

**Proxied Perspectives:
Vancouver Immigrant and Low-Income Women
Represented to the Royal Commission on the Status
of Women, 1968**

by
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Abstract

Called in 1967 in response to social unrest, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women accepted letters, briefs, and presentations in support of social and economic parity for women in Canada. This thesis engages briefs submitted to the Commission on behalf of immigrant and impoverished women living in Vancouver's downtown neighbourhoods, penned by agents not part of the community being represented. This study analyzes how marginalized women's experiences were framed by "proxied" representatives to the Commission; by the Commission; and by spectators such as the mainstream newspaper media. Though the Commission was structured to accept proxied accounts as directly representative, this study concludes that additional interrogation of the ambiguity or contradictions in these "proxied" accounts was required for the Commission to more concretely represent what Vancouver's marginalized women required for a chance at social equality.

Keywords: Vancouver 1960s; Royal Commission on the Status of Women; welfare liberalism; immigrant women; Indigenous women; proxy

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Lots left to do. Let's keep building.

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List of Acronyms

CEW	Canada's Committee for the Equality of Women
CP	Canadian Press
DTES	Downtown Eastside
EES	East-Enders Society
FFQ	Fédération des femmes du Québec
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
RCSW	Royal Commission on the Status of Women
SFU	Simon Fraser University

Introduction

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) was announced by the Pearson government in 1967, partially in response to building pressure on Ottawa from women's interest groups – including the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ) and Canada's Committee for the Equality of Women (CEW) – to address gender inequality in Canada.¹ In the introduction to the RCSW's 1970 Final Report, the Commissioners wrote: “[It] is our duty to ensure for women equal opportunities with men. ... Equality of opportunity for everyone should be the goal of Canadian society. The right to an adequate standard of living is without value to the person who has no means of achieving it.”² These remarks were accompanied by additional context for the Commission's conference – that the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was a strong inspiration for the Commission's work.³ The Commission aimed to inquire after what was required to encourage social and economic parity among women and men in Canada in agreement with the mandate of the Declaration of Human Rights.

To an extent, this aim was realized in the course of the Commission's inquiry between 1967 and 1970. Equality – specifically, equal access to economic opportunity – served as a frequent guidepost for discussion in the Commission's Final Report. The Commission's summary of its four central principles illustrated a clear concern for this equality. The Final Report argued that: (1) “women should be free to choose whether or not to take employment outside their homes”; (2) “the care of children is a responsibility

¹ Monique Bégin, “The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later,” in *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, edited by Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 23.

² Florence Bird et al., “Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada” (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1970), xii.

³ *Ibid.*, xi.

to be shared by the mother, the father and society”; (3) “society has a responsibility for women because of pregnancy and child-birth, and special treatment related to maternity will always be necessary”; and (4) “in certain areas women will for an interim period require special treatment to overcome the adverse effects of discriminatory practices.”⁴

Yet within these four guiding principles, the Commission demonstrated a conflation of the notion of equality with equal access to economic opportunity. In many respects, the Commission operated on the basis that economic accommodation was the most direct route to social equality; yet the Commission did little research into women who had difficulty accessing mainstream work opportunities due to obstacles such as discrimination on the bases of language, race, poverty, and devaluation of existing skills. Though arguing that women would often require “special treatment” in order to overcome the effects of discrimination, the Commission was rarely willing or able to extend this special treatment principle to the communities who needed social support the most: to immigrant, Indigenous, poor, and criminalized women.

While the Commission’s stated principles were thematically incorporated into the Final Report from a perspective of liberal feminism, I contend that the specific causes and dimensions of ethnic and class-based stratification in Canada were not prominently investigated by the RCSW. The topics of poverty and race were both discussed in the RCSW’s final report; however, as the recommendations relied largely on provincial and municipal funding – as well as significant support from voluntary organizations – the investigation seemed to provide little guidance for the federal policy that the Commission had been created to recommend. The RCSW’s final report was not successful in providing clear avenues toward equal rights for women in Canada facing additional

⁴ Ibid., xii.

obstacles to economic opportunity owing to discrimination on the bases of race and class.

Literature Review

This study contributes to an existing body of literature on the methods and effects of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Barbara Freeman, for example, has written on the effects of the media coverage of RCSW activities nationwide, while Joan Sangster has provided a closer look at the responses by both women and policymakers following RCSW activities in Ontario.⁵ Using these sources as guideposts, I will analyze the Commission's activities in British Columbia. In particular, I have focused my argument on three inner-city Vancouver boroughs – Templeton, now part of Hastings–Sunrise; Strathcona; and “Skid Row,” now called the Downtown Eastside – and their engagement with Commission activities in April 1968 (see Map 1). As there is no study focusing solely on the RCSW's relationship with British Columbia, this research fills a critical void in understanding the Commission's wide-reaching effects on gender parity and policy in Canada. I selected briefs from these neighbourhoods because they offered perspectives on immigrant, Indigenous, and low- or no-income women – groups who were less often heard from by the Commission.

⁵ See Barbara M. Freeman, *The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada, 1966-1971* (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001); Joan Sangster, “Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no.1 (2010), 1-21; Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); and Joan Sangster, “Words of Experience/Experiencing Words: Reading Working Women's Letters to Canada's Royal Commission on the Status of Women,” in *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History*, 359-390 (Edmonton: Athabaska University Press, 2011).



Map 1 Vancouver boroughs

In constructing this study, I have drawn from primary source documents, including: the RCSW's final report; letters, written briefs, and audio recordings found in the RCSW's official records located at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa; the East-Enders Society fonds at Simon Fraser University Archives; federal census and immigration records; and newspaper articles covering the RCSW's activities. In the course of performing this research, I was drawn to conflicting accounts of singular events, varying depending on the positionality of the speaker. These discrepancies raise questions about how information was perceived and presented from different perspectives, and how this variation affected the Commission's inclusion of that complex and competing information in the Final Report.

Through the course of exploring the different frames that individuals or organizations placed on information gathered about a particular community, I apply standpoint theory, drawing most significantly from Sandra Harding.⁶ Per Harding's definition, standpoint theory is necessarily "intersectional," taking into consideration the significance of multiple axes of oppression in how perspectives are shaped.⁷ Standpoint theory takes for granted that an issue will look different depending on the position from which an individual is viewing it and therefore embraces multiple truths. In particular, it emphasizes the intersection of power and knowledge and how these systems affect perception of an issue.⁸

I take two additional frameworks into account when assessing the discrepancies apparent between sources. In light of the media coverage on the RCSW's Vancouver hearings, I have adapted the theory of media framing as put forward by Sikee Liu and Nicholas Blomley on their study of newspaper coverage of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in the 1990s.⁹ Liu and Blomley argue that media outlets construct their interpretations with their own motives and aims in mind.¹⁰ Edward S. Herman and Noam

⁶ Sandra Harding, "Standpoint Theories: Productively Controversial," *Hypatia* 24, no.4 (Nov 2009): 192-200.

⁷ Ibid., 194. Though initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (et al., *Critical Race Theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York: New Press, 1995), the term "intersectional" has been controversial. Some argue that it has been misused by activists of privilege to center their own advocacy in a monolithic movement. For a critique of intersectionality's applications, including the subjugation of racialized (specifically Black) women by researchers as "sites" of intersecting oppressions, see Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008), 1-15. For others, an intersectional approach means abandoning disciplinary knowledge and praxis that has provided power to the marginalized; see Harding, "Standpoint Theories," 197-198. As "intersectionality" is an anachronistic term to the 1960s, I shy away from using the word in specific case studies and do not expect the actors described in this thesis to have been inclined to reflect on the repercussions of their own positionality through these events, though the theory does inform my analysis.

⁸ Harding, "Standpoint Theories," 195-197.

⁹ Sikee Liu and Nicholas Blomley. "Making News and Making Space: Framing Vancouver's Downtown Eastside." *The Canadian Geographer* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 119-132.

¹⁰ Ibid., 120-121.

Chomsky argue that these aims, briefly summarized, are “to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society.”¹¹ They do this using frames, which are imposed in an attempt to help the newspaper’s audience understand a situation with which they are not familiar through a particular lens. In other words, as summarized by Robert Entman, “frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe,” often with the aim of encouraging a particular point of view.¹²

I have adapted Liu and Blomley’s framing theory and combined it with standpoint theory to introduce an original concept: “representation by proxy.” The RCSW was itself a proxied representative of women in Canada; rather than advocate to the government directly, many women used the Commission as a channel to represent their interests. This RCSW itself also accepted proxied accounts – perspectives offered on the behalf of others – when it was compiling its findings. These accounts were treated on an equal basis with women speaking on their own behalf. I argue that the people from outside the communities they endeavored to represent to the Commission likely believed that their perceptions about these communities were accurate, even though they imposed frames based on their own particular positions on the experiences of racialized and low-income women they aimed to represent. In the absence of self-representation from the women, these proxied accounts were accepted by the Commission as directly representative, even though – as posited by standpoint theory – the intersections of power and knowledge were fundamentally different for outsiders viewing communities than they were for those within the communities themselves. When the interests of a community

¹¹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), 107, Kindle edition.

¹² Robert Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no.4 (Oct 1993), 52.

were being advocated by someone who was not a member of that community, I call this process “representation by proxy.”

As we shall see in Chapter 2, there are also degrees of proxy to take into account. The first-generation child of an immigrant, for example, occupies a different standpoint than her mother who emigrated, while the teacher of that child occupies a different standpoint still. The teacher may be said to be “two degrees removed” from the community of immigrant women he or she aims to represent. This theory shall be expanded upon in case studies later in Chapters 2 and 3. Furthermore, the mainstream media and the Royal Commission itself likewise occupied positions removed from those it represented in public reports. To understand the frames being imposed by these institutions, an overview of the RCSW, newspaper media, and welfare liberalism is required.

Literature on the RCSW

In 2001, Barbara Freeman studied the media response to the RCSW extensively in her breakthrough monograph *The Satellite Sex*. Freeman argues that “mainstream media coverage of women’s issues during the Royal Commission... was a manifestation of a mainly liberal feminist public sphere.”¹³ Freeman’s work is ambitious and provides an excellent commentary on newspaper responses to the Commission’s general objectives and operations; however, it gives fewer details on the women and other presenters who provided information to the Commission itself and offers little regional

¹³ Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 20. I go into more detail about what it means for a public sphere to be liberal in manifestation later in this introduction.

focus in its analysis. I draw from Freeman at length in my critique of the shortfalls of the RCSW's approach in general.

Several scholars have written on the type of information presented to the RCSW, who presented it, and how the information was subsequently utilized. Within the body of literature on the RCSW, however, there is no study focusing on the advocacy initiated by women in British Columbia. As mentioned, Joan Sangster has written about women's labour organizing as found within and as a result of the RCSW's inquiry, but her research focuses specifically on letters pertaining to trade union organizing in Ontario.¹⁴ Shannon Stettner, meanwhile, has covered British Columbia in passing in her review on abortion as a theme in letters sent to the RCSW, but she does not much expand on women's advocacy more widely.¹⁵ Jane Gaskell focuses on British Columbia in her study of an education system evolving to accommodate girls and women in the 1970s, but discusses changes in the wake of the RCSW's final recommendations rather than looking at the women advocating to the Commission directly.¹⁶ I aim to fill the gap left by these studies by looking at how activists lobbied the RCSW in the interest of British Columbian women, with an additional focus on case studies from Vancouver's inner city neighbourhoods.

¹⁴ Joan Sangster, "Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labour, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 2010), 1-21; Joan Sangster, "Words of Experience / Experiencing Words: Reading Working Women's Letters to Canada's Royal Commission on the Status of Women," in *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 359-390.

¹⁵ Shannon Stettner, "'He is still unwanted': women's assertions of authority over abortion in letters to the Royal Commission of the Status of Women in Canada," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 29, no.1 (2012), 151-171.

¹⁶ Jane Gaskell, "Educational Change and the Women's Movement—Lessons from British Columbia schools in the 1970's," *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2, no. 5 (2010), 7539-7549.

Liu and Blomley note that the frames that the news media impose particularly on communities poorly understood by the mainstream tend to “accentuate the negative.”¹⁷ I argue that this process of framing and marginalization can be perceived quite clearly in reporting from two key sources in Vancouver that engaged with the RCSW: newspapers covering briefs that aimed to represent women from inner city neighbourhoods to the Commission, and people presenting the briefs who dealt with the communities they aimed to represent (in this study, Templeton and the Downtown Eastside), either directly or indirectly, but of which they were not a part. These perspectives encouraged the Commission to accept incomplete or inaccurate portrayals of those communities owing to the “proxied” nature of those accounts.¹⁸

Though we are able to see these deficiencies in the Commission’s methods in hindsight, the changing tides of activism and advocacy in Canada meant that there were many realities and challenges that the Commissioners were facing for the first time. The privileged positions of the RCSW Commissioners limited their ability to comprehend diverse experiences and circumstances – but they were among the first government-adjacent bodies to hear significantly from marginalized women in any capacity.¹⁹ In many respects, the RCSW was a trailblazing endeavor, notable for the scope and response of its inquiry. The Commission – a product of its time – also faced external

¹⁷ Liu and Blomley, “Making News,” 121.

¹⁸ A consistent problem in writing this thesis is that it is impossible to discern any concrete demographic information from these advocates, either in voice or writing. By and large, however, the Othering apparent in the briefs leads to the assumption that, at least in the majority, the presenters were not a part of the groups for whom they advocated. I do not speculate on why the members of these communities did not represent their concerns directly to the RCSW. Given that my deliberate aim was to focus on women who were disadvantaged in financial, linguistic, citizenship, educational, and/or racial terms, it is reasonable to surmise there were barriers (perceived or actual) to advocating to the Canadian state on their own behalf. The proxied representatives gave some reasons for their indirect form of advocacy, as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3. These reasons included lack of resources, lack of belief in the state’s ability to lend assistance, and fear of ridicule.

¹⁹ Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 238.

limitations, encouraged in part by pressures from government, the mainstream media, and in-organizational fighting. In the face of all this, the Commission persevered to produce an impartial and complete final document. In order to better understand the pressures faced by the RCSW given the magnitude of its task, a brief summary of feminist activism of the time may give context to the frames the Commission, too, imposed on the testimonies they received.

1960s Feminist Activism: An Overview

The “second wave” of feminism originated in the 1960s from a combination of several swelling social movements, including pro-peace women’s groups (including Voice of Women, founded in 1960) and Marxist movements.²⁰ This wave of activism and advocacy lasted until the late 1980s / early 1990s, when, according to a number of scholars, there was a rise of a theoretically more inclusive “third wave,” which saw some merging and interconnecting of existing movements.²¹ The most prominent successes of second-wave feminism are sometimes debated; but from bodily and sexual freedoms to the opening of legal and economic doors, second-wave feminism is most known for its endeavor to establish women, as individuals and as a broad category, as equals to men.²²

²⁰ Jill Vickers, “The Intellectual Origins of the Women’s Movements in Canada,” in *Challenging Times: The Women’s Movement in Canada and the United States*, edited by Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 41.

²¹ Natasha Pinterics, “Riding the Feminist Waves: In with the Third?” *Canadian Woman Studies* 20/21, nos. 4/1 (2001), 15.

²² Pinterics, “Riding the Feminist Wave,” 19; see also Monique Bégin, “The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later,” in *Challenging Times: The Women’s Movement in Canada and the United States*, edited by Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 32.

Second-wave feminism is often criticized in retrospect for the centering of mainstream (i.e., white and middle class) experience – sometimes to the point of exclusion of women with other experiences. Rebecca Pinterics writes that third-wave feminism is sometimes thought to orient itself around dismantling the “racist and classist oppression” of mainstream second-wave feminism, while others have viewed the deconstructive approach of third-wave feminism to abandon “feminism” altogether.²³ Like third-wave feminism, second-wave feminism was a term broadly used to describe several simultaneous movements, and should not be understood as monolithic. Jill Vickers described the mainstream women’s movement in 1960s Canada as a form of “radical liberalism,” which included as its tenets a belief in government change and a commitment to the welfare state, due solely to its commitment to challenging the status quo.²⁴ Some feminists with seemingly liberal sympathies shared a radical background with the rising Marxist left in 1960s Canada, while other feminists believed patriarchy was the root of all oppression.²⁵ Some feminists who viewed themselves as radicals at the time held views that, in retrospect, seem far more liberal.

These rhetorical and tactical shifts meant that liberal feminism itself was unstable in its approaches and ideologies. Offering a striking example of how historians’ understanding of liberal feminism has changed over time, Nancy Adamson writes about a group of primarily white, able-bodied, largely heterosexual feminists in Thunder Bay

²³ Pinterics, “Riding the Feminist Wave,” 15. See also Mary-Jo Nadeau, “Troubling Herstory: Unsettling White Multiculturalism in Canadian Feminism,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 27, no.2/3 (Spring 2003), 6-13.

²⁴ Vickers, “Intellectual Origins,” 40. Notably, Vickers also identifies that a Native woman’s movement was active in the 1960s, though she does not expand significantly on their advocacy or activity.

²⁵ Nancy Adamson, “Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 256-260. I expand on liberalism – specifically welfare liberalism – as a framework at length in Chapter 1.

describing itself as “diverse,” a description that would hold little traction in the present.²⁶ Trying to categorize the RCSW as strictly liberal or radical is likewise a task that requires negotiation between past and present perspectives. The RCSW, operating as a government inquiry, was tasked with appeasing government concerns while also challenging the status quo – a balancing act that might have placed the Commission among radicals or liberals depending on the spectator’s point of view. The RCSW did push the boundaries of acceptable advocacy in the eyes of most for the era, but in retrospect, the Commission’s focus on equal opportunity appears “quintessentially liberal.”²⁷

The Commission’s liberal methodologies appear most obvious in how it incorporated – or did not incorporate – the voices of marginalized women in its final report. Joan Sangster argues that “whiteness was taken for granted” among Commissioners, and that – as voiced by Jill Vickers as a shortcoming of mainstream second-wave feminism as a whole – alliances with movements from women of colour and Indigenous women were negligible.²⁸ Particularly as advocacy by Indigenous women – both within their communities and in Canadian society as a whole – on issues of citizenship, sovereignty, and government was rising in the early stages of the “Red Power” movement, the RCSW’s seeming disinterest in this organization seems notable. The ways Indigenous women were advocating for their rights in the 1960s, regardless of

²⁶ Ibid., 261.

²⁷ Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 238-240.

²⁸ Ibid., 238-239; see also Vickers, “Intellectual Origins,” 60. Writing in 1992, Vickers noted that intersections with the mainstream women’s movement still, at time of writing, did not significantly intersect with movements led by women of colour, and noted that relationships with Indigenous activists, in 1992, “remain[ed] a failure of tragic proportions.” If these connections were not significantly forged two and a half decades following the Commission’s inquiry, it’s reasonable to assume the prospect of intersectionality was new and uncommon to the Commissioners.

whether on the primary basis of gender or ethnicity, should have been considered more carefully by the RCSW if they aimed to represent the realities of all women in Canada.²⁹

While the RCSW did provoke change in the period, there is still space for analysis of areas where the RCSW might have pushed further against the liberal focus on equality of opportunity in their inquiry – particularly given that poor, Indigenous, and immigrant women were organizing, albeit outside of the liberal movement that primarily informed the Commission’s formation. Though the lines between liberal and radical feminism in the era are difficult to quantify, I continue to present the RCSW as a more mainstream, liberal initiative interested in furthering the government’s commitment to welfare liberalism on this basis.

