

Women Power to Girl Power: A Study of Female Autonomy in Canada

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Introduction:

No matter the political economy in place, women have tended to benefit less than men. Whether viewed as dependants rather than individual workers in their own right or as reserve labour abusing the system rather than uniquely circumstanced, women have faced challenges in having their preferences heard, their needs recognised and their life situations accommodated. Despite all this, within the last century women have made strides in improving their conditions, albeit with a few obstacles along the way. The changing political world and therefore changing political economy was relevant to these changes in employment, in income and in social assistance. The shortage of labour during the Second World War led governments to partake of the previously unsuitable “womenpower”¹ which resulted in more female employment than during the previous decades of the 20th century. However, women were once again marginalised during the welfare state so as to keep society to the status quo of the male-breadwinner model. Certain benefits were gained during the welfare state, but often with conditions subscribing women to their household role and those that were won were restructured during the neo-liberal state, leading once more to female inequality. Thus, the neo-liberal state has not benefited women as much as previously purported and women were not so well off during the welfare state as previously assumed, with more autonomy being available to them in the war state.

Women are not a homogeneous group. We vary in terms of age, class, region, ethnic background, immigrant status, educational level, etc. However, given the restricted length of this work and the lack of historic information on certain groups of women, women in Canada are classified as a single entity. Women also vary in how they are valued by society. The previous literature's focus has not been upon this variable, though it is sometimes mentioned in passing.² These social evaluations, influenced by prevailing attitudes, may seem lacking from a contemporary perspective, but are fundamental in understanding female autonomy over the last eighty years.

The War State:

Work:

Post-WWI, women had been encouraged into female sectors to work a few years before marriage and had equalled 15% of paid labourers.³ During the Depression, however, employed women were considered to be an impediment to male employment, preventing men from gaining much-needed jobs to support their families. The statistics of the time reflect this: 17% of women ten years or older (665,859 out of 3,906,532)⁴ were gainfully employed compared to 76.7% of men (3,261,371 out of 4,253,537).⁵ By 1942 shortage of labour had replaced unemployment as the main labour force issue; women were no longer viewed as a problem, but as a solution. In a series of stages, first young, single women were sought, then those married without children and

1. Ruth Roach Pierson, *“They're Still Women After All”: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 9.

2. Please see *They're Still Women After All* by Ruth Roach Pierson, *Pick One Intelligent Girl* by Jennifer A. Stephen, *Engendering the State* by Nancy Christie, *Gendered States* by Ann Porter and *Women and the Canadian Welfare State* edited by Patricia M. Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle.

3. Alison Prentice, et al. *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company Canada, Ltd., 1996), 249-251.

4. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Numbers and percentages of the population 10 years of age or over in gainful occupations, classified according to age and sex, census years 1921 and 1931* (Canada Year Book, 1937), May 23rd, 2012.

5. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Numbers and percentages of the population*, May 23rd, 2012.

finally those with children to supply the much needed labour. This is not to say that women were not still marginalised. Those with children or expecting children were sought last for the reason that they were considered to belong in the home and that employers did not want to deal with the circumstances surrounding children, such as restricted work availability or child-care. The idea behind women's work was that it was a reserve to help the war effort, a patriotic obligation.⁶ Despite these societal views, women did enter the labour force more than ever before.

In 1939, the approximate number of women in the labour force was 638,000 which by October 1, 1944 rose to an estimated 1,077,000,⁷ not including female part-time workers, the 800,000 female farm-workers or the almost 50,000 who served as part of the Canadian armed forces, Women's Services division.⁸ Everyone that could be used was being used. For the first time, women's unpaid domestic work was recognised and acclaimed publicly as socially necessary. They became the ultimate recyclers, wasting nothing, while keeping the family unit together during this difficult time. Women's unpaid volunteer work dedicated to the war effort also came to be recognised through the establishment of the Women's Voluntary Services Division under the Department of National War Services in 1941.⁹ Whether or not women would have been recognised in these ways without the all-consuming mobilisation effort of the war is debatable.

Married women were drawn into the labour force starting in the summer of 1943 when the labour reserve of young, single or childless women had evaporated.¹⁰ Though only available for part-time work given their home responsibilities, housewives nonetheless came to be accommodated. The war industries paid more than the traditional service jobs of women, resulting in a major immigration of labour; when those industries producing non-essential items were no longer guaranteed labour by the National Selective Service (NSS), the attitude towards married, part-time female workers changed considerably.¹¹ "Housewives' shifts"¹² began to appear, so called because their hours were best suited to the availability of housewives.

