents to the dollar earned by men, and approximately 33 per cent of women worked for pay, and half were married. Many women worked part-time.	The law requires people doing the same job to be paid the same rates of pay. Women earn less than 75 cents for every dollar earned by men. 70 per cent of women work for pay, most of them full-time.
<b>3. Education</b> Increase opportunities for women to participate in vocational training and post-secondary education while acknowledging the special needs of women with family responsibilities	
Women underrepresented in vocational training and post-secondary education	Women account for the majority of university undergraduates, including a significant portion (~15 per cent) who participate in part-time studies. Proportions of women continuing to graduate studies decrease to less than 50 per cent in most master's and doctoral studies.
<b>4. Women and the Family</b> Eliminate discrimination based on sex and marital status	
90 per cent of women married. Marriage disadvantaged women in employment involving loss of employment due to marriage or pregnancy, low wages, few benefits and minimal career advancement.	Human Rights codes prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, marital status and family status.
<b>5. Taxation and Child Care Allowances</b> Use the tax system to support women's ability to do paid work	
Remove financial disincentives that taxed two-income families more heavily than one-income families. Implement a national child care policy	The Canada Child Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement and Universal Child Care Benefit support families of differing income levels and needs. Dual-income families now predominate. Half of all families headed in roughly equal proportion by two-parent male-breadwinner families or sole-support families headed by women

<b>6. Poverty</b> Address the gendered effects of poverty that result from family responsibilities and unequal access to education and employment	
36 percent of female-headed households lived in poverty, especially older single women	Somewhat reduced poverty among sole-support households, including older women. Feminization of poverty analysed.
<b>7. Participation of Women in Public Life</b> Indices of the legacy of gender bias in Canadian society exemplified in the distribution of national offices and honours	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• .4 percent of MPs;</li> <li>• 2.3 per cent of Senators;</li> <li>• 2.3 per cent of MLAs</li> <li>• 20/991 individuals or 2.0 per cent overall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 per cent of MPs;</li> <li>• 33 per cent of Senators;</li> <li>• 24 per cent of MLAs</li> <li>• 282/1165 or 24 per cent overall</li> <li>• 6-7 additional women / year</li> <li>• 174 more offices and honours; 88 fewer men; decrease of 2 /year on av.</li> </ul>
<b>8. Immigration and Citizenship</b> Support women immigrants to promote inclusion through access to education, training, jobs and honours	
Conceptualization of full participation limited to access to language-training programs, vocational training programs and opportunities for education	Barriers to social inclusion related to recognition of prior learning, educational credentials not recognized in Canada and lack of supports to “Canadianize” work experience; everyday racism, systemic discrimination and continued dominance of ideology of nationalism
<b>9. Criminal Law and Women Offenders</b> Aspired to equal treatment before and under the law regardless of gender	
Changes to legislation to acknowledge gender only where pertinent. Law reform already underway elsewhere in government. The RCSW did not want to see its own work conflict with other departments. Most concerned to see expanded grounds for divorce. Control over reproduction and pregnancy to be decided by the woman. Amend language that associated women’s sexuality with deviance.	Extensive redevelopment of laws pertaining to sexual assault and sexual exploitation as acts of violence
<b>10. Plan of Action</b> The creation of an array of status-of-women machinery to promote and educate on the one hand and investigate and rectify shortfalls on the other.	
Creation of Human Rights Commissions and advisory bodies to promote equality and educate the public in addition to	Dismantling and delegitimization of equality-seeking bodies under the guise of women’s rights gradually subsumed under

several mechanisms for the investigation and redress of gender inequality	human rights which are now an international rather than a local preoccupation. Gender mainstreaming, gender-based analysis and diversity-lenses used at times for some purposes of public policy analysis
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Note: The headers refer to the chapters in the *Report* of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The number begins at Chapter 2 because no recommendations are associated with Chapter 1, Canadian Women and Society  
(Source: Adapted from Manitoba Status of Women, Milestones In Women's Equality: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow)