²⁹ Indigenous women’s contribution to activist movements in the 1960s remains underrepresented in scholarship. Intersections between the feminist movement and Indigenous rights movement were fraught with conflict. Joyce Green details the complications with a conceptual “Indigenous feminism” in “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism,” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2007), 20-32. Joanne Barker discusses the role of women in the fight for amendments to the Indian Act in the mid-1980s – and the “demonization” of women within Indigenous communities advocating for their rights as women – in “Gender, Sovereignty, and the Discourse of Rights in Native Women’s Activism,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 7, no.1 (2006), 127-161. Emma LaRocque echoes many of these conflicts between Indigenous activism and women’s rights activism in “Métis and Feminist: Ethical Reflections on Feminism, Human Rights and Decolonization,” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2007), 53-71. Lee Maracle details her own involvement with the Red Power movement in British Columbia in the early 1970s in *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1990). Other analyses of Indigenous feminism in Canada include Grace Oulette, *The Fourth World: Feminism and Aboriginal Women’s Activism* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2002), and for comparable parallels between Indigenous activism and feminist activism in the United States, see Andrea Smith, “Native American Feminism, Sovereignty, and Social Change.” *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 116-132 and M. Annette Jaimes*Guerrero, “‘Patriarchal Colonialism’ and Indigenism: Implications for Native Feminist Spirituality and Native Womanism.” *Hypatia* 18, no. 2 (2003): 58-69. I discuss this at more length in Chapters 1 and 3.

Methods, Sources, and Chapters

I anchor my critique of the Commission's findings and methods by first offering a theoretical criticism of welfare liberalism in Canada. Chapter 1 aims to unpack the dimensions of welfare liberalism in the Canadian government in the 1960s. I argue that welfare states, while espousing commitment to, and responsibility for, more egalitarian environments, in fact rely disproportionately on merit and existing opportunity in policy and its execution. The RCSW, called by the Canadian government, situated itself within the values of welfare liberalism – and likewise suffered from its limitations. As a result, the Commission fell short in its duty to provide complete, pragmatic recommendations to ensure the government-sponsored establishment of equal opportunity in Canada, even though it met the expectations placed on it by the Canadian government. Belief in the effectiveness of welfare liberalism allowed the Commission to partially overlook the specific *causes* of the conditions of poverty and marginalization that many women faced. This resulted in a failure to trouble the institutions that reinforced prejudice on the basis of intersections of race and class.

While perusing the 468 briefs and over 1000 letters of opinion that contributed to the Commission's 1970 Final Report, I focused on narratives representing or concerning women in British Columbia who were poor, racialized, and/or linguistically diverse.³⁰ I argue that women facing intersecting axes of institutional discrimination were overlooked by the Commission as a consequence of the Commission's belief in the inclusive functions of welfare liberalism. Chapters 2 and 3 offer in-depth analysis of two case studies in the hopes of demonstrating the underlying weaknesses of the RCSW's inquiry. I analyze the circumstances of the women in Templeton and the Downtown Eastside with the aim to (1) present some of the complexities of life for women from

³⁰ RCSW final report, ix.

diverse backgrounds in a major Canadian municipality in 1960s Canada; (2) study the representations of women in these neighbourhoods as made to the Commission, usually sourced from outside (or “proxied”) representatives; and (3) attempt what the Commission did not: to understand, in simple terms, the institutional and systemic circumstances that contributed to the low representation of women in marginalized positions in the RCSW’s Final Report. Put another way, I hope to amplify voices that were unheard or otherwise overlooked by the Commission and the Canadian government in the execution of this inquiry between 1967 and 1970, in the course of understanding why the Commission was unable to represent fully the positionalities of these women.

The Final Report was not representative of all Canadian women, but it did give *some* attention to marginalized women’s experiences, concerns, and circumstances. The briefs discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 were selected by the RCSW for expansion and presentation at the oral brief hearings, held in Vancouver on April 17 and 18, 1968; I chose them in part for this reason.³¹ Like the agents presenting the briefs to the Commission, the RCSW also imposed its own frames on the information presented about the women in question. The Templeton brief (Chapter 2) and the East Enders’ Society brief (Chapter 3), as discussed by both their presenters *and* the RCSW, were inadequate representations of the communities they aimed to represent because the briefs were compiled and presented by people outside the affected group. Whether too far removed from the experiences they aimed to represent, or because they struck an uncertain balance between the experiences and needs of their community, proxies were unable to understand or accurately represent the intricacies of these women’s lives.

³¹ Vancouver was only the second stop on the RCSW’s oral brief tour; the tour began in Victoria earlier the same week.

Often, the perspectives represented in these briefs to the Commission were broken down, interpreted, and disseminated in more than one form, by multiple participants. In the case of the Templeton brief (Chapter 2), migrant women – from Eastern European countries as well as from India, China, and elsewhere³² – were represented in words paraphrased first by their children; subsequently by white, naturalized school administrators; then by newspaper media; and finally by the RCSW. I aim to deconstruct the frames imposed by each set of representatives while taking note of the needs articulated by the high school students on behalf of their mothers. Ultimately, I argue that the school administrators altered the account offered by the students, whether intentionally or unintentionally, resulting in the diversion of attention from the actual needs of the migrant women of Templeton. The newspaper media – as I will argue, an institution committed to favourably representing the interests of the Canadian welfare state – followed a similar path in its representation of both the students’ and the administrators’ points of view. While the RCSW made a clear and marked effort in taking the first word – that of the schoolchildren – into account as to what the women in Templeton actually needed, I argue that the accounts of the administrators and the newspaper media were also taken into account in the RCSW’s final report with equal weight. The treatment of accounts from all standpoints as equally legitimate, regardless of the degree of proxy a representative had from the community in question, gave legitimacy to these peripheral accounts and contributed to the devaluation of those closer to the community in question, at the expense of effective representation and advocacy.

In the case of the East-Enders Society brief (Chapter 3), the concerns of “unemployable,” “indigent” women – about 30 percent of whom were reported by the

³² I detail immigration statistics in Chapter 1.

Society as Indigenous – were represented by the women who worked to provide them with basic shelter and services on a voluntary basis.³³ As with the Templeton brief, I will study the RCSW’s final report response to the brief to demonstrate how these frames detracted from attention to the needs of the women using the services offered by the Society. In both cases, briefs selected by the RCSW to highlight the concerns of marginalized women elevated the voices of people in positions of comparative authority over the women they purported to represent, at the cost of direct representation in the RCSW’s final report. Whether resulting from a dearth of the time, resources, or ability to discover the root of the adverse conditions women in these Vancouver boroughs faced, the RCSW did not adequately delve into the true circumstances faced by women in Vancouver’s Templeton and Downtown Eastside communities and instead perceived the words of proxies as accurate at the possible expense of more representative advocacy.

This thesis will demonstrate that, however well-intentioned, the RCSW was unable to provide a complete scope of the issues faced by all women in Canada due to two main factors: (1) the incorporation of frames imposed by “proxied” representatives of school administrators, support workers, and newspaper media into the RCSW’s analysis; and (2) the realities of operating under the mandate of welfare liberalism and its limitations in an era when government was thought to operate benevolently in assistance of its citizens. As a result, the RCSW did not understand that the Commissioners themselves played a part in the silencing or marginalization of Vancouver’s (and Canada’s) racialized, linguistically diverse, and/or low-income citizens.

³³ Simon Fraser University, East-Enders Society fonds, F-59, vol.1, Social Worker’s Annual Report, January 29 1969. These details are further explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1.

The RCSW, Welfare Liberalism, and Not-So-Special Treatment for Vancouver’s Downtown Women

Vancouver in the 1960s was, in the eyes of the City, experiencing a crisis of “urban community.”¹ Tasked with the revitalization—variously called “reform” and “rehabilitation”—of Vancouver’s formerly industrial neighbourhoods such as Strathcona, which had been described in one 1968 city report as “a garbage dump,” the City of Vancouver attempted to plan its way out of perceived urban ruin.² While negative perceptions of the neighbourhoods of Strathcona, the Downtown Eastside, and Hastings–Sunrise were due in part to their industrial histories and their proximity to Vancouver’s downtown core, these perceptions were also, according to Jo-Ann Lee, encouraged by the immigrant-heavy makeup of the affected neighbourhoods. Strathcona in particular had been feeling the impact of City-mandated revitalization since the 1940s, when it had been slated for slum clearance.³

Postwar Canadian governments at all levels – municipal, provincial, and federal – were recurrently concerned with notions of “improvement,” particularly of impoverished

¹ David Ley, “Styles of the times: liberal and neo-conservative landscapes in inner Vancouver, 1968-1986,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 13, no.1 (1987), 40.

² *Ibid.*, 45-46; see also Karen Bridget Murray, “Making Space in Vancouver’s East End: From Leonard Marsh to the Vancouver Agreement.” *BC Studies* 169 (Spring 2011), 18.

³ Jo-Ann Lee, “Gender, Ethnicity, and Hybrid Forms of Community-Based Urban Activism in Vancouver, 1957-1978: The Strathcona story revisited,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 14, no.4 (August 2007), 389. Lee argues that Strathcona was viewed with a “generalized consciousness of racial and ethnic difference” in these 1940s City planning documents, which referred to Italian and African-Canadian communities as “colonies.” She also notes that Strathcona saw an influx of Chinese immigrants after changes to the federal *Immigration Act* in 1968, though it also shared experiences with ongoing “slum clearance” in Chinatown from the City through the 1950s and 1960s, as noted by one interviewee (390). The fact of Strathcona’s multicultural and shifting population in the years of the RCSW’s operations contributed to popular perceptions of Vancouver’s inner-city neighbourhoods as unknowable, as shall be demonstrated below.

neighbourhoods, through the 1950s and '60s.⁴ This was due in part to a constructed Canadian identity that came to celebrate welfare liberalism as both a recognition of Canada's legacy of labour and wealth and a rejection of American values.⁵ Welfare liberalism, emerging initially out of a provision of services for veterans in the postwar period, expanded in Canada as a result of the economic downturn and related social unease of the late 1950s. Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, in calling for "a melding of socialist and conservative sensibilities in opposition to the faceless, alienating, dehumanizing, unprincipled liberalism that... would concede all, even nuclear annihilation, to... acquisitive individualism" – as prevalent in the United States – facilitated united support for welfare liberalism across political lines on the basis of furthering and protecting a Canadian national identity.⁶ Followed by Lester Pearson's emphasis on federalist solutions to dissident political pressures and Pierre Trudeau's commitment both to the "sovereignty of the individual" and "collective reform," Canadian lawmakers spent the 1960s developing a national identity that affirmed a balance

⁴ Murray, "Making Space," 7-9.

⁵ The intricacies of Canadian postwar national identity and its construction around imperialism, economy, and cultural sovereignty are complex, and will not be detailed here. I use Bryan Palmer's framework for this relationship, detailed in *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 16-21; 31-36; 44-52. Briefly summarized, Palmer notes that while Canada benefited greatly – both economically and culturally – from American postwar prosperity, it also grew anxious of economic dependence on and cultural homogenization with the United States. Meanwhile, Canadian lawmakers continued to highlight the moral ambiguity they perceived in the American over-reliance on profit at the same time as they pledged to be America's Cold War ally (Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 17-18; 52). This balancing act between American benefit and threat was a narrative long since established itself in Canadian nationalist consciousness. See Lorraine Eden and Maureen Appel Molot, "Canada's National Policies: Reflections on 125 Years," *Canadian Public Policy* 19, no.3 (1993): 232-251; Clarence Bolt, *Does Canada Matter?: Liberalism and the Illusion of Sovereignty* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 1999; and W. Kaye Lamb's exposition of anti-American sentiment among 19th century frontiersmen in *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1977). Canada's national investment in a narrative of hard labour was linked with maintaining sovereignty against an encroaching American interest – first geographically, then culturally in the postwar era. Much of the narrative around Canadian welfare liberalism was similarly constructed in diametric opposition to notions of American greed, even as the Canadian economy grew through the 1950s and collapsed late in the decade largely as a result of trends in American investment and trade (Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 35-36).

⁶ Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 72.

between the “laissez-faire” approach of liberalism with the top-down tradition of a “benevolent” welfare state aiming to provide a “better” environment for Canadians. Unfortunately, this endeavour was entrenched in the legacies of colonial and anti-immigrant policies that also characterized Canadian government policy leading into the 1960s, resulting in imbalanced rights.⁷

Vancouver’s downtown neighbourhoods experienced negative effects from these welfare strategies, especially as governments focused on “reform” or “rehabilitation” of communities and neighbourhoods that did not fit into the government’s prescribed notion of a unified Canadian national identity. In the case of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, diverse voices such as those from people living in neighbourhoods like Strathcona, the Downtown Eastside, and Hastings–Sunrise were less privileged than accounts from people who more closely matched the image Commissioners had of the average Canadian and perhaps to give “Canadian” concerns more weight. I conclude that the intention of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was, like many programs implemented in the spirit of Canadian welfare liberalism, to establish lasting conditions for the bolstering of Canadians’ social status, but to do it in such a way that allowed the government to withdraw support after an initial investment. In other words: “liberalism,” as much as “welfare,” guided the RCSW’s inquiry—with all the aims toward “laissez-faire” that this approach entailed.⁸

The realities of being a governmental body operating under a welfare liberalism entwined with a national identity agenda meant that diverse voices were

⁷ Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 160-163.

⁸ My frameworks for welfare liberalism and liberalism more broadly are, as expanded upon below, drawn primarily from Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart. trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), and Curt J. Pankratz, “Welfare State Regimes and the Evolution of Liberalism,” *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* 30, no.3 (2014), 217-230.

underrepresented in the RCSW while voices perceived to represent “Canadian” concerns were given more weight. As a result of the political and cultural context behind Canadian policy leading up to the RCSW’s inquiry in 1968, neither the RCSW nor the Canadian state at large possessed the tools to acknowledge the diverse circumstances faced by women in disadvantaged positions of the economy, immigration status, and/or ethnic background – a lack that undermined the significance of the RCSW’s guiding principle of “special treatment.” Despite being bogged down by a social and political precedent, the RCSW nevertheless won some victories for a number of Canadian women – but few for the women in Vancouver’s inner city neighbourhoods.

1.1. Welfare Liberalism and Gender Advocacy in Postwar Canada

Curt J. Pankratz defines welfare liberalism as the view that “the state should be responsible for ensuring that individuals have equal opportunity to ‘take advantage of economic opportunity.’”⁹ Welfare liberalism seems, on the face of it, a contradiction, as welfare governments exist in opposition to the most fundamental tenet of liberalism—“laissez-faire.” What is “broadly called ‘liberalism,’” according to Michel Foucault, is a “type of rationality in the art of government, this new type of calculation that consists in saying and telling government: I accept, wish, plan, and calculate that all this should be left alone.”¹⁰ Ian McKay summarizes Canadian liberalism specifically as “the implantation and expansion over a heterogeneous terrain ... a certain politico-economic logic.”¹¹ I

⁹ Pankratz, “Welfare State Regimes,” 219.

¹⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 22.

¹¹ Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no.4 (Dec. 2000), 621.

argue that the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was called to make these sorts of calculations, implantations, and expansions in their suggestions for how to reform the Canadian free market in such a way as to give women equal access to it. The Canadian federal government, in the 1960s, aimed to enact tenets of governing based on liberal values without taxing government resources more than necessary in pursuit of this equality – and which also furthered “Project Canada,” as termed by Joyce Green, in privileging the values of settler colonialism.¹²

The RCSW was thus tasked with creating equal access to a predominantly white middle class without either itself or the government significantly considering or providing for communities for whom this benchmark was not possible or desirable. Notably, the RCSW’s advice on providing for women with additional difficulties in accessing the free market generally relied on provincial government participation – over which the RCSW did not have jurisdiction – or else for all levels of government to provide funding of a nonspecific amount to existing benevolent organizations that would do the work to get women to a point where free market access was more possible.¹³ In focusing its primary lens on access to economic equality, the RCSW operated within the established bounds of governmental operations – including in its reinforcement of settler-colonialism – in 1960s Canada.

There were, predictably, dissatisfactions to be found in this approach to a social safety net. According to Daniel O’Connor and Suzan Ilcan, Canadian’s approach to welfare liberalism emphasized merit over true egalitarian opportunity. Under their conception, the “merit [approach] comprise[d] a set of programmatic efforts aimed at

¹² Joyce Green, “Canaries in the Mines of Citizenship: Indian Women in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34, no.4 (Dec 2001), 716.

¹³ See, for example, RCSW Final Report, 209.

minimizing the political character of governance in the administration of welfare liberalism.”¹⁴ The Canadian government’s focus on labour reform ensured that individuals were still held responsible for their own performance in the Canadian economy. If equal access to the labour force could be ensured, there would be, the logic went, no excuse for a person not to find well-paying work within the free market. Labour policy, in other words, was a prime example of the joint pursuit of “authority” and “autonomy” by Canadian governments trying both to appease a dissatisfied working and/or poor population and balance the budget without considerable government-directed overhaul to the economy.¹⁵

Clarence Bolt echoes Alvin Finkel’s assertion that the post-war Canadian state, welfare benefits and all, was created only after consultation with the country’s business and industrial leaders, who feared that mechanization, unemployment, poverty, and inadequate health care raised the spectre of working-class revolt.¹⁶ This consideration of “welfare,” he argues, was in fact merely a measure trying to allay that revolt. “The intent,”

¹⁴ Daniel O’Connor and Suzan Ilcan, “The Folding of Liberal Government: Contract Governance and the Transformation of the Public Service in Canada,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 30, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 2005), 7. A note: government cannot appease a need they do not know exists. The 1960s saw an influx in the emergence of voices previously unheard or unlistened to in Canada, as expanded upon at length in Palmer’s *Canada’s 1960s*; Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010); Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, *The Canadian War On Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010); Joan Sangster, “Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no.1 (2010), 1-21; and Lee Maracle, *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1990), among others. It was, after all, those who were having difficulty accessing well-paying job opportunities that the government was primarily hearing from prior to this influx as a result of the economic downturn of 1958 (Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 42), and it was upon this basis that the government began forming their policy decisions through to the 1960s. It is not necessarily surprising that more “established” voices were privileged over those whose goals were, as with many women in Vancouver’s downtown neighbourhoods, considered “alternate” points of view, even within the RCSW. It does not change the fact, however, that many voices still went unheard under a merit-based approach to economic equal opportunity.

¹⁵ O’Connor and Ilcan, “The Folding of Liberal Government,” 9.

¹⁶ Clarence Bolt, *Does Canada Matter?: Liberalism and the Illusion of Sovereignty* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 1999), 58.

writes Bolt, “was to save capitalism and not to create some kind of socialist state where political and economic control would devolve to the people, through their governments, and away from corporate and political elites.”¹⁷ This, too, corroborates the argument that the advent of the Canadian social safety net was not motivated by benevolence, but with the preservation of the free market economy in mind.

Regardless of the Canadian government’s intent in its drive for policy reform, the RCSW was clear about its mandate. It aimed to address the state of women’s rights as human beings in Canada and to create better conditions for gender parity in accordance with similar aims stated by the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights, yet it did so without reflecting enough on their own privilege to develop a full scope of what human rights entailed. As noted by Joan Sangster, RCSW commissioners tended to “overlook” the stories of women of colour when they did submit their experiences for the Commission’s consideration.¹⁸ The Canadian state’s precedent for a welfare-liberal meritocracy meant that the Commission was limited in its methodologies and that its recommendations were therefore tilted in favour of recommending solutions for marginalized women that relied less on government and more on women’s inclusion in Canada’s workforce. This, as the RCSW seemed to hope, would bring marginalized women in line with the rest of Canada’s female citizens, ensuring no ‘special treatment’ was any longer required at all.

Despite a dedication to hearing directly from the women it aimed to represent, the RCSW, whether by design, precedent, or resources, did not thoroughly pursue the perspectives of women who were not white and middle-class – who were advocating, in other words, for more complex solutions than free-market economic parity. This chapter

¹⁷ Ibid., 73n.3.

¹⁸ Joan Sangster, “Words of Experience / Experiencing Words: Reading Working Women’s Letters to Canada’s Royal Commission on the Status of Women,” in *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women’s History* (Edmonton: Athabaska University Press, 2011), 388, n52.

unpacks some of the concerns faced by these more marginalized women in Vancouver's downtown neighbourhoods in the 1960s and addresses the Commission's responses to those concerns.