Women were able to branch out into new sectors from which they were previously barred due to societal need. In 1931, 52.1% of women gainfully occupied were working in the service sector, 12.7% in manufacturing, 8.2% in finance and trade and less than one-twentieth of a percent in construction.¹³ By 1943, this had changed radically: 36.6% of women formally engaged were employed in the service sector, 31.1% in manufacturing, 15.0% in finance and trade and 0.3% in construction.¹⁴ The war also gave women the opportunity to enter the armed forces for the first time: 17,038 entered the Royal Canadian Air Force, Women's Division (WD), 21,624 entered the Canadian Women's Army Corps and 7,043 entered the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service.¹⁵ Nor were they simply enlisted personnel; 6,000 WDs were officers.¹⁶ Though these women were not assigned to combat duty, 30 WD servicewomen died whilst on

6. Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, 23.

7. *Ibid.*, 61.

8. *Ibid.*, 9.

9. *Ibid.*, 35.

10. *Ibid.*, 27.

11. *Ibid.*, 27.

12. *Ibid.*, 29.

13. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Numbers and percentages of the gainfully occupied males and females 10 years of age or over, by occupation groups, census years 1891 to 1931* (Canada Year Book, 1937), May 23rd, 2012.

14. Jennifer Anne Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity and the Gendering of Canada's Welfare State, 1939-1947* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 39.

15. Glad Bryce, *First In, Last Out: The RCAF, Women's Division and Nursing Sisters in World War II* (Toronto: University Women's Club of Toronto, 2010), 17-18.

16. Bryce, *First In, Last Out*, 17.

active duty¹⁷ and they were considered fundamental to the successful operation of the armed forces.¹⁸

Economic Condition:

Economic condition is largely dependent upon income, but basic necessities such as housing, food and clothing also play a part. During the Depression, these basic necessities, as well as social recreation, were scarce, whether or not a woman was married.¹⁹ Though war rationing did limit the amount of food per person, it ensured that everyone had at least some food, thus improving the economic condition of those hardest hit by the Depression. The armed forces provided women with ensured housing in the form of barracks or billets, well-made uniforms of which they could be proud²⁰ and labour and recreation opportunities which increased self-confidence and social connexion.²¹ Those women in war industries were often relocated with pay advances to cover the costs and housing was provided in terms of dormitories or billets.²² The increased pay that came with these employments, as well as the independence of not being with one's family, of not being dependent upon domestic service for employment or housing, or of being able to leave the home to work in married women's case, provided greater social and economic autonomy.

By 1944, women's average industrial earnings had risen to 69.3% of men's from 54.1% in 1939. During the same period, average weekly wages also increased from \$12.78 to \$20.89 and the hourly wage gap began to close with women earning 71.2 cents for every male dollar in 1944 compared to 47.9 cents in 1939.²³ Within the RCAF Women's Division, pay was raised from 66.66% of men's to 89% in 1943; a number of WDs later interviewed stated that they felt that their work was finally being appreciated by the government.²⁴ Given that before the war, female wage rates were as low as 40% that of men's,²⁵ these pay rates were highly significant in monetary and social terms. The prevailing ideology of mothers being paid by mother's allowances to keep them in the home had been uprooted to one of, albeit limited, female independence.

Social Assistance:

The prevailing early 20th century view was that women belonged in the home, but the value of women's work was so great due to the war that women's home duties were accommodated like never before through the Amendment to the Income War Tax of July 1942 and the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement. The tax amendment was designed to encourage married women to enter into gainful employment.²⁶ Before the amendment, a wage-earning husband would not be exempt from the full married status claim if his wife earned less than or equal to \$750; after the amendment, no matter how much the wife

17. Ibid., 121.

18. Ibid., 19.

19. Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds., *No Easy Road: Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990), 276-277.

20. Bryce, *First In, Last Out*, 46, 49.

21. Ibid., 125-126, 40.

22. Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl*, 25.

23. Ibid., 39.

24. Bryce, *First In, Last Out*, 73.

25. Veronica Strong-Boad, "*Janey Canuck*": *Women in Canada 1919-1939* (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1994), 8.

26. Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, 49.

earned, the husband could still claim the full married status exemption.²⁷ Thus, women no longer had a ceiling on how much they could earn before being penalised, thereby offering them more freedom as to how much they could work and even possibly for which wages. Though only established in Ontario and Quebec, the daytime nurseries looked after a great many children. By September 1945, Ontario alone had cared for approximately 2,500 children.²⁸ These nurseries offered consistent, reliable care, providing both meals and supervision, thus taking a great deal of responsibility from the mothers' shoulders, and thereby offering them more independence and opportunity to contribute both paid and unpaid work towards the war effort. The nurseries were also open for eleven to twelve hours a day, Monday through Friday and on Saturday mornings,²⁹ thus allowing women to take on more full-time work, if they so desired. Companies also recognised the need to accommodate their female workers and some built and operated their own employee-only nurseries close to their factories.³⁰

The plight of women was largely ignored during the Depression.³¹ It did not seem to matter that they too were out of work, starving, lacking decent shelter and clothing, with “nothing to look forward to”³² and no means to be “respectable.”³³ Many were also without a provider as their husbands had abandoned them.³⁴ Whether or not they had a working husband, the economic necessity to work was rife amongst women.³⁵ They were largely excluded from the unemployment insurance coverage instituted in 1935 and in 1940 due to the nature of their work (i.e. seasonal, casual, domestic, civil, teaching, nursing) and due to their employment not being considered as the “main means of livelihood.”³⁶ It was recognised by the King government, however, that neither veterans nor munition workers, be they male or female, would willingly return to relief.³⁷ A 1943 measure ensured that workers assisting the war effort were covered, that coverage was extended to federal non-permanent employees and that eligibility requirements were made less stringent. In 1944, coverage was extended to those employed in hospitals, charitable institutions, public service and seasonal occupations. Finally, in 1945, professional nurses were covered in tandem with their previously covered counterparts, private duty nurses.³⁸ Since these newly covered areas of employment were largely female dominated, all of these measures helped women and recognised their importance in the labour force.

Social Value:

The onset of war resulted in a need for women such that their status as women was recognised and their life circumstances and needs were accommodated. The restrictions on the

27. Ibid., 49.

28. Ibid., 53.

29. Ibid., 52.

30. Ibid., 52.

31. Margaret Hobbes, “Equality and Difference: Feminism and the Defence of Women Workers during the Great Depression,” in *Canadian Women: A Reader*, edited by Wendy Mitchinson et al. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company Canada, Ltd., 1996), 218.

32. James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 106.

33. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 106.

34. Ibid., 77-78.

35. Hobbes, *Equality and Difference*, 213.

36. Gary Dingleline, *A Chronology of Response: The Evolution of Unemployment Insurance from 1940 to 1980* (Ottawa: ON: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1981), 10.

37. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 202-203.

38. Dingleline, *A Chronology of Response*, 17-19.

employment of women, particularly married women, were eased.³⁹ Lack of a provider did not inhibit women as they had higher wages, tax credits, housing, food and daycares. Women were recognised as having needs different from men in such enterprises as on-base hairdressers for those women within military service.⁴⁰ Though it perpetuated the gender perceptions of the time with women having to have their hair a certain way, it also fulfilled military dress-code regulations which continue to exist, albeit in an altered form, today. Both women's and men's working conditions were also more of a priority than previously (e.g. Depression-era sweat-work) with the implementation of work safety precautions⁴¹ and rest breaks.⁴² Living conditions outside the workplace were also considered important, and conferences were held by the National Safety committee to address workers' recreation, health and living conditions.⁴³

Better pay, jobs, working and living conditions increased women's economic security, but were also a reflection of the value of the work relative to the war effort. It was not all about the women. Winning the war was key. But compare women's abysmal conditions during the Depression, as well as the social pressures to stay in the home sphere, to their war circumstances. Women were accepted, be they single, married or with children, in the labour force in non-traditional sectors, being trained for so-called 'men's work.' Such social developments were a significant step forward in the recognition of female capability and autonomy.