The Table summarizes the aspirations of the RCSW's recommendations following the chapter headings each covered. For example, facilitating women's choice and opportunities to participate in the labour force, especially on the part of married women was the single most important category of recommendation made as indicated by the number of research studies proposed on related topics (See Appendix BB, CC, DD, FF, GG, VV, and XX). Women's labour force participation rapidly increasing. The shift placed additional stressors on women as individuals and collectively in relation to family forms, the institution of marriage, and heteronormativity embedded in the sex/gender system. Working women received few employment supports, and their incomes on average barely exceeded half those of men. After taxes, childcare and transportation expenses many women were not much further ahead financially than were it possible for many of them to choose not to work outside the home for pay. Recommendations in this area concerned equal pay, equalization of treatment between the genders regardless of jurisdiction, equal rates of pay, and conditions of employment between men and women doing the same work. In 2010 the tables have almost completely reversed with fewer than a quarter of households continuing to maintain a male-breadwinner model of that earlier time (Hick 2007, 141). Seventy per cent of women work for pay outside the home, and a greater proportion work full-time and year 'round than in 1970, yet women's earnings have improved on average about a half cent a year such that women earn about 70 to 74 cents on the dollar earned by men.

Education was the second main policy area addressed due to the fact that women on average had fewer years of schooling on average than men, which further disadvantaged them not only in terms of access to vocational training programs that required years of regular attachment to the workforce, but also in terms of earning capacity, and ultimately benefits and pensions. Women's participation in educational opportunities pointed to the unmet need for part-time educational opportunities that allowed for mobility and transfer of qualifications and credentials among jurisdictions. Recommendations aimed to gain increased access to educational opportunities for women, especially married women who required flexible and open opportunities to continue their education and training while working and raising children.

The recommendations concerning women and the family pointed to discrimination based on marital status that resulted in many women being cashiered from certain kinds of employment upon marriage or pregnancy. 90 per cent of all women married and lived in families (Canada 1970, 10), making marital status a significant characteristic of the lives of most women. Marriage figured as a serious impediment to

women's possibility of continued employment throughout adulthood. Its far-reaching implications for eligibility for future entitlements to income supports, retraining, benefits and pensions emphasised dependency within the dominant familial ideology, and for this reason justified the pre-eminent attention given to married women, employed or not. The socially limited conception of family forms and women as mothers and primary caregivers comes through as a cultural imperative despite Commissioner Jeanne Lapointe's persistent attempts to have women considered as human beings apart from socially prescribed familial roles.

The recommendations in the Chapter on Taxation considered child care provision as a type of employment support that had implications for the creation of incentives and disincentives related to the structuring of paid work either to support or undercut women's labour force attachment. Initially the recommendations in this chapter appeared to be somewhat out of step with the content of the other topics, but less so in retrospect than in 1970. Today's complex system of tax credits has familiarized the public with the use of the tax system to create opportunity structures designed to benefit all or only some segments of the population.

Recommendations from the chapter on poverty accepted that "the poor will always be among us" (Lange 2005). Here as in the previous chapter a genuinely radical recommendation to provide a guaranteed annual income to sole-support families was introduced but never implemented (Canada 1970, Recommendation 135). Like the recommendation for a national child care program this became one of very few recommendations to have been permanently set aside.

The recommendations in the chapter on women's participation in public life exhort governments and political parties to do better (Arscott 1994) and to see more women rise to the challenge. The chapter prepared the groundwork for research on barriers that prevented women from assuming half the responsibilities and posts associated with the political life of the nation. In forty years federal representation has increased from 2 to 22 per cent, making for an improvement of half a percent per year on average. The multi-partisan, non-profit organization, Equal Voice, tracks the election of women. Gender parity remains a remote goal due to a stalling of the electoral project for women in the last five rounds of elections.

The brevity of the 8-page chapter on Immigration and Citizenship, and its accompanying 7 recommendations at first glance appears inexplicable. Language training, educational and vocational training opportunities are mentioned as if there were little worth saying on the topic. The Commission decided not to characterize portions of the populations in terms of ethnicity. "Second-generation immigrants," that is, the Canadian-born children of immigrant parents, would be considered simply as Canadian women without regard for their ethnic heritage. Moreover, the Commissioners decided that 'nowhere in the Report should the specific name of any (especially racial or ethnic) minority be used as a point of comparison with women' (RCSW. Minutes, 1967-1970, 54th Meeting). Mention of minority group status was intentionally absent.

Recommendations concerning women offenders and criminal behaviour looked to see the *Criminal Code* amended to remove euphemisms that applied to only one gender and regarded references prejudicial to women related to a chastity, prostitution and vagrancy were to be removed because they unfairly distinguished between men and women. The Commission recommended a stronger affirmation of women's autonomy in

control over their fertility and pregnancy. The recommendations in this area followed up law reform on divorce, the topic which had had the strongest potential to fuel controversy related to familial ideology. Pent-up demand for divorce also had wide-ranging implications for further challenging the nuclear family form and of widening existing gaps in income support for increased numbers of sole-support households headed by women.