1.2. Unheard or Ignored?: Immigration, Manpower, and Indigenous Women in 1968 Vancouver

In this section, I summarize Canada's immigration policy, the reality of urban Indigenous affairs, and downtown economic stratification in order to illustrate why and how non-white, low-income women in 1968 Vancouver frequently went unacknowledged by federal, provincial, and municipal government policies.¹⁹ I furthermore posit reasons as to why they either did not aim to or did not succeed at representing themselves to the RCSW during its April hearings in Vancouver, making room for advocacy by representatives from outside the community. I conclude that marginalized women in Canada were poorly represented by the RCSW in part due to systemic obstacles to self-representation, but also owing to the RCSW's over-reliance on the labour force as its primary lens for understanding the needs of women in Canada.

1.2.1. Immigrant Women

In the 1960s, Canada was undergoing significant social and political shifts, including in its approach to immigration. Between 1962 and 1978, considerable changes were made to immigration law until it resembled Canada's current system. Until 1962,

¹⁹ As the RCSW, by its own insistence, only held jurisdiction over federal recommendations, federal policy will be my focus. Like the RCSW, however, I will touch on provincial and municipal policy in the end.

however, immigration policy was still invested in trying to “preserve the British character of Canada.”²⁰ Sometimes called the “White Canada policy,” immigration law was still “deeply rooted in the nineteenth century” in its restriction of applications from non-European countries. The limit on the number of South-East Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) migrants allowed into Canada, for example, was capped at 300 per year.²¹ China in particular was also still facing discrimination in its immigration numbers in spite of the 1947 repeal of the 1923 *Immigration Act*.²² The 1966 White Paper on Immigration put into writing an emphasis on skills in the selection of who was to become a “new Canadian,” but as Lisa Marie Jakubowski notes, “these policy changes towards non-discriminatory treatment were not necessarily made in response to popular demand in Canada,” instead being born out of a desire to compete effectively with an increasingly multicultural United States.²³

After 1962, however, changes to Canada’s immigration policy began its shift toward the “points system,” which aimed to attract immigrants to Canada whose professional skills could benefit the Canadian economy “regardless of ‘race,’ religion or country of origin.”²⁴ The post-1962 repeal of the Canadian government’s most discriminatory immigration clauses positively benefited Asian countries and resulted in an influx of East and South-East Asian immigrants into Canada through the 1960s. Until

²⁰ Lisa Marie Jakubowski, *Immigration and the Legalization of Racism* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997), 11.

²¹ Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, *The Punjabis in British Columbia: Location, Labour, First Nations, and Multiculturalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012), 15.

²² Wing Chung Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-1980: the pursuit of identity and power* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 19-20.

²³ Jakubowski, *Immigration and the Legalization of Racism*, 18. The author also notes, however, that the changes were likely themselves responsible for a new openness to multiculturalism among Canadian citizens in the late ‘60s, suggesting that the policy had a significant impact on popular opinion to the point where it might have influenced later progressive changes to the *Immigration Act* by 1978. See *Immigration and the Legalization of Reform*, 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

the release of a revised *Immigration Act* in 1967, however, the repeal on discriminatory intake was “more symbolic than real.”²⁵ The 1966 White Paper on Immigration and the rebranding of the Department of Manpower into the Department of Manpower and Immigration, also in 1966, combined to provide the basis for a 1967 immigration policy that – like Canada’s other policies situated in welfare liberalism – aimed to eradicate inequality by emphasizing equal access to the Canadian labour force and free markets.

In spite of this limited scope, Canada nevertheless saw a significant influx of immigrants from nations previously capped under the law. By the early 1970s, sizeable migrant communities had developed in Vancouver, which, as the largest urban centre in British Columbia, took the province’s majority of incoming migrants. Vancouver had an estimated total Chinese-descended population of 30,640 by 1971 – 8,000 of whom had entered between 1966 and 1970, adding to British Columbia’s already well-established Chinese community. This was about 5 percent of Canada’s total immigration numbers, and about 10 percent of British Columbia’s immigration total for the same period.²⁶ Migrants from India were also coming in at a high rate – more than 5,000 newcomers, or about 3.3 percent of total immigrants to Canada by 1968 – despite considerable limits on immigration earlier in the decade.²⁷

Statistics on immigration to Canada between 1966 and 1970, while available, offer only select datapoints from which we might attempt to deduce the true scope of the

²⁵ Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver*, 19-20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 23. Approximately 10 percent of the 22,496 migrants into British Columbia in 1968 were also from Asian countries; see Library and Archives Canada, RG 33/89, vol.20, “Citizenship and Immigration.” The Asian community was the most significant nonwhite population to enter British Columbia by several percentage points each year in the late 1960s. By these numbers, thousands of women of visible minorities were entering British Columbia each year, yet the “Immigration and Citizenship” chapter of the RCSW’s Final Report made no mention of these demographic shifts. See RCSW Final report, 357-364.

²⁷ Library and Archives Canada, RG 33/89, vol.20, “Citizenship and Immigration.”

influx of non-white immigrants into British Columbia as the RCSW was conducting its inquiry. We know that British Columbia received 13.5 percent of all incoming immigrants to Canada in 1969 and that, according to the RCSW, approximately 51 percent of the 22,496 immigrants into British Columbia in 1968 were women.²⁸ Additionally, we can surmise from regions of origin for 171,845 (18.8 percent) of immigrants to Canada that their being non-white was at least possible – even highly probable.²⁹ Furthermore, approximately 2.8 million Canadians reported a mother tongue other than English or French by 1971.³⁰ From these figures, we might surmise that there were potentially tens of thousands of non-white immigrant women newly establishing themselves in British Columbia at the time that the RCSW was conducting its hearings.

The RCSW noted that 1.5 million women had entered the country since World War Two, and that women concerned about their immigration status were most likely to be found in urban centres.³¹ Neither the Canadian government nor the RCSW were ignorant to the existence and/or emergence of communities of new Canadians. Yet in spite of this, there was no obvious direct representation to the RCSW – in brief or in letter form – from immigrant women who struggled with additional boundaries to locating work or building community in Canada, such as women who faced language barriers or whose racialized status in the eyes of mainstream Canadians made work and/or socializing more difficult.

²⁸ LAC RG 33/89, vol.20, “Citizenship and Immigration.”

²⁹ Department of Manpower and Immigration, *Immigration Statistics, 1956 to 1976*. Statistics, where available, were at times imprecise. From Africa, for example, only Egypt and South Africa were listed separately while all other countries were lumped together. Multinationalism was not represented by these figures. It is impossible to truly understand the scope of nonwhite immigration during this time.

³⁰ Census of Canada, 1971, part 3, table 17.

³¹ RCSW Final Report, 357; LAC RG 33/89, vol.20, “Citizenship and Immigration.”

Some, however, went out of their way to make the RCSW aware that immigrant women were in need of support. H.A. Elliot from Ontario wrote: “Some special attention should be paid by immigration authorities to see that ... women [from non-English speaking countries] are given as much assistance as possible.”³² Overt but not detailed, this letter suggests that some Canadian citizens were capable of observing and understanding obstacles faced by immigrant women, but did not know what might be done. This informational gap may be partially explained by Canada’s new immigration laws; by some accounts, formal advocacy movements utilizing the intersectional clout of “mainly white, English-speaking immigrant women” to support “the work of non-English-speaking, working-class, immigrant women” began to emerge in earnest only in the mid-1970s.³³ The representation of ‘marginal’ interests by proxy in the RCSW’s hearings may have been society’s first step toward a more direct form of advocacy for these women’s interests and needs – a process in which the RCSW certainly played a part.³⁴

Kamala Elizabeth Nayar notes that, in British Columbia in particular, the popular and government discourse around immigrants was shifting at this time from a primarily assimilationist view to an integrationist view. What ‘integration’ meant was that, in theory, immigrants were to be welcomed into existing Anglo-dominated spaces with the aim of interaction and exchange between cultures. “In reality, however,” writes Nayar, “integration amounted to conformity with the dominant Anglo culture.”³⁵ The simultaneous establishment of increased rights for non-European immigrants and the

³² LAC RG 33/89, vol.8, “H.A. Elliot,” no letter enumeration given.

³³ Tania Das Gupta, “Immigrant Women’s Activism: The Past Thirty-Five Years,” in *Race, Racialization, and Antiracism in Canada and Beyond*, ed. Genevieve Fuji Johnson and Randy Enomoto (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 108.

³⁴ If advocacy for non-English-speaking, working-class, immigrant women was already taking place in 1968, it was infrequently supported by similar initiatives by white, middle-class women at the time of the RCSW’s inquiry. Despite repeated attempts, I was unable to find studies describing such advocacy in the late 1960s.

³⁵ Nayar, *The Punjabis in British Columbia*, 15-16.

emphasis on Canada's bilingual and bicultural national identity meant that, though the doors to Canada were newly open to those in many nations previously excluded, they were still landing in a nation that prioritized Anglo- and Franco-culture at the expense of those who wished to build communities of their own.³⁶

Faced with these realities, immigrants in Canada frequently found ways to create their own links to their heritage and backgrounds while also building intracommunity support in their new environments. Wing Chung Ng notes that Vancouver hosted at least one and as many as three Chinese-language newspapers between 1945 and 1980 at any given time.³⁷ Punjabi women in the Skeena region in the late 1960s and early 1970s, meanwhile, collaborated to make their own clothes and sweets, since neither were available outside Vancouver.³⁸ Such efforts may not have been sufficient to prevent feelings of isolation in the context of Anglo-dominant British Columbia, but the latter is one example of ways that immigrant women formed their own sense of community in the absence of support from government or English-speaking allies. It is possible that the very existence of these disparate communities explain why women from migrant communities were less likely to have contributed to the RCSW's inquiry. They had formed community amongst themselves, thereby seeing no pressing need to petition a government more likely to ask them to set aside their cultural practices and identities for the sake of a pan-Canadian experience that relied on integration.

Kamala Elizabeth Nayar notes that studies on the adjustment of immigrants to Canadian society have typically relied on accounts of interactions between the migrant

³⁶ Ibid., 16.

³⁷ Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver*, 7.

³⁸ Nayar, *The Punjabis in British Columbia*, 92.

community and “the Anglo-mainstream.”³⁹ This practice both erases the significance of intracommunity solidarity and ignores the possibility of intercommunity interaction without the Anglo-mainstream’s involvement. The RCSW noted the strength of intracommunity ties among immigrant communities in Canada in its final report, though they also commented that immigrant women in particular were at risk of “find[ing] themselves effectively isolated from the mainstream of Canadian life.”⁴⁰ This observation demonstrated the focus adopted by the RCSW in their analysis of immigrant women: unable to quantify the true level of support offered by those in-community ties, the Commission instead relied on accounts from those external to the communities in question in order to assess immigrant women’s degree of isolation. This method of analysis would permeate the RCSW’s inquiry into the experiences of women whose circumstances were under-represented among letters and briefs, resulting, as argued by Nayar, in initiatives encouraging these women not to rely on the social support systems they had created themselves.

Yet the Commission in fact recognized the importance of holistic support for immigrant women. The Final Report argued for government-provided training and language programs for immigrant women that took social factors – as well as government immigration concerns – into account.⁴¹ The actions suggested by the Commission in establishing these centres, in order to be sure that these concerns were well-balanced, were considerable: from assistance for voluntary organizations in helping to bridge the gaps of social support faced by these women, government support was

³⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁰ RCSW Final report, 361.

⁴¹ Ibid., 361-362.

heavily emphasized in the aid options for immigrant women.⁴² None of these suggestions were bad suggestions; however, one could argue these are all things the RCSW itself might have done, since its mandate was to get to the bottom of women's circumstances and needs across Canada. The RCSW appeared to be calling for another inquiry into the true circumstances of immigrant women altogether, and for voluntary associations – arguably a part of the “Anglo mainstream” identified by Nayar – to pick up the slack in the meantime.⁴³

If the RCSW was perceived by immigrant communities as part of a government that was concerned more with an assimilationist agenda, immigrant women may well not have gone out of their way to seek RCSW representation. It remains unclear whether they might have welcomed, been indifferent to, or even declined the option of direct representation if consulted. As the Commission sent out its call for letters and briefs through major newspapers and advertisements likely only in English and French, it is not clear whether immigrant communities were even aware of the Commission's existence. Proxies for these women, meanwhile, may or may not have extended the offer to assist them in representing themselves to the RCSW either. Regardless, the RCSW appeared unmotivated to branch out from their focus on how economic opportunity could help Canadian women integrate into – and in their view, thrive – in Canadian society. I expand on this argument in Chapter 2.

⁴² Ibid., 210. Notably, the Commission also calls on government to “review language training programmes in order to ensure that the needs of immigrant women are being met” (210). Several pages of Chapter 8 of the RCSW's Final Report also call for the end to changes in women's immigration status should they divorce their husbands after landing in Canada; see RCSW Final Report, 362-364.

⁴³ Apart from the two sections cited above, immigrant women are mentioned only one other time in the RCSW's Final Report. The RCSW notes that voluntary associations had carried the brunt of immigrant support programs to date, and called for additional funding to allow them to overhaul existing programs. The message was clear: while another inquiry was sorting out the actual needs of immigrant women, volunteers would continue to implement programs that the government declined to provide. See RCSW Final Report, 47; 49.

1.2.2. Indigenous Women

Indigenous women were under-represented in letters and briefs submitted to the RCSW. They were particularly under-represented in the case of Vancouver's letters and briefs given that several thousand Indigenous women were estimated to have lived in Vancouver's downtown neighbourhoods in the late 1960s. Although an estimated 27 percent of Indigenous and Métis persons lived off-reserve by 1964, and although those living off-reserve tended to move to urban areas, only one of the 122 letters received from British Columbians mentioned Indigenous women at all, and that reference was made merely in passing and in the broader context of marital desertion.⁴⁴ Views of Indigenous women, as presented to the Commission on a nationwide basis, differed greatly (and perhaps unsurprisingly) depending on the source. This section aims to break down the various portrayals of Indigenous women in letters to the Commission in order to give context to the case study of the East-Enders Society, detailed in Chapter 3.

As noted by Bryan Palmer, Indigenous activism in the 1960s is under-represented in Canadian scholarship.⁴⁵ Scholarship on Indigenous persons in urban centres is additionally hindered by the fact that the Bureau of Statistics did not keep records on Indigenous populations in the 1960s.⁴⁶ As evidenced by the writings of (among others) Jeannette Armstrong and the creation of the Vancouver-based Native Alliance of Red Power in 1968, however, it is obvious there was considerable activism

⁴⁴ Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 380. Particularly as the Department of Indian Affairs did not record statistics on Indigenous populations during this time, it is difficult to understand the population migration patterns of Indigenous women at the time of the RCSW inquiry. It is certain – based on claims made by representatives from the East-Enders Society from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside – that some Indigenous women were living in the city by 1968. See Chapter 3 for expansion on this topic.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁴⁶ Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 190.

led by Indigenous women in 1960s Vancouver.⁴⁷ A recent article by Meghan Longstaffe analyzes how activism emerged in the Downtown Eastside in response to increasing rates of disappearance among Indigenous women beginning as early as 1961.⁴⁸ Furthermore, emerging movements for Indigenous rights in the late 1960s, argues Lee Maracle, wound up refocusing their efforts in response to the 1969 White Paper, taking on a more liberalist approach to policy.⁴⁹

The 1969 White Paper reflected a broader trend in federal approaches to a “policy of cultural assimilation to eliminate special status for Canada’s First Peoples.”⁵⁰ Prior to launching the White Paper, Jean Chrétien, then Minister of Department of Indian and Northern Development, hosted “a series of public forums... to hear Native peoples’ perspectives on their experiences of discrimination and their recommendations for policy reform” – much, one assumes, in the same way that the RCSW hosted its hearings.⁵¹ The result of these hearings was the conclusion by the federal government that the special treatment of Indigenous persons in Canada “produced racial segregation and a lack of viable access to housing, education, and jobs, which, in turn, resulted in Natives being excluded from the rights, privileges, and opportunities afforded to all Canadian citizens.”⁵² Despite the government’s intentions, for Indigenous peoples, the 1969 White Paper “represented a stark return to a nineteenth-century anti-Indian assimilationist

⁴⁷ Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 368.

⁴⁸ Meghan Longstaffe, “Indigenous Women as Newspaper Representations: Violence and Action in 1960s Vancouver,” *Canadian Historical Review* 98, no.2 (June 2017), 230-260.

⁴⁹ Maracle, *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, 218-219.

⁵⁰ Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson, *Seeing Red: A history of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 157.

⁵¹ Joanne Barker, “Gender, Sovereignty, and the Discourse of Rights in Native Women’s Activism,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 7, no.1 (2006), 134.

⁵² *Ibid.*

agenda.”⁵³ Already-forming activist movements were spurred to new action with the aim of defending Indigenous rights in response to a government ignorant to the fact that Indigenous people either did not only want the same opportunities that were afforded to other Canadians, or could not access them without additional support.

Elucidating on theories of differentiated citizenship and what that has meant for Indigenous women in Canada, Joyce Green suggests that “breaking with the state’s historic stance of inclusion... of citizens through assimilation into the dominant culture” requires the “recogni[tion of] their identities and economic, social and cultural locations in politically significant ways.”⁵⁴ Yet Barbara Freeman notes that the Commission favoured an “assimilationist line” when it came to treating the concerns of Indigenous women as well.⁵⁵ If the Canadian government believed, as Freeman argues, that “improved living standards and an adequate education were the tools that would help [Indigenous people] both survive and achieve equality,” the question arises as to whether these beliefs, if shared by the Commission, led them away from answering questions – or even asking them – about the circumstances specific to Indigenous women in favour of following government rationales, which were already straying from what many Indigenous people sought.⁵⁶ The Commission, overtly concerned with the questions of education and living standards of all women in Canada, may well have concluded from their “white perspective” that “all ‘Indians,’ ‘Eskimos’ and ‘Métis’ naturally aspired to the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Green, “Canaries in the Mines,” 719.

⁵⁵ Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 188.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 189.

same housing, education, work opportunities, and medical services as other Canadians” – yet questions of sovereignty remained unacknowledged in the RCSW’s inquiry.⁵⁷

Put another way, the Commission’s commitment to their stated ‘special treatment principle’ fell short when their inquiry did not sufficiently investigate the actual circumstances and needs of Indigenous women. The letter-writers that did address the circumstances of Indigenous women often called for special treatment for Indigenous women and were disregarded. Marjorie George from West Vancouver wrote to the Commission that formal education on the subject of women’s rights and legal recourse for women who have been deserted by their husbands ought to be instituted not just for all women, but “should be made a must in schools of Indians or ones with a large percentage of Indians +/- ‘new Canadians’.” Commissioner John Stewart’s reply to George’s letter made apparent that no “special treatment” was intended at all: “The work of the Commission is to improve the status of women at all levels and among all racial or ethnic groups who reside in Canada.”⁵⁸ From Alberta, a Métis woman also wrote to the Commission explaining the paucity of employment opportunities for women, pointing to the history of Indigenous women in particular being denied employment for so long under the erroneous view that they did not require paid work. In contrast, a white woman wrote to the Commission claiming that Indigenous women were innately well-suited for domestic work – a very racialized assumption, and far from an attempt at advocacy or representation.⁵⁹

Freeman suggests that one reason for the insufficient attention to the circumstances and needs of Indigenous women was “perhaps because these women’s

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 7, letter 1-96, Marjorie George.

⁵⁹ Joan Sangster, “Words of Experience,” 376

concerns were not considered of enough interest, or a substantial threat to the gender status quo.”⁶⁰ On the other hand, as “native people are most often presented in relation to white values and norms, usually in ‘conflict’ with them,” the Commission may simply not have had the methodological or statistical tools available to them to attempt a more thorough representation of Indigenous women in Canada.⁶¹

They did not, after all, ignore the question of Indigenous needs altogether. A considerable section of the Final Report’s Education section attempts to paint a nuanced view of difficulties experienced in Indigenous communities in Canada’s north, citing generational differences; an urban versus rural divide; the complicated history of Northern and Indigenous education, housing, and development; and the undereducation of government officials on the realities of Northern and Indigenous women.⁶² Elsewhere, the RCSW called for reform to labour laws to support oft-ignored forms of Indigenous work – particularly around the making and sale of Indigenous crafts – and freely acknowledged that Indigenous women were among Canada’s poorest residents.⁶³ Based on a brief out of Edmonton, the Commission also did their best to piece together statistics reflecting Indigenous women in urban centres, noting that Indigenous women, particularly those leaving reserves for urban centres for the first time, were “severely handicap[ped]” in their pursuit of work because of their “background” – because, in other

⁶⁰ Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 188.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

⁶² RCSW Final Report, 210-217. Ironically, the Commission did not significantly self-reflect on their own education on the realities of Northern and Indigenous women at the time of their hearings in British Columbia; they may have soon found their views challenged, however, when they went to the territories to conduct additional hearings in November of 1968. To the Commission’s credit, they did incorporate concerns voiced in one brief authored by Indigenous women, which called for teachers and government officials coming into the North to be educated prior to arrival, and for the involvement and employment of Indigenous people in the creation of curriculae in their recommendations. See RCSW Final Report, 215.