Women, too, were encouraged by the social atmosphere to demand recognition for themselves. Based on the importance of the female contribution to the war effort, women petitioned for their own representation, and in January 1943, a subcommittee, headed completely by women, was established in the post-war female interest.⁴⁴ Compared to previous and future government discussions on women, this subcommittee was ahead of its time: its first principle was that women had a *right* (my emphasis) to the same advancement opportunities as men, to equal remuneration and to post-war employment. It recognised women as equal members of the state and the economy through a number of recommendations to the federal government. Training and retraining programs were to be equally accessible to women and men. Household work was to be included in the national labour code and thus covered under unemployment insurance, minimum wage legislation and worker's compensation. Married women at home were to be viewed as economic partners and thus included in health insurance and family allowances. They were to have access to half-day nurseries funded by the government. Electricity, household appliances, communications networks, educational, recreational and health facilities were all recommended to be extended and expanded to improve living conditions and autonomy.⁴⁵

Though the majority of the subcommittee's recommendations were ignored by the federal government in the post-war period, it presents an example of the change towards women and within the women themselves. In the words of one woman,

I think it [the war] did a lot to finish off the idea that a woman's place and her only place was in the home... The war and working in plants so changed me I became an entirely different person.⁴⁶

Such recommendations were not to be seen within official government channels until the 1967

39. Stephens, *Pick One Intelligent Girl*, 25.

40. Bryce, *First In, Last Out*, 47.

41. *Ibid.*, 61.

42. Stephens, *Pick One Intelligent Girl*, 34.

43. *Ibid.*, 46.

44. Prentice et al., *Canadian Women*, 348.

45. *Ibid.*, 348.

46. *Ibid.*, 349.

inception of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. It is significant to note that many of these recommendations continue today and are still being ignored. The social recognition advanced with the war was not to continue into the post-war period.

The Welfare State:

Work:

Though the war solved the unemployment crisis of the Depression, its end presented the possibility of another. Without the war, women workers were no longer needed in force and thus were regulated back into the home to ensure full male employment and secure nuclear families. A stable democracy would thus be produced with women performing social reproduction and consumption roles. Following the end of the war, women were given two choices: either leave the labour force through marriage or transfer into more traditional female occupations and accept the lower pay, quality and skills associated with such menial work. While it was considered that some women would be employed on a temporary, intermittent or part-time basis and that single women would work until securing a male provider, overall, marriage was viewed as the answer to female post-war engagement. Traditional female sectors experienced shortages during and immediately after the war because of the opening up of war industries to women and the return of married women to the home following the war. It was unimaginable for men to fill such roles but the work still needed to be done, so government employment offices encouraged women still in the labour force to accept such employment.⁴⁷ Many women, having had a taste of the higher wages and autonomy of non-traditional sectors, were naturally unwilling to return to pre-war employment. However, in the argument of stability and security, government offices, such as the National Selection Service Women's Division fought to convince women that there would be fewer jobs with a very much reduced wage scale and those jobs available would be in occupations suitable to women.⁴⁸ Post-war vocation training was provided only in employment seen as attractive to women and in certain sectors of employment where marriage bars such as those seen before the war were instituted.⁴⁹

In the face of these pressures, the percentage of women in the workforce diminished from 33.5% in 1944 to 25.3% in 1946.⁵⁰ During the 1950s and 1960s, women were mostly confined to the home, though participation in the labour force did slowly rise from 24.9% in 1956 to 28.7% in 1961 and later to 31.3% in 1965.⁵¹ Only in the 1960s did the participation rate match and surpass that of the 33.5% high of 1944.⁵² Men were still the primary participants in the labour force, but more and more women gained employment so as to supplement the family income. For many families, the single-earner, male-breadwinner model was proving unable to maintain living standards and to provide enough to buy new consumer goods. Thus, increasing numbers of women entered the workforce, including married women with their participation rate doubling from 11% in 1951 to 22% in 1961.⁵³ Within the same decade the

47. Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl*, 102.

48. *Ibid.*, 103.

49. Leah F. Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 89.

50. Ann Porter, *Gendered States: Women, Unemployment Insurance, and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945-1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 41.

51. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Percentage distribution of the population 14 years of age or older in the labour force and non-labour force categories, by sex, 1946 and 1956 to 1965* (Canada Year Book, 1967), May 24th, 2012.