Finally, recommendations associated with the Plan of Action took an embryonic form due to strong disagreement among the Commissioners as to the kinds and extent of policy machinery that would be needed to implement its recommendations. One group believed that a federally sponsored Human Rights Commission with a women's branch within its structure would be adequate to handle proven cases of discrimination whereas the other camp supported an overlay of multiple new entities at multiple levels of jurisdiction to promote and educate the public about equality for women on the one hand and to provide institutional means of investigating and redressing instances of gender inequality on the other hand. The second view prevailed in the implementation phase of the recommendations resulting in women's policy agencies, women's programmes and advisory councils in addition to human rights commissions, women's centres, ombudsman's offices, citizen action agencies and other initiatives, many of which were adopted by provincial and territorial governments as well.

The activities and recommendations touched on many areas of public policy, labour force participation and education foremost among them. Family forms and income supports directly related to the national system of taxation as avenues for addressing child care and poverty figured large among the recommendations. Women's underrepresentation in public life could be construed in the future to be an indicator of women's continuing inequality. Drawing attention to the relevance of immigration and citizenship status left a placeholder for future research and study. Law reform provided the leading edge in the actualization of gender equality as an emergent fundamental value for incorporation into the overarching governmental policy framework. Multi-pronged plans for the establishment of equality for women indicated several possible courses for implementation.

Despite the RCSW's achievements, barriers to full participation by women have persisted among what Susan Ship refers to as the two English-French "charter groups" that related well-established considerations of "region, language, social class and gender" to the dominant ideology in service to elites (1998, 329). The participation of women who are members of ethnic and racialized minorities, ship writes, are "further affected by factors that include ethnic ranking, racism, citizenship status, fluency in official languages and other factors" that further diminish their representational claims, including differential access to resources among women (328). A full consideration of "how white skin privilege and belonging to a dominant ethnicity, as well as gender and economic, and political structures" affects access to power (331). Toni Williams had raised similar points concerning the RCSW in her critique of the RCSW's *Report* published in the *Ottawa Law Review* in 1990.

When the Commission initially considered Canada's demographic profile the information available drew principally on data drawn from the 1961 census. The RCSW worked with the Dominion Bureau of Statistics to supply more current data but these inquiries concerned primarily women's labour force participation rather than questions

about ethnicity, heritage or immigration history. Commissioner Elsie Macgill prepared a chart for the Commissioners that provided basic demographic information that influenced the development of the Commission's Research Plan.