⁶³ RCSW Final Report, 147; 328-331.

words, they were Indigenous women.⁶⁴ Their recommendations noted that “the provision of girls’ hostels” may help women “adjusting to a new way of living,” as might “friendship centres,” which “should be staffed by native people and should provide social facilities, meals and information about local services.” These centres ought to have been funded, according to the Commission, as voluntary organizations by all levels of government.⁶⁵

As these recommendations appear to have been taken directly from briefs received by the RCSW that had been authored by Indigenous women, the RCSW may have done what they could, using the methodologies they had available and the information that they were provided. Yet their recommendations did not provide information on the kinds of special treatment these women might be offered in pursuit of stability. That comments on the needs of Indigenous women in Canada’s urban centres were interspersed among comments about reserves and Northern education suggests that the RCSW was ill-equipped to answer questions about what it was that Indigenous women in urban centres actually wanted or needed. The suggestion for community centres run by Indigenous persons and funded by the government is not a bad one; it could be said that it shows a degree of understanding and provides for an environment of self-determination. But while some voluntary organizations may have jumped at the opportunity to form their own policy with government funding – like, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the East-Enders Society – the impression was nevertheless one of pushing responsibility for social welfare away from the purview of the federal government.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 330.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

1.3. The RCSW: Commissions, Advocacy, Government, and Compromise

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women, as noted above, met with both successes and failures in their endeavour to advocate on behalf of women whose voices commonly went unheard by the government in 1960s Canada. Hindered in part by welfare liberalism, mired in implied meritocracy, and perhaps additionally hindered by resource allocation, the RCSW behaved predictably as a government body comprised of white women and men from a middle-class socioeconomic background. The active pursuit of participation from marginalized women, or recommendations placing greater emphasis on self-determination and de-emphasized mere government funding to voluntary organizations, would have resulted in better support for women whose goals and needs may not have matched those of white, English-speaking, middle-class Canadian women.

The RCSW's implementation of "special treatment" among its guiding principles made all the more significant that special treatment for marginalized groups was often not identified or proposed. This oversight or inattention may have been due to the organization's nature as an extension of government. As argued by Matthew R. Keller, "commissions typically reflect negotiated efforts to justify and circumscribe the role of the state."⁶⁶ The Commission, aware that their primary audience would be the federal government, may have tempered their recommendations to appear moderate in spite of their recognition of differing degrees of need among women in Canada to reach a position of greater equality.

⁶⁶ Matthew R. Keller, "When Is the State's Gaze Focused? British Royal Commissions and the Bureaucratization of Conflict," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 27, no. 2 (June 2014), 207.

Keller argues that Royal Commissions by their nature rely on, engage in, and perpetuate a “cycle of bureaucratization, in which government inquiries progressively mov[e] ... toward increasingly generalizing, systemic claims about their subjects.”⁶⁷ Even though Commissions are called generally to produce recommendations and solutions that the state on its own could not, they can be hobbled from the outset “precisely because their conclusions are seen by powerful interests as diverging too far from acceptable policy outcomes.”⁶⁸ The RCSW, then – suspended in a state of “middle ground” appeasement between an agitated public and a government that aimed to bolster an economy to create political support – was tasked with what was perhaps impossible: to promote social ease, government interest, and investment in a strong free market while truly representing the interests of a diverse Canadian population.

The Commission’s greatest success was that, for many, they provided a willingness to listen to tales of discrimination against women – itself a source of healing for some. It operated best as a basic platform on which some women’s voices could be heard. The Commission endeavoured to send personal responses to each of the more than 1,000 letters it received, and some women in marginal positions found great relief in being acknowledged. Though the Commission’s internal notes frequently identified personal letters as offering “no value” to the creation of policy solutions to women’s plights in Canada – often, notably, to those that articulated systemic and significant problems in women’s lives – for many, it was enough to be heard. One woman noted in her letter that, after attending an RCSW hearing, she found she could pray again for the first time in years.⁶⁹ One woman, writing just to tell her story to someone who might

⁶⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 207-208.

⁶⁹ LAC RG 33/89, vol, 8., Carrie Berndtson, no letter designation given. The treatment of Mrs. Berndtson’s letters to the Commission is significant – so fervent was her correspondence, most of

appreciate it, said, “I talked myself into this [mental] institution and I talked myself out of it.” She then added: “(My tongue still gets me in and out of trouble – ha, ha – I shall treasure it always.)”⁷⁰ These letters may have had “no value” for the Commission, but to the women who penned them, each one mattered. The RCSW offered many women something crucial that they had heretofore lacked: a repository for their experiences to be acknowledged, recorded, and heard.

Going forward, the aim of this study is to identify opportunities where the Commission might have found an opportunity to recommend “special treatment” solutions to conditions of marginalization for poor, immigrant, and Indigenous women, using Vancouver as a lens. Chapter 2 discusses the Templeton brief, compiled by high school students attending Templeton Secondary in Vancouver’s Hastings–Sunrise neighbourhood. While students with significant immigrant representation compiled the brief, the representation of their mothers’ circumstances and needs was nevertheless delivered by proxy – a representation further complicated by the students’ white, middle-class teachers and the newspaper media, which misrepresented the students’ testimony at Vancouver’s RCSW hearing on April 18, 1968. Chapter 3, meanwhile, focuses on the Downtown Eastside, and the brief from the East-Enders Society, which aimed to highlight the specific and persistent needs of the women living in poverty in the area.

In delving into these case studies, I aim to underscore that the RCSW, presented with a complex and nuanced picture of women whose voices were marginalized in Canadian society, were unable to overcome some obstacles because of the way they interpreted proxied representations of those women. The RCSW itself placed frames on

it on the subject of prayer and mental illness, that Commissioner John Stewart finally replied with a false claim that the Commission was no longer accepting letters after October 1, 1968. Mrs. Berndtson did thank them for inviting her to the Regina hearings; speaking to the Commission in whatever form was clearly spiritually significant to her.

⁷⁰ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 8, letter 5-150, Alice Whelan.

each of these briefs, affected by its origin in governments who were pushing for considerable “urban renewal” initiatives through the postwar decades. Like these urban renewal efforts, the Commission’s solutions involved initial government intervention, but did not offer sustained support for the establishment or maintenance of a more egalitarian social environment. As a result, the Commission did not represent long-term and valid options for the “special treatment” of these women as thoroughly as Commissioners might have had they not been influenced by settler-colonialism, welfare liberalism, and merit-based free-market success. Amidst the Commission’s successes – which I shall also identify – its failures stemmed from complicity with a government whose primary mandate was to dampen social unrest in ways that privileged neither welfare nor equality.

Chapter 2.

“Small United Nations” or “Birds in a Cage”: Immigrant Women In Students’, Administrators’, and Newspapers’ Eyes

In a written brief received by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in February of 1968, Templeton Secondary School was described by social studies teacher Donald Sage as a “small United Nations.”¹ Located at the heart of what is today Vancouver’s Hastings–Sunrise neighbourhood,² Templeton Secondary boasted the children of immigrants as a significant percentage – about 48 percent – of its student body.³ Based on Sage’s summary of “about 1,500 ideas suggested by the young people” who took part in his study, the RCSW invited Sage and Templeton’s students to present their findings at Vancouver’s oral hearing on April 18, 1968.⁴

Accompanied by school counselor Frances Fleming and students Alida Bianchi and Loredana d’Elia, Sage led the presentation on the findings accumulated from among 1,007 of the 1,883 students attending Templeton Secondary in the 1967–1968 school year. Though Sage spoke first and with authority on the study’s findings, the oral brief was remarkable for its diverging perspectives on the needs and circumstances of the community’s immigrant women, depending on whether administrators or students were

¹ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195, appendix.

² Hastings–Sunrise is bordered by Nanaimo St. to the west, E Broadway to the south, Boundary Rd. to the east, and Burrard Inlet to the north.

³ The appendix provided statistics for the demographic breakdown of the school’s 1,883 students, though Sage does not state how these statistics were acquired. Only 52 percent of the school, per Sage’s statistics, identified themselves as “Canadian” or “English,” with those of Italian heritage weighing in at 16 percent and students of Chinese heritage accounting for 9.5 percent of the school’s student body. It is assumed, based on the percentages given, that students were only able to identify themselves by one ethnic marker. See LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195, appendix.

⁴ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195.

speaking. While Sage and Fleming generally characterized immigrant women as fearful and passive, Alida Bianchi and – to a lesser extent – Loredana d’Elia spoke to the nuanced agency and ambitions they perceived among the mothers of Templeton students.



Map 2. Templeton region, now part of Hastings–Sunrise

Looking at the separate testimonies of each of the oral brief’s four presenters, this chapter aims to break down the Templeton brief and its responses by parts. First, I deconstruct the written brief submitted by Sage, focusing on how he chose to report the results of the student-conducted study. I argue that though both Sage and the Templeton students presented similar statistics about the school’s demographic composition, the frame imposed by Sage’s point of view was quite different from the interpretation presented by the students themselves. While Sage commented primarily on the perspectives of the school’s students, the students themselves commented instead on the preferences and desires of their mothers: the women of Templeton. As a

result, Sage's presentation did not represent the needs of immigrant women to the RCSW, even though he had been called to the oral hearing in Vancouver for this purpose.

Second, I describe the comments offered at the oral hearing by counselor Frances Fleming. Though Fleming's level of participation in the written brief's compilation was unclear, she nevertheless spent several minutes at the oral hearing expanding on her observations on the experiences and needs of immigrant women, based on her interactions with students' mothers in her capacity as school counselor. One of the students who spoke after Fleming, Loredana d'Elia, repeated some of Fleming's remarks about the fearfulness of Templeton's immigrant women. I argue that Fleming's position as a white, middle-class school administrator limited her interactions with Templeton's immigrant women and did not constitute an adequate basis for testimony. That she did testify, and that her observations matched the testimony of student Loredana d'Elia but not Alida Bianchi, added a veneer of validity to d'Elia's testimony in the eyes of both the Commission and the newspaper media covering the hearing. Comparatively, Alida Bianchi's testimony was underrepresented in both RCSW and media discussions – possibly owing to the fact that neither school administrator shared her perspective on the needs and circumstances of immigrant women. Fleming's presence and testimony, in other words, may have added credibility to one interpretation over another, even though she may not have had sufficient exposure to the issues to possess expertise.

Third, I analyze the testimonies offered at the oral hearing by d'Elia and Bianchi, the two students. While Bianchi spoke eloquently and at length about Templeton mothers' competence, community, and strength, d'Elia's argument was more ambiguous, repeating some information that had been articulated by Sage and Fleming

in their assessments of how alienated immigrant women felt in Canadian society. Consequently, Bianchi's differing perspective went largely ignored in both mainstream media coverage and in the RCSW's summary of the Templeton brief. I argue that, even though the RCSW used d'Elia's comments to frame their primary recommendation on the education of immigrant women, the testimony offered by both students was undervalued in the Final Report compared with the testimony offered by Donald Sage in both written and verbal forms.

In the chapter's final section, I break down the frames imposed by the mainstream media in their coverage of the Templeton brief as a whole. In presenting immigrant women as fearful, backward, and un-Canadian, the media justified the intervention of state groups in the integration of immigrant women into mainstream Canadian society without considering the needs or realities of the community itself. Reporters intentionally altered details from Bianchi's and d'Elia's testimonies, often in favour of details offered by Sage and Fleming, in order to meet the corporate, political, and social pressures faced by newspaper media in the 1960s. I suggest that both the RCSW and Canada's mainstream media contributed to a public perception of immigrant women as fearful and 'Other,' encouraging or reinforcing a socially conservative public response, thereby justifying a low-investment solution by the government to contribute to the welfare of immigrants in Canada.

2.1. “Our Young People”: School Administrators and Proxied Representation from a Distance

Born in 1918 in Kingston, Ontario, Walter Donald MacKinnon Sage began teaching at Templeton Secondary in the 1960s while also serving as President of the

United Empire Loyalists' Association, Vancouver branch.⁵ The written brief submitted to the RCSW in February of 1968, compiled from results of studies conducted by students about students, bore only Sage's name. Sage's aim in conducting the social studies project that would eventually fuel the Templeton brief was to collect more information on his students' home lives and perspectives on women more broadly, which suggests that the abundance of information Sage eventually received on the lives of immigrant women was an unintended outcome of the study's methods.⁶

While well-intentioned, Sage's prominent involvement in the submission and presentation of the brief to the RCSW resulted in the government's and media's privileging of Sage's comments over those offered by d'Elia and Bianchi, even though the students were in closer social proximity to their mothers. In its continuous positioning of diversity and nationalities at the forefront of both the written and oral versions of the brief, each articulated two quite different perspectives: the administrators' interpretations of students' comments on women's place in society; and the students' representations of the experiences of their immigrant mothers. In neither case were the voices of immigrant women directly heard: each account was offered from different degrees of proxy from

⁵ City of Vancouver Archives, "Walter Donald McKinnon Sage collection," <http://searcharchives.vancouver.ca/walter-donald-mackinnon-sage-collection>. See also Glenbow Museum Calgary, "MacKinnon/Sage family fonds," <http://www.glenbow.org/collections/search/findingAids/archhtml/mackinnon.cfm#series4>. As the survey Sage used to compile his results was not part of the brief he submitted to the RCSW, the true intentions behind the survey remain unknown. It seems possible that Sage compiled the survey with the RCSW in mind. As many of the questions asked students about their views on women working outside the home, he may have intended to send results to the Commission all along. If the results about immigrant families were surprising to him, however, the questions in the survey likely created an impression about these communities that was not representative owing to Sage's position of proxy. In this case, the students' accounts of their mothers' lives should certainly have been given more weight than Sage's and Fleming's in the oral hearing, but as we shall see below, they were not.

⁶ Library and Archives Canada, Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada fonds, audio recording ISN#226791, Regional Hearing: Vancouver, Disc 5 of 7, 1:22:18-1:22:48. See also LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195.

immigrant women, with the students speaking from a position of immediate proxy and the administrators speaking from a considerably further degree of removal.



Figure 1 Templeton Brief presenters. Vancouver Sun, April 19, 1968, p.68

In the oral hearing in April, Sage opened with commentary on the diversity of the student body. “Our school is a very exciting one,” he said – “We have some 2,000 students. . . . It’s a fascinating area to see 36 different racial groups working together.”⁷ Sage went on to explain that there was no infighting among “racial groups”; instead,

⁷ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:22:21-1:22:38

camaraderie was common among students from diverse backgrounds.⁸ Many of these hearing comments had already been expressed in the written brief that had been submitted to the Commission in February, two months earlier:

The students come from many racial origins and to mention a few, the origins are: Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Yugoslav, German, Russian and North American Indian. What makes the situation most interesting is that our school is like a small United Nations. Unlike the UN itself there is little quarreling amongst the racial groups. Many of the young people are of Anglo-Saxon origin. The remainder are from the foregoing nationalities. **Because of their backgrounds, our young people were rather conservative on their views of the role of women in Canadian society.**⁹

Later in the brief, Sage identified the students' seeming desire for their mothers not to work outside the home, unless necessary, until their children were 14 to 16 years old.¹⁰ Again, he implied that the students' racial backgrounds contributed to their viewpoints:

The students are against this idea [of a woman's role being to stay at home all her life]. They [the students] wanted the girls to get out and earn money in society and get used to living in Canadian society before marriage.... The students were quite explicit that a wife should not work unless it is a case of dire necessity when the children are less than sixteen years old.... Because most of the fathers do not receive very high salaries the mothers are almost duty-bound to go out and supplement the family income by: clerking in stores, working in furniture factories, laboring in fish canneries, etc. ... When the children are less than say fourteen the symbol of the

⁸ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:22:42-1:22:50

⁹ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰ The written brief often conflated "married women" with the students' mothers, as though the terms were interchangeable. I default to "students' mothers" unless another meaning is clearly intended, as the students – whose responses informed all stages of this report – were arguably not in a position to comment on all married women in the same way they were positioned to report on their mothers.

‘mother in the home’ meets with the approval of the students. Perhaps this can be accounted for by the concept of being in agreement with the European and Oriental traditional tenets of the mother’s position.”¹¹

Approximately 56 percent of the 1,007 students surveyed to generate the figures for this brief reported that their mothers were not employed outside the home. This statistic, too, was attributed by Sage to the realities of “traditional [eastern and central] European and Oriental backgrounds.”¹² The Commission analysts who responded internally to the written brief echoed these sentiments: “About half the students are first-generation Canadians,” read a report attached to the back of Sage’s brief, “and their views reflect the cultural bias towards women of their ‘European and Oriental-born parents.”¹³

Though Sage contributed much of the written brief to the Commission, the Commission heard at greater length in the oral hearing from guidance counselor Frances Fleming. Although there was no indication that Fleming was significantly involved in the project, she nevertheless was called upon to summarize what she viewed as a majority perspective about women’s rights from among the student body:

Their [the students’] philosophy of work for women seems to be this: that one works to earn needed money. . . . The average student identifies just two periods in a woman’s life when she should work: ... when they leave school, to gain experience in the world and to earn some money to help set up a home. Then they feel that the young lady, when she has a

¹¹ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195, emphasis mine. In the context of the brief, “European” appears not to refer to Anglo-European but rather to central and eastern European nations such as Italy and Yugoslavia, as represented by Bianchi and d’Elia’s presence at the hearing. For more on the prejudice faced by Eastern Europeans in postwar Canada, see Franca Iacovetta, “Making Model Citizens: Gender, Corrupted Democracy, and Immigrant and Refugee Reception Work in Cold War Canada,” in *Whose National Security? Canadian State Surveillance and the Creation of Enemies*, edited by Gary Kinsman, Dieter Buse, and Mercedes K. Steedman (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2000), 154-167. This Othering of Eastern European women was closely connected to Cold War fears and politics, which may be influencing Sage’s rhetoric here.

¹² LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195.

¹³ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195, appendix.

family, should retire to the home. And when her family is partly grown – and this is when the large family and when the, uh, father’s wage may be inadequate as a labourer, they feel that now it’s mother’s duty to go out again into the world and to supplement the family income. Partly as a break for mother to get away from her large family, and partly because this money coming in means a much more enriched life for the family. These students, [inaudible] many students, like the feeling of security of having mother in the home – this is partly the European and Oriental pattern – and secondly they just like the service that mother gives them in the home.¹⁴

Acting as a proxy for the viewpoints of her students, Fleming was not representing immigrant women at their behest. In representing her students’ views on what their mothers wanted – a position of “removed proxy,” in other words – Fleming inserted her own observations on the subject of what students’ mothers faced in Canadian society.¹⁵ Claiming that many of the mothers of Templeton students “speak through their daughters as interpreters,” Fleming concluded that “the mothers of immigrant families have no opportunity or time or money to learn English adequately.” This, claimed Fleming, “serves to isolate the mother in the home,” and perhaps justified in her mind the use of proxies to represent the needs of immigrant women.¹⁶

Fleming’s observations matched a common sentiment in Canadian society about immigrants: that, without a social and linguistic interpreter, they were hopelessly isolated. Before either d’Elia or Bianchi could speak at the hearing, Fleming had, on the

¹⁴ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:12:10-1:13:34

¹⁵ As touched upon in my introductory chapter, my theory of proxy roughly combines standpoint theory with frame theory. If the students of Templeton were representing their mothers with a particular frame, and Fleming was representing the students’ representation, it becomes hard to understand which observations were from Fleming; from the students; or from the women themselves. Fleming’s testimony was therefore even less likely to be accurate due to her lack of proximity to the position of being an immigrant woman in Templeton district. I use “removed proxy” as shorthand for this relationship going forward.