52. Porter, *Gendered States*, 41.

53. *Ibid.*, 60.

percentage of employed women who were also married rose from 30% to 49.8%.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly women's unemployment rose during this period from 0.6% in 1946 to 1.1% in 1961.⁵⁵ These figures are included as part of women's labour force participation, however, and do not reflect the true removal of women from the labour force. In 1961, for example, a significant 71.3% of women were not involved in the labour force.⁵⁶

Given the transitory nature of women's lives, be it through marriage, pregnancy, child-rearing or the relocation of a husband's job, women were often able only to take on contingent, temporary or part-time work often in sectors with high-turnover rates, poor working conditions and low wages.⁵⁷ In 1952, for example, within the Unemployment Insurance employment service, 36.3% of regular placements were women compared to 63% of casual placements.⁵⁸ Women's distribution in better-paid, more secure union manufacturing and mechanical professions reduced from 15.4% in 1941 to 9.9% in 1961.⁵⁹ Clerical and service jobs grew: in 1971, 38.3% of full-time and 29.5% of 'other' (i.e. not full-time) women held clerical employment and 12.7% full-time and 22.3% of 'other' women held service jobs.⁶⁰ Marital status did not seem to largely affect this trend: in 1967, 30% of working mothers compared to 35% of total female paid workers were in clerical and communication work and 24% of the former were in service and recreation compared to 22% of the latter.⁶¹ Despite increased female enrolment and graduation in universities, women tended to hold subordinate positions in stores, offices, hospitals, banks and telephone companies.⁶² Women, more than men, were attending university for specific career objectives,⁶³ as reflected in their concentration within traditional female fields, such as teaching. Yet specific occupations were not being filled due to a lack of training and experience⁶⁴ and the full-time employment rate for male graduates' was higher.⁶⁵

Economic Condition:

In 1979, almost 50% of all women workers were employed in only ten occupations.⁶⁶ The concentration of women in subordinate, menial positions in traditional sectors not valued by society meant less remuneration. Between 1954 and 1956, women's wages fell from 56.1% of men's to 55.6%; salaried workers earned even less with a high of 50.3% in 1955.⁶⁷ According to a survey week in 1965 of the "average weekly hours and earnings of salaried employees and earnings of clerical and other salaried classes in manufacturing," women's average earnings,

54. Annis May Timpson, *Driven Apart: Women's Employment Equality and Child Care in Canadian Policy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001), 19.

55. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Percentage distribution of the population*, May 24th, 2012.

56. *Ibid.*, May 24th, 2012.

57. Porter, *Gendered States*, 95.

58. *Ibid.*, 53.

59. S. J. Wilson, *Women, Families and Work* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1996), 93.

60. Monica Boyd and Elizabeth Humphreys, *Labour Market and Sex Differences in Canadian Incomes* (Ottawa, O.N.: Economic Council of Canada, 1979), 59.

61. Canada. Women's Bureau, *Working Mothers and Their Child-Care Arrangements* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer for Canada, 1970), 34.

62. Canada. National Council of Welfare, *Women and Poverty* (Ottawa: The Council, 1979), 23.

63. M. S. Devereaux and Edith Rechnitzer, and Statistics Canada, Education, Science and Culture Division, *Higher Education – Hired?: Sex Differences in Employment Characteristics of 1976 Postsecondary Graduates* (Ottawa, O.N.: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1980), 4.

64. Porter, *Gendered States*, 96.

65. Devereaux, Rechnitzer and Statistics Canada, *Higher Education – Hired?*, 4.

66. Canada. National Council of Welfare, *Women and Poverty*, 23.

67. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Proportions of female employees and proportions of their average earnings to male's earnings, for the last week of October 1954 to 1956* (Canada Year Book, 1957/1958), May 24th, 2012.

averaged across the provincial percentages, were 49.3% of men's.⁶⁸ In 1973 the mean income of women working full-time was 62% of that received by men.⁶⁹ None of these percentages match those of the war period. Even when women filled the same positions as men, the wages were not equal. In 1965, the female wage for the position 'Clerk, intermediate' varied from \$53-\$69/week compared to the male \$72-\$90/week,⁷⁰ a \$19 to \$21 difference. Despite the position being the same, women received only 73.6% to 76.7% of the male wage.