**Table 1: An Objective Criteria for the Establishment of Priorities****Number of Women by Sub-Groups**

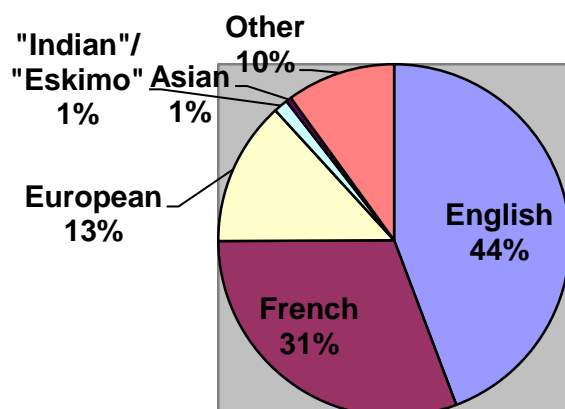
<b>1. Women in Canada by Province</b>			<b>2. Women by Ethnic Origin</b>			
<b>Canada</b>	<b>9,019,354</b>	[%]				
Newfoundland	222,929	[2.5]	English	3,998,334	[44.3]	
Prince Edward Island	51,272	[0.6]	French	2,770,173	[30.7]	
Nova Scotia	362,763	[4.0]	German	524,799	[5.8]	
New Brunswick	295,496	[3.3]	Ukrainians	236,668	[2.6]	
Quebec	2,627,355	[29.1]	Italians	225,175	[2.5]	
Ontario	3,101,564	[34.4]	Netherlands	214,839	[2.4]	
Manitoba	453,183	[5.0]	Chinese	29,098	[0.3]	
Saskatchewan	445,617	[4.9]	Japanese	14,578	[0.2]	
Alberta	642,561	[7.1]	Indians	108,932	[1.2]	
British Columbia	799,988	[8.9]	Eskimo	6,500	[0.0]	
Yukon	6,450	[0.1]	[Other/not reported]		[10.0]	
Northwest Territories	10,176	[0.1]				
<b>3. Women by Religious Denomination</b>			<b>4. Women as a Percentage of the Total Labour Force, 1951-63, at Annual Average</b>			
Roman Catholic		[%]	1951	21.9	1960	25.8
(Ukrainian, Greek)	4,208,002	[46.7]	1952	22.2	1961	26.6
United Church	1,835,686	[20.4]	1953	24.9	1962	27.1
Anglican Church	1,211,757	[13.4]	1954	22.4	1963	27.6
Lutheran	312,657	[3.5]	1955	22.6	1964	28.3
Baptist	298,048	[3.3]	1956	23.3	1965	31.3
Presbyterian	402,398	[4.5]	1957	23.9		
Jewish	125,474	[1.4]	1958	24.4		
Mennonite	76,125	[0.8]				
Mormon (Hutterites)	25,332	[0.3]				
Doukohoobors	6,362	[0.1]				
[Other/Not Religious/ Not reported]	517,841	[6.1]				
<b>5. Women by Age &amp; Marital Status*</b>						
	Spinster [%]	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Total	
Less than 15	68.7	--	--	--	3,025,831	
15 to 24	20.1	10.4	0.2	3.2	1,300,031	
25 to 44	6.1	52.5	6.2	50.2	2,421,620	
45 to 64	3.6	29.3	33.7	41.3	1,554,835	
65 and more	1.7	7.4	59.9	5.2	717,037	
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	<b>9,019,354</b>	
Total	4,405,564	4,004,579	578,716	30,495		
<b>6. [Percentage] Marital Status of Women in Labour Force [Age 14+]*</b>						
<b>Marital Status</b>	1941	1951	1961	1965		
Single	79.9	62.1	42.3	48.3		
Married	12.7	30.0	49.8	51.7		
Other	7.4	7.9	7.9	--		
Number	832,840	1,164,321	1,763,862	2,073,000		

\* Adapted by the author; percentages in square brackets supplied by the author

Source: Library and Archives of Canada, MacGill Papers. MG 31, Volume 6, File 2 'Laws and Practice under Federal Jurisdiction concerning the Political Rights of Women: Report 2.'

In subsection 1 of the Table sub-groups are defined in descending order of implied importance: geographical jurisdiction, ethnicity, and religion followed by overall labour force participation, age and marital status, and marital status in relation to labour force participation. The strongest emphasis in the *Report* as in the Commission's research and priorities was on labour force participation and the weakest emphasis concerned on ethnicity as it related to heritage. The most resources, research studies sponsored and research funds expended, the largest number of pages and the most recommendations in of the *Report*, concerned women's employment, with no attention to their ethnicity or citizenship status. Next to no attention was accorded to ethnicity other than the well-established cleavage of English-French relations. Well-established social cleavages assumed region as defined by provincial and territorial boundaries, alignment of ethnicity with the dominant conceptualization of Canadian identity with the dualism of bilingualism and biculturalism then being promoted by the other prominent Royal Commission of the day.

### Ethnic Origin of Canadian Women, 1961 Census



Aboriginal peoples comprised of "Indians" and "Eskimos" are identified separately. Women from the Caribbean and South Asia are not separately identified, and neither are any women who may previously have resided in Africa. The ethnicity of ten per cent of women is not identified. The 13.3 per cent of the females identified from census data as having a European origin included twice as many individuals of German heritage compared to relatively similarly-sized subgroups of Ukrainian, Italian, and Netherlands heritage. Canadian women having an Asian ethnicity included only women of Chinese or Japanese heritage. The very narrow and limited view of ethnicity did not include recent immigration from Greece and Portugal. An assimilationist approach tended to ally recent settlers with one or the other charter groups associated with the 2.6 million mostly francophone women living in Quebec and 3.1 million mostly Anglophone women living in Ontario accounted for 63.4 per cent of all Canadian womanhood, even though region, language, ethnicity and religious denomination did not align neatly along these lines.