¹⁶ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:13:49-1:14:29

basis of students' observations as well as her own assumptions, already advocated for a multilingual training program on television and radio to help instruct immigrant women on Canadian laws and social customs, as well as in the English language and – if desired – in vocational training.¹⁷ She did not indicate to what extent Sage's social studies project influenced her views, and the presentation of her own views following a summary of the student's wishes made ambiguous the line where students' views ended and her own opinions began. As argued below, this allowed institutional authorities such as the RCSW and the newspaper media to blur the lines between students' preferences and those of the administrators, and particularly between immigrant women's understandings and those of school officials.

In the cases of all presenters, testimonies were seen to speak for immigrant women. Yet immigrant women did not represent themselves in either the written or oral iterations of the Templeton briefs. Their needs were instead represented by various proxies, each of which was progressively more and more removed from the community itself. Bianchi and d'Elia, expressly identified as first-generation immigrants, occupied a position of immediate proxy: though not themselves immigrant women, they were intimately familiar with the realities of their lives and perhaps shared a great deal of experience with immigrant women in adjusting to Canadian society. Fleming, if unintentionally, hit the nail on the head in her testimony: Bianchi and d'Elia acted as interpreters for their mothers, just as the Templeton student body interpreted their mother's lives in the course of Sage's social study project. Sage and Fleming, on the other hand, occupied a position of more removed proxy – there was no demand for their interpretation of immigrant women's experiences. With such a high degree of separation between the Canadian-born administrators and the immigrant women they aimed to

¹⁷ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:15:27-1:16:15

represent, the relationship of proxy became considerably less viable, particularly since – from the information we have – Sage and Fleming presented their testimonies without direct consultation or consent from the community in question.

Among the consequences of the representation of immigrants' concerns by proxy was the additional degree of removal between the policymakers – in this case, the Royal Commission – and members of the community pursuing advocacy. The students at Templeton Secondary who participated in the social studies survey were already serving as proxies for their mothers, and when Sage delivered an aggregate interpretation of their findings to the Commission, an additional layer of proxy was established: Sage and Fleming acted as proxies for the proxies for immigrant women (that is, the students). The RCSW's Final Report took serious account of the testimonies of Sage and Fleming despite their degree of removal from the community they represented. In doing so, the RCSW imparted to Canada's federal government an indirect account (the RCSW's findings) of an indirect account (Sage and Fleming's observations) of a list of needs delivered by proxy (the students) on the concerns of immigrant women.

In cases where linguistic, institutional, and other barriers were present, proxies have been historically useful tools for advocacy. As evidenced by chief Commissioner Florence Bird's concerns that the Commission "might not hear from ... in-between groups," representation by proxy could at times enable the discussion of concerns that may not have otherwise been addressed by the RCSW due to obstacles to self-representation.¹⁸ In the cases of a number of immigrant women, the presence of linguistic, social, or cultural barriers to approaching the Commission themselves seems

¹⁸ LAC RCSW fonds, ISN#226790, 1 of 7, 0:49:30-0:49:38

possible. The use of their children or another official proxy to represent their views may well have been a useful, even conscious strategy for some.¹⁹

The additional testimony from institutional figures such as Sage and Fleming, however, presented an obstacle for the Commission in terms of understanding the actual circumstances and needs of immigrant communities. It might be said that the students, though imposing a frame on their mothers' experiences, were at least informed by proximity and experience of similar conditions. Sage and Fleming – despite managing information provided by the students – were more likely to have instead imposed a frame informed by their own experiences as middle-class Canadians and members of the existing educational infrastructure.

The Commission, in subsequent evaluations of the Templeton brief, did not indicate to what extent they took Sage and Fleming's testimonies into account when creating their recommendations. As seen below, the newspaper media more overtly took their testimonies as completely representative of immigrant women's experiences, without fully considering the students' perspectives, even though the students were closer to their mothers. Sage and Fleming, in speaking on behalf of immigrant women without consultation, may have acted more to the detriment of immigrant women than if they had stayed silent and allowed the students alone to speak.

¹⁹ Kamala Elizabeth Nayar also offers accounts of the experiences of isolation and difficulty relating to others among Punjabi women newly immigrated to British Columbia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. See *The Punjabis in British Columbia*, 86-92.

2.2. “To Them It Means Everything”: Templeton Students As Proxies for Their Mothers

In weighing the evidence presented by the two students at the RCSW hearing in Vancouver, the Commission and the newspaper media prioritized the interpretations of one over the other. Sixteen-year-old Loredana d’Elia’s comments about immigrant women in the Templeton district were quoted repeatedly, paraphrased, and interpreted by internal and external sources alike in an endeavor to understand the experiences and needs of the community. Yet 17-year-old Alida Bianchi, the first of the students to speak before the Commission, spoke at more length and with significant confidence about the needs and desires of students’ mothers in the region, with little acknowledgement from any of the sources reporting on the brief.

Bianchi, who spoke first following Fleming’s statement, offered significant points of contradiction to elements of Sage’s testimony. She noted that she did not feel as though mothers needed to stay in the home for the sake of teenagers, who preferred independence. She also argued that paid work, regardless of the level of commitment, would likely benefit their newly-immigrant mothers. Speaking from her own experience in a family that had emigrated from Yugoslavia, Bianchi said:

[Women] come here to Canada and they find work maybe in a factory sewing little odds and ends, you know, very simple work, but to them it’s the world. ... It may not be much to many of you, but to them it means everything, and they don’t need that extra special training to become a board of directors [sic] somewhere. It’s just being able to bring a little money to help their families and husbands along.²⁰

²⁰ LAC RCSW fonds, ISN#226791, Disc 5, 1:18:42.-1:19:20

According to Bianchi, any opportunity to work had the potential to improve the quality of life for immigrant women, whether it be on a board of directors or otherwise. This “board of directors” line from Bianchi became the most referenced line from her testimony in the newspaper media, as we shall see below.

Of the four presenters, Bianchi was also the only one to offer an overt recommendation on how to better support immigrant women in their pursuit of employment outside the home: “[A government-run bureau] would protect the rights of working women in matters such as inadequate wages, exploitation because of race or handicap, or – of course – the ever-present idea of the ‘weaker sex,’ in quotations.”²¹ Bianchi’s recommendation included shared authority between the provincial and federal governments for such a bureau to ensure that local as well as national needs were being met.²² Bianchi, more than other presenters for the Templeton brief, had done research to support her observations and arguments; yet she and her contributions were not mentioned in the Commission’s report and were rarely mentioned in the newspaper media.

Another point touched on by Bianchi was the significance of financial necessity as a factor in the Templeton community’s preferences, not only in terms of work but also broader social policy issues. Bianchi observed that a mother’s desire or financial need to work had to be balanced with the gendered issue of daycare: “Mothers would much sooner stay home with their children and care for them, as is the tradition in European countries, than go out and work and make a very low wage and have to pay it out to the

²¹ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:17:24-1:17:35

²² LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:17:38-1:17:49

government to pay strangers to come into their home or take their children out and take care of them.”²³

Bianchi was speaking to the complexity of the issues faced by immigrant women in the Templeton community, but her comment was also remarkable in its contrast with Donald Sage’s perspective on daycare in Templeton. In the written brief, Sage indicated that “our young people are against working mothers of students less than say sixteen so they would not welcome the taxpayers being involved in paying for such centres.”²⁴ Bianchi’s comment instead alluded to the agency of women in the neighbourhood by articulating their conscious balancing of preferences and needs, thereby challenging the notion that immigrant women were left out of their own decisionmaking. In presenting her testimony, Bianchi effectively corrected Sage’s stated misconception, noting that immigrant women may have been opposed to daycare because the money it would have cost for the government to offer them daycare could work in contravention to the financial stability of immigrant families. This depth was overlooked by commentators on the Templeton brief, to the detriment of community members.

Bianchi’s remarks suggested that students were not always concerned primarily with their own happiness and comfort, as Sage conveyed, but could instead be concerned with their mothers’ desires and the needs of the family. Although some students may, as Sage and Fleming suggested, have felt more comfortable with their mothers at home, Bianchi’s testimony about how women felt pride in being able to bring in some income suggests a competing view. There was no way to quantify how many students preferred their mothers at home, nor was there any way to quantify how many of Templeton’s students preferred a greater degree of independence. Bianchi’s

²³ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:18:14-1:18:31

²⁴ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 13, Brief 195.

testimony does demonstrate, however, that student experience was not monolithic. Such plurality was not accounted for within the Commission's report or the newspaper media.

The coverage of Loredana d'Elia's testimony, meanwhile, was more extensive. Of the newspapers that commented on the Templeton brief, most chose to quote d'Elia's perspective over that of Bianchi. Like Bianchi, d'Elia also spoke at length on the difficulties encountered by immigrant women in the Templeton community, including language barriers and intimidation:

Most of [our mothers] would like to go out and work; most of them are scared because they can't speak English, and they uh, fear this, and it's something in them that won't let them. Most of them do try to make wages in the home. They, uh, turn to sewing, they'll sew for other people, and uh a lot of them do housecleaning for other people....It's the way they're brought up, it's their culture; they like to stay home, they believe in taking care of their children, they're very self-conscious.... They just like to keep to themselves, they would like to go out but they're just too scared, and – for some women it would be good to have a community centre to learn the language and other training.²⁵

D'Elia's testimony, unlike Bianchi's, painted a conflicting picture of the preferences and outlooks of immigrant women. Yet as explored below, the newspaper media in particular interpreted d'Elia's remarks in a way that suggested that she viewed these women as passive and ill-prepared for life in Canada. In fact, d'Elia's testimony was more complex; at times, she described immigrant women as simultaneously occupying two conflicting states. For example, she noted at one point that immigrant women "don't have a mind of their own in politics," but also observed that they sometimes felt inhibited from speaking

²⁵ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:19:49-1:21:45

their minds.²⁶ Her comments, taken together, portrayed these women as possessing opinions and preferences but not possessing the tools to articulate them in a public sphere – a conclusion supported by the dearth of self-advocacy by immigrant women in front of the RCSW. The media, however, only focused on the comment that women did not “have a mind of their own” and interpreted this to mean that they were apolitical or without opinions.

D’Elia’s concluding comment, which became quite famous among newspaper media, similarly reflected a complex picture: “It’s just like if you get a bird that you kept in a cage all your life and then at the end let him out, he wouldn’t know how to survive, and that’s what their [our mothers’] problem is now.”²⁷ This comment conveyed the idea that immigrant women in the Templeton region were struggling to position themselves in Canadian society. In making this remark, d’Elia built on Fleming’s observations about the problems posed by language and cultural barriers to Templeton mothers, offering authenticity to Fleming’s observations. D’Elia’s articulation of this sentiment also underscored that students, in having greater access to institutions that encouraged cultural integration such as the school system, may have felt their mothers were motivated by fear or inhibition because resources were less available to them than they were to high school students.

The popularity of d’Elia’s comments with the newspaper media may have been owed to a number of factors, but similarities with Fleming’s account seem particularly notable. As d’Elia’s testimony was off-the-cuff and she repeatedly expressed significant nerves, she may have been influenced by Fleming’s testimony. Regardless, if the newspaper perceived d’Elia’s remarks to be corroborated by an authority figure, those

²⁶ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:20:30-1:21:06

²⁷ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:21:55-1:22:05.

remarks would have been viewed as more legitimate. The similarities between the statements lent additional credence to d'Elia's testimony: it allowed her remarks, by virtue of being similar to Fleming's, to appear more in line with the liberal mainstream.

Additional exploration of the media treatment of d'Elia's remarks, particularly compared with Bianchi's, appears below. It seems possible that the newspaper media used d'Elia's contradicting testimony, however, to portray immigrant women in the way that most suited its agenda in shaping public perception, though d'Elia's testimony was more complicated than the media chose to frame.

2.3. “A Vigorous Programme Is Clearly Essential”: Commission Response and Recommendation

Of the approximately 35 pages of the RCSW's Final Report devoted to the circumstances of immigrant women in Canada, one set of recommendations in their chapter on education seemed to follow directly from the information and recommendations offered by the Templeton participants' oral testimonies. The Commission used d'Elia's testimony in particular to support their educational recommendations for immigrant women. In the process of making these recommendations, Commissioners imposed their own frame on the combined comments received from the participants of the oral brief: they concluded that Templeton's immigrant women required greater support on the basis of being, in their words, “handicapped.”²⁸ I argue that the Commission used d'Elia's testimony in order to justify their suggestion of centres and services that, run primarily by volunteers, would ultimately require little long-term governmental investment once policies and institutions

²⁸ RCSW Final Report, 209.

were established to help immigrant women integrate – or assimilate – into Canadian society. These suggestions were positioned in the framework of welfare liberalism, and allowed the federal government to balance a narrative of benevolence while also working toward a *laissez-faire* approach to services.

As noted, the Commission’s educational recommendations for immigrant women drew significantly from d’Elia’s testimony, reporting as follows:

During questioning by the Commissioners one of the students said “...Most of them [students’ mothers] would like to go out and work and most of them are scared because they can’t speak English. Most of them try to make wages in the home... they do sewing and housekeeping for other people.... They don’t have a mind of their own in politics... they never argue with their husband. It’s the way they’re brought up. For some women it would be good to have community centres to learn the language and to train and to mix with the English mothers. Most of them stick to their own community. It’s just like if you get a bird you kept in a cage all your life and at the end, let him out, he wouldn’t know how to survive.... And this is what their problem is now.”²⁹

Based at least in part on this testimony, the Commission recommended:

...A vigorous programme of language teaching for children and adults is clearly essential to the immigrant’s orientation to this country. Information, counseling and referral services are also needed for immigrants. Woman immigrants need jobs and training but they also need help in understanding Canadian society in general and their new

²⁹ D’Elia, quoted in RCSW Final Report 1970, 209-210. The RCSW transcribed d’Elia’s statement with minor changes, perhaps to reinforce the need for such institutions. For example, rather than “they do sewing and housekeeping for other people,” d’Elia in fact is heard on the recording to say, “They, uh, turn to sewing, they’ll sew for other people, and, uh, a lot of them do housecleaning for other people...” (LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:20:13-1:20:21).

community in particular. They need contacts in the community as well as educational and recreational services especially designed for them.³⁰

Though the Commission called on the federal government to co-ordinate with provincial governments to “conduct surveys ... where immigrants are settling to ascertain the special educational needs of immigrant women” and to “review language training programmes,” it seems the programs, in the Commission’s eye, would be run primarily by voluntary associations.³¹ This is one respect in which recommendations remained incomplete; they were recommendations more to plan future action or to encourage other organizations to coordinate action, rather than recommendations for the federal government themselves to endeavor to better the treatment of immigrant women in Canadian society.

D’Elia’s testimony was not the only one the RCSW incorporated into its suggestions, even though the students’ perspectives, as argued above, should have born more weight than that of the school administrators. The RCSW also wrote that “many women are unable to leave their children [for language classes] or are inhibited by custom from joining mixed groups” – an observation that seems clearly at least informed by Fleming’s testimony.³² The merging of administrators’ testimonies with those of the students meant that all degrees of proxy were treated as though they each bore equal weight, even though the administrators were not in direct contact with immigrant women. In other words, the Commission framed information provided by administrators as though it had come from within the community of immigrant women, even though the administrators’ relationships with Templeton’s women were not substantiated. In not

³⁰ RCSW Final Report, 209.

³¹ Ibid.

³² RCSW Final Report, 209.

differentiating the information from the school administrators from that of Bianchi and d'Elia, the Commission may have constructed its observations on a misguided basis.

If the Commission did not overtly differentiate between comments offered by students and those offered by administrators, the newspaper media committed significantly more grievous errors in its assessment of the Templeton brief, including misattribution of ideas and inaccurate paraphrases of the testimony offered at the hearing. I argue that the Canadian newspaper media was aiming to encourage public perception of immigrant women as a burden to Canadian society, rather than as marginalized women who may have benefited from extensive government support.

2.4. “Students Like To Have a Nice Home”: Newspaper Media and the Status Quo

The newspaper media’s responses to the Templeton brief followed a history of conservative reaction. Writing about racial bias in the Canadian Press (CP) at the turn of the twenty-first century, Frances Henry and Carol Tator note that increasing commodification of major media outlets in Canada has contributed to a shrinking “marketplace of competing ideas” – a press of ever-narrowing vision that depends on investment for coverage. The few investors in Canadian media post-commodification – notably, for example, Conrad Black – have consequently “influence[d] the political and social landscape in ways that distort the freedom of press and present a danger to the future of democracy.”³³ Though the authors are speaking about a later time period, the

³³ Frances Henry and Carol Tator, *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English-Language Press*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 51. These theories were famously pioneered in Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The*

commodification of the newspaper media was well underway in the 1960s.³⁴ The media's motivations were to protect its sources of funding— investors, advertisers, and governments – whose smooth operations relied on maintaining the status quo. With advertisers, write Herman and Chomsky, “the *advertisers'* choices influence media prosperity and survival,” which interferes with journalistic freedom and results in the “marginalization of dissidents.”³⁵ The treatment of the Templeton brief by the mainstream media was likely guided by the eye corporate newspapers may have had to cultivating a public consensus that favoured the views of the dominant group.³⁶

Hackett et al. and Gandula Ludwig are among those to argue that Canada's mainstream newspaper media, defined historically for its partisan politics more than for its advertising, underwent a conservative, corporate shift in the 1960s as a whole, partially in response to rising social movements of the period. Hackett et al. argue that, amid a liberal consensus that saw increased compromise between unions and elite, the rise of a welfare state, and increased consumerism, newspaper media aimed to appease advertisers and to meet political expectations to reduce dissidence rather than to problematize narratives given preference by the dominant classes.³⁷ Ludwig similarly argues that political pressures on media coverage may have encouraged conservative

Political Economy of the Mass Media (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), particularly pages 107-156 of the Kindle edition.

³⁴ Herman and Chomsky argue this process began in the mid-19th century with newspapers being created as venture capital opportunities alone, but also identifies specific case studies of media mergers in mid-1960s America. See *Manufacturing Consent*, 111-113; 128.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109; 133.

³⁶ Herman and Chomsky expand on elite domination of the media and the role of propaganda in ensuring social stability particularly in *Manufacturing Consent*, 107-111.

³⁷ Robert Hackett, Richard Pinet, and Myles Ruggles, “News for Whom? Hegemony and Monopoly versus Democracy in Canadian Media,” in *Seeing Ourselves: Media Power and Policy in Canada*, eds. Helen Holmes and David Taras (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996), 259. See also Kim Phillips-Fein, “‘If Business and the Country Will Be Run Right’: The Business Challenge to the Liberal Consensus, 1945-1964,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 72, no. 1 (Sept 2007), 192. Herman and Chomsky also discuss the political discrimination of advertisers – and, subsequently, of the papers in which they have a stake, in *Manufacturing Media*, 137-138.

reporting: if the state's role in hegemonic negotiation is to remain centrally organized around creating and reproducing a particular social order – especially an order reinforced by gender, race, and class – then the mainstream print media had little motivation to cover 1960s social movements in a sympathetic light.³⁸ If newspaper funding depended on an affirmation of the postwar hegemonic order, and if the maintenance of a particular hegemony “combines persuasion from above with consent from below,” then the newspaper media was motivated both to maintain the existing power relations of the 1960s amid unrest and to contribute to the consolidation of the status quo in order to maintain its ongoing relevance to the corporations and states that funded it.³⁹

Henry and Tator, citing the work of James Winter, introduce the concept of “media truism” into their discussion of the corporatization of Canadian media.⁴⁰ A “pervasive truism” they found in discourses of the Canadian newspaper of the 1990s was “that immigration laws are too lax and that we let people from minority cultures in who take advantage of our generous social programs.”⁴¹ This concept of a media truism connects well with Liu and Blomley's conceptualization of framing: Just as an issue's frame in the media can serve to “legitimiz[e] the role of social agencies and non-profits,” so too can it serve to legitimize narratives that maintain a particular hegemonic order in Canadian society.⁴² Faced with rising discontentment from women, black and Indigenous communities, and left-wing social movements in the 1960s, mainstream

³⁸ Gundula Ludwig, “Governing gender: the integral state and gendered subjugation,” in *Gramsci and Global Politics: Hegemony and Resistance*, edited by Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel (New York: Routledge, 2009), 100.