Women's economic condition was thus not strong, for not only was their work largely cyclical, but their wages were not representative of their work. Nor could they look to unions for help to secure better working conditions and wages since the prevailing ideology was that of the male family wage on which to keep his woman and family. Women as a group have always been vulnerable to poverty, but despite the welfare state's promise of social security for all, women continued to be poor. In 1979, three fifths of poor Canadian adults were women and one out of every sixth woman was living in poverty.⁷¹ The reintegration of women into the family sphere meant that their economic security was largely dependent upon that of their families or their husbands (e.g. the family allowance, the survivor allowance). Women's work may have helped family security but not individual security, especially as concerned retirement savings. The nature of women's work was such that they either were in the home performing unpaid work and therefore ineligible for a government or private pension or what they did earn was not enough to live on post-retirement. As concerned government assistance, it was largely turned from the needs of women in the war era to that of 'ideal middle-class' families.

Social Assistance and Value:

Since having women in the workforce was no longer viewed as a social necessity following the war, the government ceased to provide benefits in support of female employment. The Amendment to the Income Tax and the the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement were terminated. Women's earnings were limited to \$250 and any money earned above that ceiling would be reduced from the husband's married status exemption.⁷² Thus women were punished for leaving their 'proper' domestic sphere as any income that they might earn would, after taxes, reduce their contribution to the income of their family. Unsurprisingly the percentage of women keeping house rather than being employed rose from 63.2% in 1946 to 64.9% in 1956.⁷³ Women appealed for the continuation of the nurseries out of a need to work, but women's work was viewed as being a last resort and as a matter of choice. Only those absolutely needing the employment to support a dependent husband or family should be working. Despite women claiming that they were working "out of economic necessity, because of separation from, or the death, war injuries, sickness or inadequate income of the husband,"⁷⁴ the nurseries were still terminated.

The eligibility for insurance-based benefits within the two-tiered welfare state system was based on wage work, which was largely unperformed by women. Any benefits towards

68. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Average weekly hours and earnings of salaried employees and earnings of clerical and other salaried classes in manufacturing, by industry, province and urban area, survey week 1965* (Canada Year Book, 1967), May 24th, 2012.

69. Boyd and Humphreys, *Labour Market and Sex Differences in Canadian Incomes*, 31.

70. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Average wage and salary rates for selected occupations in certain cities across Canada, October 1, 1965* (Canada Year Book, 1967), May 24th, 2012.

71. Canada. National Council of Welfare, *Women and Poverty*, 1.

72. Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, 49.

73. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Percentage distribution of the population*, May 24th, 2012.

74. Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, 56.

women were based on their roles as wives and mothers (e.g. the idea of the family allowance being a kind of at-home wage for mothers). Women's lack of stable continuation in the workforce, given the nature of their labour, and the view of them not as workers but as family members with gender-specific roles tended to feed the ideological prejudices of the system and exclude them from benefits. The prevailing societal view was that visibly pregnant women or those rearing young children were not acceptable to be seen publicly, and by the end of the war there were no programs securing women's income or employment during these life stages. Rather, pregnant and married women were barred from receiving Unemployment Insurance benefits and were considered the source of fraudulent claims due to their lack of continuous or genuine attachment to the labour force.⁷⁵

However, circumstances did eventually begin to change as attitudes evolved to recognise that women were entering the labour force out of necessity. By 1971 64.9% of families had more than one breadwinner compared to the 57.0% of families in 1951 who had a sole breadwinner.⁷⁶ In 1971 new legislation almost completely covered the risk of unemployment: benefits were made more accessible for longer time frames and the standard of living was more closely maintained. Women benefited from the legislative changes through maternity benefits, greater equality in benefit rates and greater coverage. As a result of the changes, 66.7% of women⁷⁷ had access to the increased benefit rate. These strides, however, were short lived.

The Neo-liberal State:

Work:

In recent years, women have increased their representation in professional fields and in managerial positions, but they continue to be a minority in goods-producing sectors and non-traditional fields such as mathematics, engineering and natural science.⁷⁸ The labour trends of the welfare era, however, remain largely intact. In 1964 the service industry was the largest employer of women, clerical work was the largest occupational field for women and a growing percentage of women were working part-time.⁷⁹ In 2009 traditional fields continued to dominate female employment with 67% of employed women situated in nursing or health occupations, teaching, clerical or administrative positions and sales or service positions.⁸⁰ Between 1976 and 2009 the percentage of women employed part-time rose from 23.6% to 26.9%.⁸¹ Non-standard employment, in terms of temporary, contract, on-call and home-based work, has increased, as well as self-employment.⁸² Women as a percentage of multiple-job holders has also increased from 41.8% to 52.6% between 1987 and 2009.⁸³ All this increased work does reflect the increased female labour participation rates, be they single, married or with children, but it does

75. Ann Porter, "Women and Income Security in the Postwar Period: The Case of Unemployment Insurance, 1945-1962," in *Canadian Women: A Reader*, edited by Wendy Mitchinson et al. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company Canada, Ltd., 1996), 329-331.