The reporting of ethnicity in the census probably overstated assimilation to “English” or “French” heritage, with an accompanying under-reporting of ethnicity as a result of the systemic reinforcement of a two founding races identification along geographic, linguistic and religious lines. The over-representation of English-French relations can readily be discerned from the objective criteria that together they made up 75 per cent of the population, with all other named ethnicities accounting for an additional 15 per cent and unnamed ethnicities the remaining 10 per cent. The criticism that the RCSW *Report’s* “everyday racism” wrote visible minority women out of its pages is closer to the mark than then author knew (Agnew 1996, 113; St. Lewis 1997). Immigrant women entirely absent from the chapters on the economy and the family, and mentioned 4 of 8 pages that comprised the entire chapter on immigration and citizenship (128). The placeholder points to the Commission’s having run out of time along with dissatisfaction with what could be pulled out of the three studies sponsored by the RCSW (Eaton [1970]; Ferguson [1970]); Hawkins [1970]). As a result the chapter took a truncated form. While these decisions now seem misplaced, knowing that they were discussed and decided upon demonstrates the amplification of the largest common denominators to the exclusion of almost all minority statuses. The mention of First Nations, Metis and Inuit women ran counter to the trend due to the volume of submissions and encounters the Commission had directly with Indigenous Peoples that influenced the Commission to mention these communities separately. The Commission’s intention had been to produce a Chapter on women in the North, but resource and time constraints produced incomplete and partial materials that lacked the social scientific objectivity demanded by the RCSW, ruling out further use of them in the Commission’s own report. As it was, indigeneity, ethnicity and immigrant status became placeholders for future inquiry. At least a quarter of population of Canadian women was minimized in favour of further amplification of a univocal voice associated with the dominant ideology and its powerholders to whom the Commission was accountable.

The *Report* addressed the public in a universalizing voice speaking about all women as much as possible foregrounded gender with other characteristics such as education, economic status, being regarded as secondary as in “women with low incomes.” This was part of a deliberate strategy to be inclusive according to their lights by not singling out ethnicity, heritage or citizenship status as relevant to women’s ideal egalitarian participation in Canadian society. Discussions in Research Studies that provided an analysis of cultural domination, dispossession and the legacy of colonization were not used in the *Report* (Shipley). Particularized evidence of the lived experiences of sub-groups or particular individuals tended to be categorically excluded. A misplaced sense of inclusion excised cultural markers and identifying references rather than as might be the case today to inquire more deeply into what can be learned from these inflections on the mainstream culture that provide contested accounts of what it means to be or become Canadian.

Established social cleavages outlined in the Objective Criteria Table contributed to the erasure of race, ethnicity and immigration status as topics but dropped them as being low priorities once the portion of their budget available for research became clear. For example, the only research proposal to have sought to study an ethnic sub-grouping concerned an intergenerational study of acculturation by members of families of Japanese heritage (Kurokawa 1968). Its rejection was due to the decision to use limited research

funds amounting to 200,000 dollars to study only the largest populations of women (Appendix NN); the less than fifteen thousand women of Japanese heritage was too small a population to have justified funding. That said, Commissioner Gordon initially had suggested studies of minority groups naming Ukrainians, Italians and Jews as well as Indians and Eskimos, without following up after topics like these got demoted to the status of “illustrative studies” having the lowest priority in terms in what they could contribute to the report overall.

The only illustrative studies to be undertaken and completed concerned Indigenous women, but these small-scale studies were regarded as insufficiently objective and thinly documented to justify publication or use in the official report (Lotz 1971; Bruce 1968; Shipley 1968). Indigenous women spoke and wrote to the Commission effectively bringing to the fore sex-bias related to the awarding and removal of Indian status under the Indian Act depending on a woman’s marital status and choice of partner (Sewid and Skogan 1968; Humphrey 1970). The non-recognition of Métis status added layers of complexity to the Commission’s understanding of diversity among Indigenous Peoples (Yellowknee 1968). Force resettlement of Inuit from hunting camps into permanent settlements and the alienation of family members resulting from children’s experiences in residential schools provide snapshots of how the women affected understood their own situations (Bruce 1968). Revisiting these sources with fresh eyes holds to the potential add layers of meaning to the *Report* unintended by its authors but important to new generations of Canadians concerned to take ownership of diverse narratives and their storytellers (Hemmings 2005)