³⁹ Hackett et al, “News for Whom?”, 259.

⁴⁰ Henry and Tator, *Discourses of Domination*, 52-53.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴² Liu and Blomley, “Making News and Making Space,” 126-127.

newspaper media had an interest in portraying immigrant women as a demographic disinterested in access to higher-paying jobs.

This was apparent in its treatment of Bianchi and d’Elia’s testimonies in the Templeton brief. Tellingly, no media source covered either Bianchi’s testimony on the point of their mothers’ agency. Instead, the papers focused overwhelmingly on d’Elia’s comments that compared immigrant mothers to caged birds. As noted, d’Elia had offered this comment within the context of the various challenges immigrant women faced in interacting in Canadian society – language barriers, obstructed access to the workplace, and the like – and yet most media sources quoted d’Elia without any reference to this context. Media sources also did not note that the situation d’Elia was describing was not unlike the one faced by many other Canadian women who wished to find reasonably well-paid employment with decent working conditions.

Newspaper media framed Templeton women’s low representation in the workplace as dependent on a preference of immigrant women not to work outside the home rather than recognizing that it was difficult for all women to find work beyond low-paying, entry-level jobs. Though several of the Commission’s recommendations noted that women found it difficult to gain promotion or to break into the workforce at all, this narrative was entirely absent from newspaper discussion around immigrant women.⁴³ This perspective may have been partially encouraged by the media’s access to Sage’s written brief when compiling their articles. Sage had noted that, in answer to the question, “Are there professions which discriminate against women?” most students had answered, “It would appear that the professions do not discriminate against women but

⁴³ As the focus of the Commission was on how women fared economically, I have also focused here. It should be noted, however, that immigrant and racialized men would have faced similar obstacles to employment as women due to their status as Other in Canadian public opinion.

that the ladies are not interested in joining many professions.”⁴⁴ This argument was prioritized and repeated throughout the media coverage for the brief, even though neither d’Elia nor Bianchi made this argument verbally.

Some media sources took d’Elia’s testimony as a way to more systematically frame immigrant women as ‘Other’ by representing them as needier than women who were born in Canada. *La Presse*, for example, covered the brief as follows: “Un groupe d’étudiantes ... ont soumis un mémoire présentant un tableau *assez sombre* de la situation faite à leurs mères qui, isolées dans leur foyer, ‘n’ont aucune chance même d’apprendre l’anglais” (“A group of students submitted a brief that presented *quite a dark account* of the situation their mothers faced; isolated in the home, they ‘don’t even have a chance to learn English.’”)⁴⁵ The media representation of immigrant women’s situations as ‘quite dark’, isolated, and without opportunity for integration may have instilled in readers the idea that immigrant women were decisively and irredeemably “Other.”

Other news sources took d’Elia’s “bird in a cage” comment even further out of context. One article from the *Ottawa Citizen*, titled “Immigrants Fear Public,” framed the issue as though women like d’Elia’s mother were unable to cope with a newfound freedom from captivity, represented by arrival in Canada: “When [mothers of immigrant families] are set free in Canada, they don’t know how to survive, Loredana d’Elia... said. . . . They feel other people will laugh at them. All their lives they have been used to quietly following and obeying their husbands.”⁴⁶ The audio recording confirms, however, that d’Elia presented her comments about women’s fear in the context of not speaking

⁴⁴ LAC RG 33/89, Vol 13, Brief 195.

⁴⁵ “Comment faciliter les études des femmes qui ont des enfants,” *La Presse*, 19 avril 1968. Emphasis and translation mine.

⁴⁶ “Immigrants Fear Public,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, April 19 1968

English. Though d'Elia also made a comment that many women did not often argue with their husbands, the language of obedience was manufactured by the media.⁴⁷ Such subtle differences were lost to a misinformed public who had access neither to d'Elia's full verbal comments nor to the written brief.

Like d'Elia's comments, Bianchi's testimony was also inaccurately contextualized. The *Citizen* represented Bianchi's argument that a few resources would go a long way toward helping students' mothers as though she had instead been arguing that their mothers had simple needs. "They just need a little training to do a simple job somewhere," the newspaper attributed to Bianchi; "they aren't asking to become presidents or boards of directors."⁴⁸ This framing is representative of the problem newspaper media had in accurately reporting on marginalized communities and social movements of the 1960s. Instead of representing Bianchi's testimony that immigrant women were keen to work and contribute to family incomes, the *Citizen* chose to downplay the demand for employment, both among new Canadians and longer-term citizens alike.

The *Citizen* used these framed comments to discourage public engagement with the idea that immigrant women aspired to or deserved better-paid, high-powered positions. The *Citizen* also overtly portrayed immigrant women as uncomfortable with participating in broader Canadian society, as represented in the article's very title, "Immigrants Fear Public." Far from encouraging the Canadian public to deconstruct their

⁴⁷ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 5, 1:20:30-1:20:35. The quote d'Elia gave was: "[Women] never argue with their husbands. The husband's always right." D'Elia was vocal about her nerves and was not speaking from prepared remarks, so while it is important to take the heart of d'Elia's statement seriously, that she said this within a minute of also saying that their mothers wished to work and go out of the house bears reiterating. The picture d'Elia painted of immigrant women's agency was complex and multi-faceted; my argument is that the mainstream media focused on and distorted a few elements of this testimony at the expense of the bigger picture.

⁴⁸ "Immigrants Fear Public," *The Ottawa Citizen*, April 19 1968

gendered, racialized, and classed notions of immigrant women, this portrayal instead reinforced racialized narratives about Canadians ‘saving’ an Othered community. This “socializing” frame was intended to create a reaction of pity and distance among the newspapers’ readership.⁴⁹ By offering “a little training to do a simple job,” Canadian institutions might offer that salvation in the form of integration into Canadian society, albeit at the lower end of Canada’s labour hierarchy. The *Citizen* removed the girls’ request for greater community and government support from coverage of their testimonies while characterizing new immigrants to Canada as simple women who were asking for little – a move that effectively shifted the girls’ main message toward a top-down integration narrative, thereby justifying the existence of the welfare state and patronage typical of the period. This selective portrayal of Bianchi and d’Elia’s testimonies allowed the *Citizen* to suggest to its readership that the problems of “simple” immigrant women could be easily solved by the Canadian state with the provision of low-paid, low-status work.

Newspapers across Canada, while placing emphasis on different facets of the girls’ testimonies, all in some way framed immigrant women as passive victims. *La Presse* reported that the girls had said their mothers were often cornered into “des tâches ingrates et dures, comme de laver les planchers” (difficult and degrading tasks like washing the floors) and that “souvent leurs employeurs exploitent également leur ignorance des lois canadiennes” (employers often exploited their ignorance of Canadian employment laws).⁵⁰ Strikingly, neither of these points was in fact mentioned in the girls’ presentations; *La Presse* instead took these observations from school counselor Frances Fleming and attributed them to d’Elia. This was a prime example of the

⁴⁹ Liu and Blomley, “Making News and Making Space,” 126.

⁵⁰ “Comment faciliter les études des femmes qui ont des enfants,” *La Presse*, 19 avril 1968.

newspaper media's disengagement from the differing degrees of separation of proxy from the immigrant community, prioritizing views that reflected mainstream ideas.

The Vancouver newspaper media was particularly interesting in how it chose to represent the Templeton brief. With arguably the most potential for assessing the realities and experiences of those living in Templeton, the *Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* nevertheless also favoured the administrators' testimony over that of the students. The *Sun* began by summarizing the written brief, put forth by Sage: "A woman's place is in the home," wrote the *Sun*, "until her children are 16 years of age, the students said."⁵¹ Although it initially quoted Sage's assessment that the "students like the feeling of security of having mother in the home," the article eventually noted that Bianchi "disagreed with [Sage's written] brief in one respect" in that she "did not think it is necessary for a mother to stay in the home with her children until they are 16."⁵² It is noteworthy that the *Sun*, unlike other mainstream media outlets, offered one of the only mentions of Bianchi's testimony in the coverage of the hearing, taking pains to separate the students' comments from those of the faculty members. The degree of disagreement between Bianchi and Sage was not acknowledged, however, and Sage's remarks were kept at the forefront of the coverage. Sage's comments were reported as though they carried equal weight to Bianchi's in spite of their different proximities to immigrant experience.

The Province, like the *Sun*, represented Sage's brief as though it accurately represented students' actual viewpoints. "The students, generally, were not in favor of mothers going out to work," wrote *The Province*, citing Sage exclusively, "and consequently were not advocating day care centres for young children, nor maternity

⁵¹ Ann Barling, "Mothers Belong at Home," *Vancouver Sun*, April 19 1968.

⁵² *Ibid.*

leave.”⁵³ The *Regina Leader-Post* similarly framed the issue of mothers in the home as a matter of their adolescent children’s preference. “[Students] like to have a nice home and well-cooked meals,” wrote the *Leader-Post*, before misquoting Bianchi in claiming she had said that “many immigrant mothers fear to go to work, except by cleaning or sewing for others” – thus positioning them in the context of work that middle-class readers would have comfortably associated with immigrant women.⁵⁴ Far from advocating for *more* economic opportunity for immigrant women, this erroneous attribution had the effect of pigeonholing them into roles Canadian society viewed as suitable, without any regard for their own preferences or ambitions.

The frequent re-appearance of this Othering tactic, of representing immigrant women as passive and ill-prepared for the paid workforce in Canada, portrayed immigrant women as lacking agency and marginalized by fear – a fear instilled, the media argued, by the oppressive conditions of their home countries.⁵⁵ When articles drew on the girls’ testimonies, it was usually to complement ideas found in Sage’s written brief, in which the students played no clear part. Articles also tended to paraphrase the students carelessly or falsely attribute to them comments they did not make, based on pre-conceived assumptions about immigrant women. Overall, the mainstream Canadian newspaper media framed the Templeton brief in conservative and paternalistic terms. While this reporting helped to foster a public consensus that moved away from activist and radical demands of the era, the coverage still appeared to participate in the shifting social and political zeitgeist of the era. In reporting on advocacy to the RCSW, the mainstream media cultivated the impression of being in touch with –

⁵³ Terry French, “Call for equality in birth control, too,” *The Province*, April 19 1968

⁵⁴ “Immigrant mothers said like caged birds,” *Regina Leader-Post*, April 19 1968

⁵⁵ This tactic was introduced as a method of reinforcing Canadian nationalism and exclusionist policies, but that is best expanded upon elsewhere.

and maybe in support of – movements for reform. Instead, like the federal government, engagement with the activities of advocates for change was oriented around manufacturing public consensus on maintaining the status quo instead.⁵⁶

2.5. Conclusions

The immigrant women of Vancouver’s Templeton borough were disadvantaged by the newspaper media’s infrequent discussion of social support in issues of language, law, and labour; furthermore, they were characterized in the media as a community that was primarily fearful and isolated, to be pitied and assisted. The portrayal of Templeton women as a social problem in need of remedy meant that attention was drawn to the Templeton region as an area that did not conform to Canadian cultural norms.⁵⁷ This cast an impression of immigrant communities as burdens to Canadian society, possibly having the effect of discouraging the very services needed in the region.

Overall, coverage of the Templeton brief demonstrated a trend toward a “media truism” when it came to the status of immigrant populations in 1960s Canada. The reification of remarks from persons removed from new-immigrant experience in the Commission’s Final Report as well as the newspaper media demonstrated an obvious dismissal of viewpoints offered from those closer to communities of immigrant women. The media’s choices in the representation of the Templeton brief were informed by Canada’s past immigration policies, and made the media complicit in the reinforcement of Canadian hegemony. In the case of the Templeton brief, neither the newspaper media nor the RCSW itself appeared to notice that the identified needs of immigrant women

⁵⁶ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 173-174; 176.

⁵⁷ Liu and Blomley, “Making News and Making Space,” 126.

varied according to the source of the information. Anecdotal accounts of experiential proximity were dismissed in favour of the more concrete, but less informed, recommendations from the seemingly white and middle-class presenters – recommendations made without direct consultation with or consent from immigrant women themselves.

As we shall see going forward, another brief, presented by the East-Enders Society, raised and encountered many similar issues in the representation of a community that struggled to articulate its experiences to the RCSW. Like immigrant women in the Templeton region, middle-aged, poor women in the DTES were represented by primarily white, middle-class volunteers at the Commission hearings, where questions of representation by proxy were more overtly raised in the presentation itself. The next chapter contextualizes the framing decisions of both 1960s newspaper media and the RCSW in its approach to a community of diverse, low-income women whose specific circumstances were never named by the volunteers who aimed to represent them nor explored by the RCSW itself.

Chapter 3.

Internal Documents or Public Perception?: The East-Enders Society Frames on the Downtown Eastside

The East-Enders Society, presenting before the Commission on behalf of women in need of housing, employment, and social services in what is today known as the Downtown Eastside (DTES), was heard by the RCSW on April 17, 1968. According to Society president Jean Crowley, the East-Enders Society was primarily advocating for women between the ages of 35 and 60, characterized as “the single woman who cannot look after herself very often, or who is only partly productive or on a temporary disarrangement with her life.” Crowley and in-house social worker Phyllis Harwood argued that their clientele’s “disarranged” status resulted primarily from precarious housing, employment, or both.¹ Harwood and Crowley focused specifically on this age group for a reason: though women could not access retirement pensions until age 60 or disability pensions until age 55, the Department of Manpower and Immigration was unwilling to provide training specifically for women aged 35 or older.² The East-Enders Society’s brief therefore focused on finding solutions to the problem of employment for women aged 35 to 55, as well as housing solutions for all.

Even though the East-Enders Society brief aimed to represent women who may not otherwise have been heard by the Commission, both the written and oral briefs were remarkably short and lacking in specifics about the women who used the services provided by the Society.³ The written brief, only one page long, superficially covered

¹ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 43:09 – 43:21

² See LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 47:17-47:45. I expand on this below.

³ The East-Enders Society held the microphone for 13 minutes, while the oral Templeton brief was nearly thirty minutes long.

obstacles to housing, employment, and financial security as faced by the Society's clientele. Two lines were also given to the subject of prostitution, while another two lines were reserved for the subject of sterilization – topics that were not further explored in the oral hearing.⁴ While the characteristics and circumstances of the women who made use of these services were partially expanded upon in the comparatively short oral brief, the subjects of housing and employment were given considerably more attention – even though most of the East-Enders Society's operations were focused on community rather than on employment.

A first reading of the East-Enders Society brief, alongside the oral hearing remarks, gives the impression of a Society that was not very familiar with its clientele. But the East-Enders Society's internal documentation demonstrates a considerably more developed impression of the women who used Society services, ranging from regular reports on the needs of the community to statistical information on the women using Society services.⁵ The East-Enders Society framed the information they presented to the RCSW, in other words, in a way that glossed over details about their clientele. Perhaps owing to this dearth of information, the Commission did not significantly pursue additional information about the women served by the Society in the Downtown Eastside, even though women in similar positions were underrepresented in the Commission's inquiry. There was thus unrealized potential for better understanding of marginalized women more broadly in this meeting between the Society and the Commission – though the Commission, only in its third total day of oral hearings, may

⁴ In comparison, the written Templeton brief was more than twenty pages long. The East-Enders Society's brief did not specify whether the sterilization in question was on a voluntary or involuntary basis. This is further explored below.

⁵ See SFU Archives, East Enders Society fonds F-59, vols. 1-6.

not have realized how prominently the topic of women in poverty would feature in hearings in Edmonton, Montreal, and Toronto in particular.⁶

As with the Templeton brief, the East-Enders Society brief was an example of representation by proxy. The women whose needs were being represented were not presenting the brief to the Commission. I argue that the East-Enders Society provided the Commission with a simplified account of the needs of women in positions of precarity in the DTES to advocate for federal attention to a limited scope of needs, in part owing to the limited jurisdiction of the RCSW's inquiry. In the process of attempting to convey a broad picture of a diverse community, the East-Enders Society erased intersections between axes of oppression among marginalized women, at the expense of information and advocacy for those who needed it most. Particularly ignored were Indigenous women, who the Society was well aware comprised a significant portion of its clientele and yet they were mentioned only in passing. This chapter dissects the frame imposed by the East-Enders Society in the course of representing the women who made use of their services, and identifies areas in which the Commission might have pressed harder – particularly when it came to sterilization and prostitution – in order to pursue a more complete picture of poverty among urban women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

⁶ Though some leniency might be given for the Commission's comparative inexperience with oral hearings at this stage, the Commission did reiterate their commitment to representation of marginalized women several times in the oral hearing for this brief. See LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 49:43.

3.1. “Women of Any Creed or Colour”: The Society’s History and Operations

Classified as a “private social service group,” the East-Enders Society was a non-state corporation that operated on East Hastings Street between 1964 and 1993. May Gutteridge, a social worker who had worked for four years doing outreach in the DTES, founded the organization in association with the Anglican Church. Her primary aim was to open a hostel to provide housing solutions to adult women who were having difficulty locating stable shelter – especially Indigenous women, though the Society welcomed “destitute women of any creed or colour.”⁷ Funded primarily by non-governmental contributors such as Lions Clubs, church groups, and private donors, the Society was eventually able to additionally open a Women’s Centre in 1967 at 342 E. Hastings Street, providing amenities for women such as typewriters, sewing machines, and laundry facilities. Though it received a monthly grant from the provincial government to hire an in-house social worker to help the women who lived within the hostel develop skills and resources, the Society was otherwise funded through private donations in its initial years of operation.

At the time of its founding, the programs offered by the East-Enders Society were community- and outreach-based. In 1964, before the acquisition of the hostel, the Society had already hosted several clubs, including ones for “pensioners” and for “Indian girls and women” in the DTES.⁸ In the Society’s initial constitution, the objectives of the East-Enders Society were succinctly phrased: “to provide temporary housing on a charitable basis for persons requiring the same[,] to do charitable work among the elderly and the indigent, and co-operate with the charitable activities of churches in the

⁷ See SFU EES fonds F-59, vol.1, Minutes from October 5, 1964, and Open House notice from September 29, 1965.

⁸ SFU EES F-59, vol.1, 1964, Donation appeal

Province of British Columbia.”⁹ These stated objectives remained in place through at least January of 1968, shortly before the Society sent the written brief in to the RCSW.¹⁰

By 1968, the Society was able to provide concrete statistics on the day centre. Nearly 1,000 women and more than 200 children had used the centre since it had opened in 1967, noted the minutes from a meeting in January of 1968. This document also showed a strong understanding of the diverse experiences of the women who made use of Society services; the minutes noted that rising rents and the demolition of housing alternatives were contributing to a housing crisis. They also noted that some women “live on skid road for acceptance,” suggesting that the Society was aware of a sense of culture and community among poor women on the DTES.¹¹ The Society prided itself on its diverse programs, including provision of rent and food vouchers for women and families who needed them. Founder May Gutteridge reported proudly that among their clientele were “many older Indian women in very poor health” who sought Society support sometimes two times per week.¹² Far from merely advocating for employment for women in precarious positions, the Society provided appropriate support to the community as needed, suggesting that the organization was well in touch with its community.

⁹ SFU EES F-59, vol.1, The Societies’ Act Constitution of the East-Enders Society, 1965

¹⁰ SFU EES F-59, vol.1, The Societies’ Act Revised Constitution and By-Laws of the East-Enders Society, 1968. By 1971, the Society’s listed objectives became considerably more detailed and descriptive of the Society’s aims; they aimed to “be aware of, and concerned for, the various needs of [women without adequate resources] so that relevant and factual information is available”; to “communicate this information to significant parties” including the three levels of government and voluntary agencies; and to “provide some of these needs until more responsibility is assumed by these other resources” (see SFU EES F-59, vol.1, Policy of the East-Enders Society, 1971). This shows a notable complexity in the Society’s aims that seem to accord much more strongly with reasons for presenting to the RCSW, though we cannot know what prompted the Constitutional changes or how long the Society was functionally operating on these complex bases regardless of their official recognition.

¹¹ SFU EES F-59, vol.1, Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting, 1968

¹² SFU EES F-59, vol.1, Executive Director’s Report, Annual General Meeting minutes, 1967

3.2. Home for the Evicted, Not the Addicted: Comparing Internal and RCSW-Oriented Society Frames

Although the East-Enders Society’s internal records painted one picture, the hearing and written brief to the RCSW seemed significantly less attentive to the details in the community they represented. Unlike the Templeton brief, which was more than twenty pages long, the East-Enders Society brief was merely one page, briefly outlining several diverse issues without much context about the people seeking support. Though most coverage went to housing and income, the written brief also devoted two lines apiece to the publicity of prostitution arrests and policy around consent for “recommended sterilization.”¹³ In both the written brief and the oral hearing, the Society presented findings that were both vague on specifics and inconsistent with information found in the Society’s internal documents.

By comparing the sparsely detailed written and oral briefs to the Commission with the Society’s attentive internal reports, I argue that the Society presented its findings to the RCSW with the aim of providing a broad picture of a complex community by proxy – at the expense of the direct representation or diverse needs of any of the Society’s clientele. The frame that the Society imposed on the needs of poor women on the Downtown Eastside emphasized broad, seemingly inclusive statements over specific ones, resulting in a vague presentation to the Commission that glossed over the complex intersections that contributed to institutional poverty. In the process of trying to present the community broadly, the Society may instead have further marginalized some of their clientele.

¹³ Recommended by whom or under what circumstances is not clear, particularly on whether the “recommended” sterilizations were voluntary or involuntary. Even voluntary sterilizations were often coerced. This is expanded upon below.

Some of the Society's written recommendations seem to have been taken directly from a September, 1967, report given by Society social worker Phyllis Harwood, who was also one of the presenters of the Society's oral brief. In this report, Harwood noted the growing problem of housing resulting from demolition of residential buildings for commercial enterprises. She observed that single women were not eligible for support from the Vancouver Housing Authority. Of particular concern were those who had been displaced by the City of Vancouver's "urban renewal" initiatives in poorer neighbourhoods, including the future Georgia Viaduct and the proposed freeway through Strathcona. These infrastructure projects, wrote the Society, were creating a deadlock in the development of single-room housing solutions such as hostels in the area. In its written report to the Commission, the Society quoted an April 1967 bulletin of the Vancouver Housing Association titled "Stalemate Over Hostels":

The Provincial Government has for the second time, turned down the City of Vancouver's request for construction of a hostel to house single persons displaced by urban renewal. The Province suggests that this type of accommodation can better be provided by non-profit societies building with the aid of a Provincial grant under the ELDERLY CITIZENS HOUSING AID ACT. There are, however, many single persons between the ages of 40 and 60 living in the redevelopment areas who, for one reason or another, ill health, lack of skills, etc., have lost their earning power. Their incomes are considerably lower than those of old age pensioners and they thus stand in greater need of economical housing. Provincial grants are not available to non-profit societies for housing the age group.¹⁴

Harwood also expanded on the issue of housing in the oral brief, noting no recourse for women over 35 displaced by city revitalization efforts: "In Vancouver here," she told the

¹⁴ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 12, Brief 121

Commission, “where there is urban redevelopment, the men ... are being put into large hostels that are either private or that the City of Vancouver is arranging ... but there is nothing for the woman who is being dispossessed of her living quarters on the fringe edge of Skid Row.”¹⁵

The East-Enders Society positioned itself to the Commission as the only temporary or permanent rooming option for poor, single women, whom they otherwise described in general terms. The Society explained they were having to turn away women transitioning out of mental institutions or prison or trying to enter recovery from addiction, suggesting that they did not have the resources to help women facing these obstacles and commenting that they had too many of the “other kind” of women to cater to – without specifying in more concrete terms what “kind” that was.¹⁶ One anecdote from Society presenters told of a social worker seeking housing for a woman exiting a mental institution and discovering that the Society, with no overnight staff beyond a matron, could not take her. “The social worker said, ‘Well, where can the poor women go?’” Harwood told the Commission – “and we have no answer to this.”¹⁷ Particularly in the context of the East-Enders Society’s commitment to welcoming women “of all colours and creeds,” that the Society reported to the Commission that some women were unable to be accommodated by the Society owing to certain background factors is striking.

Given these remarks, I argue the Society imposed a different frame within its own internal documents than it did when presenting itself to the RCSW. The Society may, unconsciously or otherwise, have been demarcating between one “kind” of women in

¹⁵ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 44:37 - 45:00

¹⁶ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 50:58 – 51:23. This comment, made on the tail end of unprepared comments by Mrs. Harwood, was particularly telling about the kinds of frames the Society was placing on the needs of its clientele. Never once was the Society explicit about who, exactly, used their services, and nor did the Commission interrogate this point further.

¹⁷ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 52:37 – 52:43.

need – such as those in precarious positions owing to external factors like urban revitalization – and another, such as those with internal issues such as addictions and mental illness that could not be rehabilitated simply through provision of social housing.¹⁸ Alternately, the Society may have been presenting their ability to provide for women in the DTES differently to the Commission to encourage government – as per the Society’s 1971 stated objectives – to take more responsibility for the welfare of impoverished women. Regardless of the reason, the remark was revealing; within their own organization the Society presented its aim as to serve all women in the DTES, while to the Commission, the Society presented its services as limited in scope.

3.3. Defining a Community: Omission, Interrogation, and Proxied Representation

Both the oral and written briefs submitted by the East-Enders Society were comparatively short and lacking in detail when it came to the specific backgrounds of the women who used their services. Though this may have been partially due to poor preparation – some details sought by the Commission appeared in the Society’s internal communications – the Society may have been intentionally vague to avoid pre-suppositions about its clientele by the Commission or observing media. As evidenced in their internal communications and in coded language apparent in the brief, the Society

¹⁸ This language is reminiscent of the “deserving” versus “undeserving” poor. Robert Moffitt dates these distinctions as made by the state as early as the 17th century English Poor Laws in “The Deserving Poor, The Family, and the U.S. Welfare System,” *Demography* 52, no.3 (2015), 729-749. Dorothy E. Chunn and Shelley A.M. Gavigan offer a brief account of the evolution of these conceptions in postwar Canada in “Welfare Law, Welfare Fraud, and the Moral Regulation of the ‘Never Deserving’ Poor,” *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no.2 (2004), 219-243. Vera Chouinard & Valorie A. Crooks discuss how revocation of welfare has become disciplinary by those deemed unworthy by the state in “‘Because they have all the power and I have none’: state restructuring of income and employment supports and disabled women’s lives in Ontario, Canada,” *Disability & Society* 20, no.1 (2005), 19-32. These demarcations between “kinds” of women in need as vocalized by the East-Enders Society were notably not interrogated by the Commission, suggesting they may have held similar distinctions in mind.

was capable of making more comprehensive observations, but in acting as proxy for the women they served, they made the choice not to.

The Society most strongly identified their clientele in broad, ambiguous terms that firmly established them as marginalized, often poor, without really elucidating on specific intersecting factors that contributed to their poverty. Identified as “indigent” in the Society’s written brief, these women were described in the oral brief as “unable to provide for themselves” and as those “who, *for one reason or another*,” needed help.¹⁹ Ambiguous terms such as these appeared frequently throughout the Society’s oral brief, even when presenters were asked direct questions by the Commission. Though the Society’s focus on housing and employment held the Commission’s interest, Commissioner Florence Bird expressed disappointment in the Society’s lack of focus on needed services for the women in the community – an omission that seems curious in light of the significant community services hosted by the Society.²⁰ In an attempt to develop dialogue about the necessary services to support the women in the community, Bird prompted Society presenters Crowley and Harwood on whether public housing coupled with an in-house social worker was part of the Society’s vision for progress – and where that funding would come from. The Society agreed that *partial* social services would be welcome with housing, but it did not respond to the query about funding.²¹ Given that the Society soon after amended their organizational objectives to encourage

¹⁹ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 12, Brief 121; LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 43:30 – 43:47, emphasis mine.

²⁰ An “Indian Social Club” in particular was frequently boasted on Society internal communication. Social clubs like these, intended to give Indigenous women a sense of community, were a significant reason May Gutteridge sought to found the East-Enders Society in the first place. It seems odd, then, that the Society would not mention services such as these to the Commission at all. See Simon Fraser University, East-Enders Society fonds, F-59, vol.1, Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting, 1968, and SFU EES F-59, vol.1, 1964, Donation appeal.

²¹ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 51:23-52:03

greater government investment in the welfare of DTES women, it seems significant that they did not advocate for it here.²²

Further questions from the Commission also went unanswered. A Commissioner asked about the approximate percentage of women under the purview of the Society's services who might be able to work if given the opportunity; this question was not answered. An additional question about what work these women may have been able to do was answered, but not in detail: "The field," said Harwood, "is too broad to give any specific statistics."²³ Among the possible reasons for these partial responses may have been that the Society had already heard from the federal government on their capacity to provide work or retraining for women aged 35 to 60; between the submission of the written brief to the RCSW and the oral hearing a month later, Society volunteers had met with a representative from the Department of Manpower and Immigration, who had said that work and retraining for these women would not be provided by the government due to lack of demand from employers.²⁴ The Society may therefore have framed its response in a way to encourage the Commission to come to its own conclusions on how to advocate to the federal government to create works programs, either to add a separate, more powerful voice to the request, or even to formulate ideas that the Society had not yet thought of. Regardless, rather than giving a response that reflected the local reality, the Society was trying to paint a bigger picture for the Commission at the expense of direct representation.

²² SFU EES F-59, vol.1, Policy of the East-Enders Society, 1971.

²³ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 48:26-48:33

²⁴ "Canada Manpower is really not keen on training people or retraining people or upgrading people that are over 35 to 37 years of age," Harwood stated. See LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 47:17-47:45 and 48:37-49:00.

A comparison with US make-work programs seems to corroborate this theory. Still on the subject of possible employment opportunities, Phyllis Harwood said:

The Americans are doing a great deal of hiring the Negroes and training them because they are the big lot of unemployed and they are training them just as we did during the war here, being able to put – sorting, or putting small pieces of equipment together. There doesn't seem to be anything – I haven't been able to unearth anything in that line [for these women].²⁵

This comparison is important in several ways. First, it confirmed that Harwood framed her response according to the Commission's purview as a federal body that – in her eyes – may have seemed unconcerned with local examples and more concerned with widely applicable solutions. Second, it provided important context on the women served by the Society, while also framing them under the singular lens of unskilled, undervalued labour. The Society was capable of making statements that described many of the women helped by the Society, in other words; it was not that they did not have a strong understanding of some commonalities among their diverse clientele, but more likely that they were reluctant to make sweeping statements to accord with expectations they had about government or Commission response to an organization that did not expect federal funding.

Thirdly, Harwood's comparison of their clientele with Black Americans revealed important subtextual information about the Society's understandings of race and class. Even though the Society overtly identified that a significant percentage of their clientele – 30.4 percent of hostel registrations between 1966 and 1968 were by Indigenous women, for example – they still did not overtly disclose these statistics or even allude to

²⁵ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 49:00-49:27

approximations in their brief to the RCSW.²⁶ They mentioned Indigenous women to the Commission in passing: “We have anyone from Indians who have worked in canneries to girls that have hitchhiked out from the prairies,” Harwood said of their clientele.²⁷ Even given the clubs, day programs, and overnight accommodations oriented specifically to Indigenous women, this reference to “Indians who have worked in canneries” was the only overt mention of Indigenous women in the East-Enders Society brief.

There were several additional hints in both the written and oral briefs that provide clues to the reasons behind the coded language used by the Society in representing their clientele. In addition to the fleeting allusions to prostitution and “recommended” sterilization in the Society’s written brief, anecdotes in the oral brief gave indications as to the additional barriers Society clientele faced. Crawley’s mention of the availability of disability funding only from age 55, for example, suggested that some of their clients were younger and might have qualified for disability funding if not for their age. Harwood also alluded to “girls that have hitchhiked out from the prairies or even Ontario that have had hippie ideas and thought they’d come out and then are looking for work,” indicating that some women arrived in the DTES without ever having been evicted from housing in that neighbourhood.²⁸ Fleeting references were additionally made to women coming from mental health facilities and from jail, as well as some who were seeking addiction recovery. Intriguingly, the Society both noted that these women were those least likely to

²⁶ SFU EES F-59, vol.1, Social Worker’s Annual Report, January 29 1969. To give a better idea as to numbers, there were an average of 247 hostel registrations each year for those first three years, of which an average of 75 were from Indigenous women. The only other category recorded by the Society in these statistics was “white women,” from which the total was derived when combined with “Indian women.”

²⁷ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 48:06-48:18

²⁸ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 45:08; 48:12-48:26

contact the Society directly, and that they were also those the East-Enders Society was most likely to have to turn away.²⁹

As many women among the Society's clientele likely faced multiple axes of oppression – gender, class, race, sexuality, and/or dis/ability, to name a few – the Society may have been nebulous on specifics to prevent their clientele from being pigeonholed into one identifier when in fact they occupied multiple standpoints. Harwood may have been aware that, if the Commission viewed Society clientele as “undeserving” of social support, the government may have been less inclined to provide support to the Society. Another option was that the Society was acting in the interests of the diverse backgrounds of their clientele. As argued by Valerie Purdie-Vaughns and Richard P. Elbach, people who experience intersecting axes of oppression may not fit into prototypical ideas about how a member of a particular group might act owing to the complexity of their experience, making it difficult for people external to their standpoint to understand what contributes to an individual's needs, wants, and perspectives.³⁰ Struggling with this task, the Society may have opted not to identify any specifics about their clientele where possible at the arguable expense of actual representation for the women the Society aimed to represent.

²⁹ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 50:47-51:23; 52:29-52:50

³⁰ Valerie Purdie-Vaughns and Richard P. Elbach, “Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities,” *Sex Roles* 59, no.3 (2008), 378. Intersectional research methods were not available to the RCSW, but they remain useful as a lens through which to understand the Society's – and the Commission's – difficulties in endeavoring to advocate for women who experienced intersecting axes of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. famously coined intersectional research methods in 1995 – see *Critical Race Theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (New York: New Press, 1995). For primers on intersectional research methods from a perspective of gender studies, see Judith Lorber, “Shifting Paradigms and Challenging Categories,” *Social Problems* 53, no.4 (Nov. 2006), 448-453. For a significant articulation of various research approaches to intersectionality, including emphasis on intercategory complexity, intracategory complexity, and anticategory complexity, see Leslie McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” *Signs* 30, no.3 (Spring 2005), 1771-1800. For a critique of intersectionality's applications, including the subjugation of racialized (specifically Black) women by researchers as “sites” of intersecting oppressions, see Jennifer C. Nash, “Re-Thinking Intersectionality,” *Feminist Review* 89 (2008), 1-15.

The significant proportion of Indigenous women who used the Society's services offer a particularly prominent example of a community that had been failed by the Society's approach with the Commission. Meghan Longstaffe argues that Indigenous women in the Downtown Eastside were already being dehumanized in newspaper coverage of their disappearances by the 1960s.³¹ Indigenous women also faced additional axes of oppression as a result of stigma from criminal charges on bases closely associated with poverty, including drunkenness and prostitution under the umbrella of vagrancy.³² Longstaffe notes that journalists sometimes framed "urban space and Indigenous women as incommensurable," suggesting that newspaper coverage likely increased scorn for conditions of Indigenous urban poverty among the general public.³³ In fact, Indigenous women were more at risk of poverty and disenfranchised conditions owing to institutional barriers; Indian Act legislation dictated that Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men lost their Indian status. This resulted in the "abrogation of Indian women's citizenship (both Canadian and First Nation)," which in turn prevented protection from "majority indifference or hostility."³⁴ Importantly, the frame of "employability" as the most relevant obstacle to equality for Society clientele – at least as it was presented in the Society's brief to the RCSW – may

³¹ Longstaffe, "Indigenous Women as Newspaper Representations," 248.

³² Joan Sangster, "Criminalizing the Colonized: Ontario Native Women Confront the Criminal Justice System, 1920-1960," in *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History*, (Edmonton: Athabaska University Press, 2011), 296. See also Freeman, *Satellite Sex*, 191.

³³ Longstaffe, "Indigenous Women as Newspaper Representations," 247.

³⁴ Joyce Green, "Canaries in the Mines of Citizenship: Indian Women in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34, no.4 (Dec. 2001), 716. There is a significant body of literature on the history of the declining status of Indigenous women in western Canada following colonial settlement. To name a few, see Jean Barman, "Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria: Rethinking Transgressive Sexuality during the Colonial Encounter," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal & Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, eds. by Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 205-227; Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008); and Robin Jarvis Brownlie, "Intimate Surveillance: Indian Affairs, Colonization, and the Regulation of Aboriginal Women's Sexuality," in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, edited by Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 160-178.

have obscured some of the wider social realities the East-Enders Society was aware of, including issues of Indigenous status and citizenship, which would have affected the ability of some of the Society's clientele to take advantage of available government services.

These frames had the potential to alter the advocacy that was being done on behalf of these women. Most peculiar was the difference in detail between what the Society identified as relevant in the written brief compared with the oral brief. Both sterilization and prostitution were identified as significant issues to the community in the written brief, while neither was discussed at the hearings themselves. "In cases of recommended sterilization," wrote the Society, "the consent of the husband has to be obtained, even if the woman has been deserted or his whereabouts are unknown."³⁵ The reasons behind the Society's suggestion for a husband's consent are not clear; if the Society was asking for the co-signature of a husband for requests of voluntary sterilization – an issue important to many who wrote into the Commission, and which the Commission's Final Report recommended be legalized as an option for birth control – the situation was clearly quite different than it would have been if the Society was talking about situations where women were sterilized who were not able to give consent themselves.³⁶ Given the frequent allusions to women who had been released from mental institutions in the course of the Society's presentation, it seems possible that the Society included this line in part to encourage repeal of this legislation, which disproportionately targeted women in vulnerable positions.

Even under the law, the lines between voluntary and involuntary sterilization was more blurred than BC legislators would admit. Quite apart from its coverage on the

³⁵ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 12, Brief 121

³⁶ RCSW Final Report, 280-281.

status of women, the *Vancouver Sun* reported in November of 1968 – seven months after the brief before the Commission – that involuntary sterilization legislation was outdated and that it was a procedure only prescribed three to four times per year on average.³⁷ Yet, though the legislation allowed only for voluntary sterilizations, the comment in the East-Enders Society suggested that the procedure was both more common than officials would acknowledge and that the authority of consent was under question.³⁸

In 1968, the *Sexual Sterilization Act* – which had been passed in British Columbia in 1933 – was still five years from being repealed. British Columbia had been the second province in Canada to pass such an act – Alberta had passed its own *Sexual Sterilization Act* in 1928 – and a three-person Eugenics Board had been established to approve or deny individual petitions for sterilizations by health officials.³⁹ Sterilizations – both voluntary and involuntary – were subsequently performed on both men and women in British Columbia through the 1970s.⁴⁰ Thanks in part to a movement initiated by

³⁷ Robert Sarti, “Sterilization of patients in institutions declines,” *Vancouver Sun*, November 19, 1968

³⁸ The lack of clarity offered by the Society on whose consent – or whose recommendation – was associated with these sterilizations makes its inclusion in the brief fraught. Because we have no sense of whose perspective most informed the brief, it is possible – as the East-Enders Society was primarily headed by white, middle-class women volunteering their time through church societies – that they would have themselves encouraged sterilization of marginalized women, given the history of involuntary sterilization of Indigenous and women with mental illness in British Columbia (see below). It is also possible that women in precarious positions may have requested voluntary sterilizations. I aim only to explore the ambiguity of the Society’s remark and the significance of its inclusion in a brief about impoverished women.