Two other related points can only be mentioned. The dominant cultural ideology included an uninterrogated sex/gender system in which heterosexual monogamous serial pairing was so completely regarded as the norm that the Commissioners entertained discussions about referring to the women Commissioners by their professional names rather than their married names as Mrs. His-first-name His-last-name. Commissioner Jeanne Lapointe repeatedly insisted that women be regarded as autonomous individuals apart from social roles as wives and mothers, but this perspective met strong resistance from those for whom the institutions of marriage and the nuclear family were iconic to life in Canada. Like some other independent women of her day Commissioner Lapointe, like other independent women of her generation did not have exclusively heterosexual relationships (Théry 2009). Lapointe’s free-thinking spirit remained private as was the accepted sensibility of the day. Sexuality unlike gender, marital and family status continued to be regarded by the Commission, like the public, as an exclusively private matter. As a result no in-depth consideration of the monolithic nuclear family supported by a single usually male earner, with its generally conservative, sexist, racist and heterosexist bias provided ample opportunity to consider the more culturally that have come into plain view since 1970. Seeing the sex/gender system in relation to its former invisibility can yet be used to bring to consciousness societal assumptions that would benefit from critical reflection in order to represent “women” better in future policy making (Harding 2003; Ship 1998, 330; Findlay 1993, 211).

### **Conclusion**

Before the category of “women” disappears from use once again, some effort to contextualize Canadian women as a category in use in public policy in the last forty years raises a cautionary flag concerning gender and diversity mainstreaming (Hankivsky

2005). Balancing the demands of objective social science, as the RCSW attempted to do, by silencing the voices and standpoints of individuals, groups, communities and minorities produced a historically serviceable but limited vantagepoint that succeeded in bringing about incremental social change in a number of areas of public policy. At the same time that it provided a limited range of policy solutions, the category “women” was already fragmented as evident in assimilating groups, communities and minorities to a dominant national ideology without permitting them to be heard and their specific complaints acknowledged in their own terms. This method of proceeding perpetuated epistemic and cultural violence denying them the respect due to dissenting viewpoints on the margins of a dominant way of life (Williams 1990; Monture-Okanee 1992; Turpel-Lafond 1997).

The category “women,” like society more generally, is by its nature is more complexly textured and polyphonic than the monumental account offered by the RCSW to the federal government in 1970. In order for equality for women to continue to evolve and flourish public policy can either close the book on the RCSW or renegotiate its place in the on-going history of Canadian nationalism. Based on the materials presented here, it would be unwise to set aside the activities of the Royal Commission because its legacy continues to inform public discussion with or without acknowledgement of its historical sources. Accordingly, there remains more to be learned from its legacy that remains unexplored yet relevant to current and future public policy. In particular the interplay between the dominant ideology and marginalized, peripheral and silenced individuals, groups, communities and minorities in the struggle for genuine democratization continues to seek equality for women. Balanced, fair and equitable representation has yet to be achieved and, without it, the achievement of equality for women will remain elusive. That work requires more time and attention to move forward on a public agenda that has yet to take account of sex/gender systems as part of the dominant ideology, the growing multiplicity of recognized family forms and renegotiation of Canadian women on a footing that both challenges and reflects multiple standpoints and their varying degrees of privilege, power sharing and autonomy. For these reasons it will take many more years before we are able to take the full measure of the RCSW’s legacy. Its work is not yet done; the challenge it set is inter-generational and multi-generational in scope, as is democracy itself. Such a stock-taking is not yet on the horizon. The hundredth anniversary of the extension of the franchise to most women, the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Confederation and the fiftieth anniversary of the RCSW provides the opportunity to ensure that future social inclusion will find taking account of these changes unavoidable.

The most recent statement of an Expert Panel on Accountability Mechanisms concluded that the work of the RCSW has been completed, and formal equality achieved such that Canadian women are now at liberty to seek to live beyond the illusion of equality to access, exercise and enjoyment of formal equality that can now become actualized in substantive rather than solely formalistic terms (Canada 2006). The work that lies ahead will come from the margins, where the pull of the dominant ideology is less compelling. Divergent standpoints hold out the prospect of speaking truth to power, and using their multiple social locations and fluid identities to reinvigorate the centre bringing to it their energy, insights and policy vision. The challenge now is to both continue the struggle for women’s equality and to redress the balance among women

themselves as well as in relation to traditional powerholders. Facing that challenge is likely to take at least the next 40 years because as yet women are not yet halfway to equal.

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