³⁹ Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), 90-91; 105; 159.

⁴⁰ No records from the British Columbian Board of Eugenics appear to have survived; see McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 159. Other accounts of ongoing involuntary sterilizations, particularly performed against Indigenous women who were not informed, did. For a detailed account of involuntary sterilization in Alberta, see Jana Grekul and Dave Odenak, “Sterilizing the ‘Feeble-Minded’: Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929-1972,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17, no.4 (Dec. 2004), 358-384. For a thorough account of how Indigenous women in particular were targeted, see Karen Stote, “The Coercive Sterilization of Aboriginal Women in Canada,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 36, no.3 (2012), 117-150. For individual case studies of

British Columbia Health Minister Dr. F.G. Tucker in 1969 to rescind the Act – one year after the East-Enders Society presented its brief to the Commission – the legislation was finally repealed in 1973.⁴¹

The *Sexual Sterilization Act* explicitly demanded consent for sterilizations among individuals deemed “feeble-minded” – a grouping that would have had significant intersections with populations perceived as “indigent,” “unemployable,” or in need of social housing in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is not clear from whom this consent was to be procured, how many such sterilizations occurred with consent, or how the process of generating consent unfolded. That the Society found the issues of both consent and sterilization to be significant enough to bring before the Commission speaks to the prominence of the issue among the Society’s clientele. At least some women who used the Society’s services, in other words, were likely among those who were sterilized according to the *Sexual Sterilization Act*, whether with consent obtained freely, under duress, or with without consent altogether.⁴²

Yet in the oral brief, the East-Enders Society did not bring up the subject of sterilization again. The Commission also did not request expansion on the subject. Part of this may have been due to the public nature of the hearings. The Society may have been unwilling to give specific details of their clientele to the public without consent,

women, including Indigenous women, who underwent involuntary sterilization in spite of the law in British Columbia, see Dorothy Chunn and Robert Menzies, “Out of mind, out of law: the regulation of “criminally insane” women inside British Columbia’s public mental hospitals, 1888-1973,” *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 10, no.2 (July 1998), 320, and Gail van Heeswijk, “An Act Respecting Sexual Sterilization’: Reasons for Enacting and Repealing the Act” (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Unpublished Master’s Thesis, 1994), 86.

⁴¹ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 126. The legality or illegality of an act neither guarantees its stoppage nor its regulation. Involuntary sterilization was never legal, yet it did occur. It is a reasonable presumption that involuntary sterilization may have continued after the law was repealed in 1973.

⁴² There was no obvious mention of sterilization among the available East-Enders Society fonds at the SFU Archives. As files containing personal information are withheld from public access at the donor’s request, however, any such mention – if it exists – is likely inaccessible.

perhaps noticing that media attention on Indigenous women was often negative, or perhaps simply at the request of their clientele. Another possibility is that the Commission had not yet been exposed to issues such as prostitution, sterilization, and the criminalization of poverty, which would be raised in later hearings in Alberta, Montreal, and the Northwest Territories.⁴³ Another potential obstacle to advocacy on this point may have been that the *Sexual Sterilization Act* was a provincial matter, as were all points on health care, and that the Commission did not want to make recommendations on issues not of federal jurisdiction. Yet the Commission still saw fit to make provincially- and municipally-oriented recommendations in other areas, including housing and services for women in precarity. Nevertheless, the allusion to sterilization in the written brief – particularly given the subset of the population who was particularly vulnerable to forced sterilization – tells us more about the clientele the East-Enders Society was likely to attract.

The East-Enders Society's reference to prostitution in their written brief was also sufficiently vague to suggest that specifics, for one reason or another, were deliberately withheld in the course of making the recommendation. On prostitution, the Society wrote: "When prostitution cases are reported through the news media, only the woman's name is publicized. If names are necessary, both names should be published."⁴⁴ As with the issue of sterilization, there was no significant discussion of prostitution either in the oral brief nor in the available files from the East-Enders Society, but it is clear from Society meeting minutes that, whether they were able to articulate it to the RCSW or not, the Society worked with women managing diverse and intersecting factors that may have contributed to a need for social support including poverty, criminal records, intellectual

⁴³ See RCSW Final report, 330, 370; and Freeman, *Satellite Sex*, 187.

⁴⁴ LAC RG 33/89, vol. 12, Brief 121

diversity, or behavior otherwise deemed outside the norm by mainstream society.

Overall, the Society was reluctant to highlight issues in their presentations to the Commission that sometimes featured prominently in the Society's internal accounts of its day-to-day operations.

On the face of it, the Commission appeared to accept the frame the East-Enders Society created about the women who used their services – a frame that relied overly on employment status and did not delve significantly into intersecting reasons why a woman may have found herself in a position of precarity. Interestingly, however, the Commission's final report touched on many of the issues and intersections brought up by other groups in Canada, but not significantly explored by the Society. The East-Enders Society brief offered the Commission an opportunity to explore the ways that poverty intersected with these issues; however, that line of inquiry was not immediately taken up. Though the Commission ultimately endeavored to draw the connections initially hinted at by the East-Enders Society, the frames imposed by the Society on the issues faced by its clientele may have prevented a significant inquiry of that scope, even by a Commission that eventually had its eye to the issues that the Society was tip-toeing around.

3.4. “It’s Been a Concern of Our Commission”: The RCSW Interrogating Marginalized Experience

The Commission was vocal about wanting to hear from groups that had been marginalized by society, both in the Final Report and in the East-Enders Society hearing itself. As stated by one unnamed Commissioner on conclusion of the Society's initial presentation:

It's been a concern of our Commission that we might not hear from these in-between groups. We are wondering who is going to speak for these people who fall between categories. You've done it justice, and I'd just like to say that we appreciate hearing about these people who do not form any part of a specific organized group so we would not otherwise probably have heard from these people.⁴⁵

Added Florence Bird, "Thank you very much for speaking for this group which is not able to speak for itself. We are terribly concerned with those people who are often called 'unemployable', mainly because nobody has tried to find out what it is they can do to help themselves. I want to congratulate you on what you're doing, and I hope that we can help you too."⁴⁶

The Commission asked several important follow-up questions to the Society's presentation, including what percentage of their clientele wants to work; what sort of jobs they could do; and what services women might need if provided with social housing. Yet there were also opportunities to interrogate the Society's presentation in the interest of seeking out more complete representation of women who fell "between categories" that the Commission did not undertake. The Society's passing remark about Indigenous women in an urban space, for example, might have intrigued the Commission to inquire further into more specific circumstances of their lives; the Society's logic in drawing parallels to wartime make-work programs for Black Americans intended for poor women in the present day may have offered another opportunity. If the Commission were truly committed to advocating for an egalitarian society – which was also a relationship of proxy, particularly as they viewed themselves as catalysts between the people and government – the difficult questions about what "special treatment" really meant in its

⁴⁵ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 49:40 - 50:09

⁴⁶ LAC RCSW fonds, Disc 1, 50:15 - 50:39

guiding principles ought to have been interrogated, even if the presenter made details difficult to discern.

Possibly as a result of the East-Enders Society's ambiguous presentation, the Commission did not integrate points specifically from the East-Enders Society brief in the Final Report the same way that it integrated details from the Templeton brief. The RCSW tended to treat the issue of poverty independently from intersecting concerns, discussing sterilization primarily in the chapter titled "Women and the Family" and prostitution in the chapter on the criminal code.⁴⁷ That said, coverage in the Final Report of women's poverty was reasonably extensive, with a 21-page chapter devoted solely to this topic. Focusing primarily on the issue of elderly women and single mothers, the chapter on poverty did also touch specifically on Indigenous women. The RCSW quoted the 1966 Report of the Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories, which called Indigenous women "the lowest and most depressed strata" in Canada.⁴⁸ The RCSW also made particular note of the migration of girls and women from reserves to urban centres in search of work: "Their background severely handicaps them," wrote the Commission, "and many submissions at public hearings told of discrimination on racial grounds."⁴⁹ They also identified frequent problems with the law among Indigenous women in urban spaces, particularly in relation to vagrancy laws, which covered arrests on grounds of prostitution.⁵⁰

That the Commission saw fit to include a section on Indigenous women in its chapter on poverty – with a particular focus on urban poverty – makes it all the more significant that the East-Enders Society did not identify a significant intersection of

⁴⁷ RCSW Final Report, 280-281; 366-372.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 330.

gender, race, and class along these lines among their clientele. The RCSW made a linkage that the Society did not, citing a brief out of Alberta ultimately to echo one of the foremost recommendations of the East-Enders Society: provision of hostels for girls and, specific to Indigenous women, for friendship centres as well. These, wrote the RCSW, would be jointly organized by voluntary associations such as the East-Enders Society and federal, provincial, and municipal governments, and would provide a balance of housing and social support.⁵¹ This recommendation was in line with the Society's mandate, but used specific terms that the Society was reluctant to provide.

The Commission's separation of sterilization and prostitution from their discussion on poverty in the Final Report seems significant, as all three subjects appeared in the East-Enders Society's brief. Sterilization was discussed only in the context of birth control, without any reference to the intersections of gender, class, race, sexuality, or disability that resulted in some women being unlawfully and inhumanely sterilized. Though acknowledging the links of sterilization legislation with the eugenics movement, the Commission observed only that the existing legislation overtly prohibited sterilization on the grounds of eugenics and called only for the legalization of sterilization by voluntary means as a method of planned birth control among married couples.⁵² Amid calls for repeal of legislation on abortion and prostitution, it is significant that the Commission did not comment on the harms of the *Sexual Sterilization Act* as they did about anti-abortion legislation; on the subject of prostitution laws, for example, the Commission had no trouble identifying that "the current legislation is not really effective in carrying out its purpose."⁵³ Particularly in light of the overt link to eugenics that the

⁵¹ Ibid., 315; 330-331.

⁵² Ibid., 281

⁵³ Ibid., 370. The language on the subject of abortion laws was similarly critical: "The current law cannot be relied upon," wrote the Commissioners on the subject of abortion, "to reduce the

RCSW identified, and the issue of consent protocol questioned in the East-Enders Society's brief, it seems unusual that the only criticism leveled against sterilization legislation was that it was not sufficiently flexible for family planning.

The critique against vagrancy laws, on the other hand, seemed to find more traction with the RCSW. Noting that women arrested on vagrancy grounds were more commonly arrested for "what they are" rather than for a specific action, the Commission concluded that "prostitution is fundamentally a social, not a criminal problem."⁵⁴ The Commission called for a significant revision of existing laws and noted that "to fine a woman ... or to send her to prison ... adds the stigma of a criminal record which may make her rehabilitation even more difficult."⁵⁵ This critique clearly identified that a criminal history carried stigma and may have interfered with a woman's ability – if she so chose – to move into a line of work that was more highly valued in society, and also insightfully correlated survival sex work with poverty in a way that has since struggled to permeate popular discourse. Yet a more extensive analysis of the ways sex work and poverty could intersect was not conducted, even though sex workers were surely among the women whom the Commission would have been unlikely to hear from without an intentional investigation.

3.5. Conclusions

Some issues specific to the East-Enders Society brief were not recognized in the Commission's breakdown of factors that contributed to poverty at all. Women between

number ... of maternal deaths and injuries that follow the improper medical practices used in illegal abortions." See RCSW Final Report, 284.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 371.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 371.

the ages of 35 and 60 were, for instance, not represented in the chapter on poverty except insofar as they intersected with single mothers. Along with omissions on the subject of sterilization and consent, and arguably based on the hints that the Society dropped about other risk factors to poverty common among the women who used their services, the Commission – though commenting commendably on many subjects – missed an opportunity to pursue information presented in the East-Enders Society brief that may have helped them to delve more thoroughly into their brief on what “special treatment” might have been required by women on the Downtown Eastside to take advantage of the opportunities the Commission felt should have been accessible to all.

While housing and employment policies would help women with undervalued skills and low income, the RCSW did not significantly interrogate other issues relevant to the intersecting forces that marginalized many women – including obstacles owing to criminalization of poverty and stigma around mental illness. The Commission did not, in the cases discussed here, strive to provide a complete scope of the factors that contributed to inequality in Canadian society – a shortcoming owing partly to the Commission’s status as a primary government-led body of inquiry, and owing partly to the East-Enders Society’s framing of its information. If women in the DTES could not be well represented by an organization working directly with them, the Commission may have thought these details were not available, and might have neglected to carry out a more thorough investigation on the very basis of the Society’s haphazard representation-by-proxy.

Conclusion. Recommendations and Acclimatizations: Gaps and Concessions in the Commission's Final Report

By the time the Royal Commission on the Status of Women released their final report in 1970, an internal split was developing among its commissioners. Concerned that the Commission was recommending that women become “wards of society,” Commissioner John Humphrey refused to sign the RCSW's final document, leaving lead Commissioner Florence Bird to defend the Commission's “special treatment” principle to an unsympathetic mainstream media.¹ Notably, Humphrey believed that preferential treatment was required to help remove obstacles to equality for those facing racial discrimination, but argued that women as a group did not display the characteristics of a minority and such a recommendation should not apply to the Final Report. Bird held fast to calls for “special treatment” in the face of media interrogation, though she focused her remarks around a broader need for maternity leave and daycare rather than centering Canada's more marginalized women.²

The mainstream newspaper media responded in two major ways to the release of the RCSW's Final Report. While some articles claimed that the Commission's recommendations were “ridiculous” in their demands, implying that the Commission asked too much, other outlets argued: “Everything's been done. They're asking for things already in the works.”³ Yet years later, the Commission's recommendations were far from being fulfilled. A follow-up report issued in 1974 noted that of the RCSW's 144 core recommendations, 42 had been implemented, while an additional 37 had been

¹ Freeman, *Satellite Sex*, 213.

² *Ibid.*, 214.

³ *Ibid.*, 216-226.

partially implemented – leaving approximately half of the recommendations ignored.⁴ In a retrospective article penned in 1994, Commission secretary Monique Bégin posited that the Commission’s greatest impact was the impetus that this open discussion of women’s issues had on dialogue and activism rather than in the immediate success of their specific recommendations. Though useful, Bégin argues, the Commission was not necessarily required for the evolution of policy that occurred in the 1970s. Particularly in Quebec, women’s rights reforms “could not be stopped” – though she notes the Commission may have played a crucial role in popularizing the concerns of women’s rights activists among the liberal mainstream more quickly than they may have otherwise gained ground.⁵ As noted by Joan Sangster, the RCSW also provided a stage for left and radical feminist thinkers to present their thoughts to the liberal mainstream, creating momentum for further radical organizing through the 1970s.⁶

Comments about the usefulness of the Commission, rather than its efficacy in promoting specific policy, pervades retrospective literature about its impact on the Canadian women’s rights movement. Literature on the effect of the RCSW in British Columbia in particular remains sparse, but on the subject of education, Jane Gaskell notes that the Commission created “quite a stir” in British Columbia’s education community. The Commission’s very existence, she argues, spurred subsequent activism around gender equality among the British Columbia Teacher’s Federation, and otherwise “provided considerable legitimacy and focus for demands about educational

⁴ Emily MacDonald, “The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 19, no.4 (2013), 384. MacDonald notes birth control and maternity advances were the most prominent (to the exclusion of decriminalized abortion), while among the recommendations that had not been addressed were community centres and language training for immigrant women.

⁵ Bégin, “The Royal Commission,” 27.

⁶ Joan Sangster, “Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor, and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 40, no.1 (2010), 6-7.

change for women's equality."⁷ The East-Enders Society's records also indicated that additional housing options for women, including for women with mental illness and addiction, began to be funded by government and established in the Downtown Eastside by the early 1970s.⁸ Though it is unclear whether this funding resulted from the attention brought to the issue by the Commission, the idea that it stemmed at least in part from the exposure to ideas provided by the Commission is compelling. The very act of providing a stage where concerns over the status of women in Canada could be heard seems to have been beneficial to ongoing women's rights activism into the 1970s.

Still, the inattention to women experiencing multiple axes of oppression by both the Commission and subsequent media and government responses meant that marginalized women continued to be overlooked by much of the mainstream women's rights movement in the decades that followed. In a prominent demonstration of this inattention, Bégin's 1994 retrospective – even in the course of remarks on the Commission's methodological shortcomings – did not remark on the low levels of assistance that marginalized women were extended in the wake of the Commission's recommendations.⁹ Bégin acknowledged a divide between what the Commission viewed as "feminist issues" and what it viewed as "social issues," and noted that, though given precedence through the course of the inquiry, economic measures were not the only markers of inequality.¹⁰ Writing on the brink of the popularization of intersectional feminism, Bégin's analysis did not identify intersecting axes of oppression in explicit

⁷ Jane Gaskell, "Educational Change and the Women's Movement: Lessons From British Columbia Schools in the 1970s," *Educational Policy* 18, no.2 (2004), 298, 300.

⁸ SFU EES F-59, vol.2, Untitled document, April 1973.

⁹ Bégin, "The Royal Commission," 31. Though other important shortfalls of the Commission were identified – including on the topic of violence against women – race and class were not mentioned in her assessment of the Commission's efficacy.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

terms. The Commission was demonstrably not very successful in diversifying the perspectives of mainstream women's activism to include marginalized perspectives.

Some legislative reform and restructuring began shortly after the release of the Final Report, however, that set the groundwork for important reconceptualizations of human rights in Canada. In 1971, the Supreme Court of Canada overruled its limitation of "legal person" status to men alone.¹¹ Also in 1971, a federal "minister responsible for the status of women" was established, though its initial appointee Robert Andras was simultaneously sitting as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and thus his attention was diluted.¹² Changes continued into the 1980s: Sections 15 and 28 in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms were revised in 1982 to ban discrimination on the basis of gender. Meanwhile, the formation of activist groups such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women ensured that pressure on the government would continue from mainstream feminists in relation to gender equality.¹³ Though Jill Vickers remarked in 1992 that women's rights were still infrequently sponsored by state action or funding, the general effect of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was to keep women's rights in the limelight of Canadian policy discourse – even if marginalized women continued to be ignored in the course of the Commission's limited efforts to investigate intersectional oppression.¹⁴

¹¹ Naomi Black, "Ripples in the Second Wave: Comparing the Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada and the United States," in *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, eds. Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 101.

¹² Bégin, "The Royal Commission," 34. Bégin also noted, however, that the committee advising the minister "did not want a distinct Department of Women's Affairs for fear of ghettoization."

¹³ Naomi Black, "Ripples in the Second Wave," 104.

¹⁴ Jill Vickers, "The Intellectual Origins of the Women's Movements in Canada," in *Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States*, edited by Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 45.

Though the RCSW provided a useful stage for many women in Canada, the inquiry's lasting effects were limited by the white and middle-class focus of its liberalist methodologies. Racialized, impoverished, disabled, and criminalized women's voices, even when presented by largely white, middle-class women, were ultimately lost in the wake of the Commission's emphasis on widening access to Canada's middle class. The occasional efforts of the Commission to draw parallels between axes of oppression – most prominently in their discussion of discrimination against Indigenous women in their chapter about poverty – were ultimately overshadowed by the concerns that were most relevant to white, middle-class women. These concerns centered around childcare, abortion, and access to work opportunities, and remained quite apart from the concerns some women had with basic shelter and the right to exist in public space.

The RCSW is an instructive example of the limitations of Royal Commissions. Established explicitly to accept representation of more marginalized voices by proxy – often, quite distant proxy – and treating all representations equally regardless of the relationship with the presenters with the community, the Commission did not significantly explore the specific circumstances informing the need for proxies in the first place. Results of this approach included underrepresentation, vague interpretation, and outright misrepresentation of marginalized women's concerns in the RCSW's Final Report and mainstream media coverage. This allowed the Canadian state to follow through on its mandate of welfare liberalism: minimal and short-term investment for services could be more justified when the needs of those most in need of them were only vaguely represented. As government-mandated commissions continue to inform Canadian policy today, additional analysis of the RCSW's methods and operations may prove instructive in ensuring marginalized voices are centered in ongoing inquiries into Canadian human rights.

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