76. Porter, *Gendered States*, 94.

77. *Ibid.*, 113.

78. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Paid Work* (Women in Canada: A Gendered Based Statistical Report, 2010, Catalogue no. 89-503-XWE), May 26th, 2012.

79. Canada. Women's Bureau, *Report on the Consultation of the Employment of Women with Family Responsibilities: Held February 17, 1965* (Ottawa: The Department, 1965), 2.

80. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Paid Work*, May 26th, 2012.

81. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Table 7: Part-time employment of women and men, 1976 to 2009* (Labour Force Survey), May 26th, 2012.

82. Vosko, *Temporary Work*, 125.

83. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Table 11: Multiple job holders as a percentage of total employed women and men, by age group, 1987 to 2009* (Labour Force Survey) May 26th, 2012.

not take into account the double day⁸⁴ or unpaid labour of women.

Women as a percentage of total employed persons has increased from 37.1% in 1976 to 47.9% in 2009; the percentage of women employed has risen from 41.9% to 58.3% in the same period.⁸⁵ Women with children are included in this trend, despite lack of adequate daycare facilities and the traditional 'female sphere' of unpaid labour. Unpaid work can be divided into child care, domestic work, time spent caring for seniors and volunteer work. In all these areas, women spend more time than men, despite the slight increase in male unpaid work between Generation X and Generation Y.⁸⁶ Women spend an average of 50.1 hours on childcare and 13.8 hours on domestic work per week compared to 24.4 and 8.3 hours by men; 49% of women compared to 25% of men spend more than 10 hours/week caring for seniors; 40% of women versus 36% of men volunteer.⁸⁷

Economic Condition:

The replacement of the male breadwinner model with the dual-earner, if not single parent model, has resulted in massive pressures, particularly on women, to maintain both the unpaid work of the home and the paid work of the labour market.⁸⁸ The need of sufficient child care as well as the responsibilities of childrearing have prevented women from pursuing full-time employment and the income security and benefits therein. The remaining part-time work available to women does not encourage income security nor provide better wages. The unstable and high-turnover nature of part-time and non-standard employment has helped to contribute to the increased unemployment rate of women, along with the stagflation and recessions of this period. Amazingly, women still continue to be the first to be fired in times of economic downturn,⁸⁹ but it is the concentration of women in sectors less impacted by recession that gives the impression of women being less affected financially. Women's concentration in unions has been on the rise, but so too has been the reduction in male union membership⁹⁰ in tandem with neo-liberal restructuring. Traditionally, women have not received much support from organised labour,⁹¹ but in the face of neo-liberalism, women have become one of the new markets for Labour. The majority of women do not benefit from the economic security provided by union memberships as their sectors of employ are largely uncovered.⁹²

Due to these precarious circumstances, women's income has continued to be significantly below that of men's, as shown in Chart 1 below. Even working full-time, full-year, women's wages continue to be about 71% that of men's.⁹³ Increased education does equate increased

84. Wilson, *Women, Families and Work*, 75.

85. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Table 1: Employment trends of women and men aged 15 and over, 1976 to 2009* (Labour Force Survey), May 26th, 2012.

86. Katherine Marshall, "Generational change in paid and unpaid work," in *Canadian Social Trends* no. 92. (Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 11-008-X), May 26th, 2012.

87. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Families, Living Arrangements and Unpaid Work* (Women in Canada: A Gender Based Statistical Report, Catalogue no. 89-503-X), May 26th, 2012.

88. Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton, ed., *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-liberalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 5.

89. Prentice, et al. *Canadian Women*, 358.

90. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Chart 5: Percentage of female and male workers unionized, 1976 to 2009* (Labour Force Survey and Corporations and Labour Unions Returns Act), May 26th, 2012.

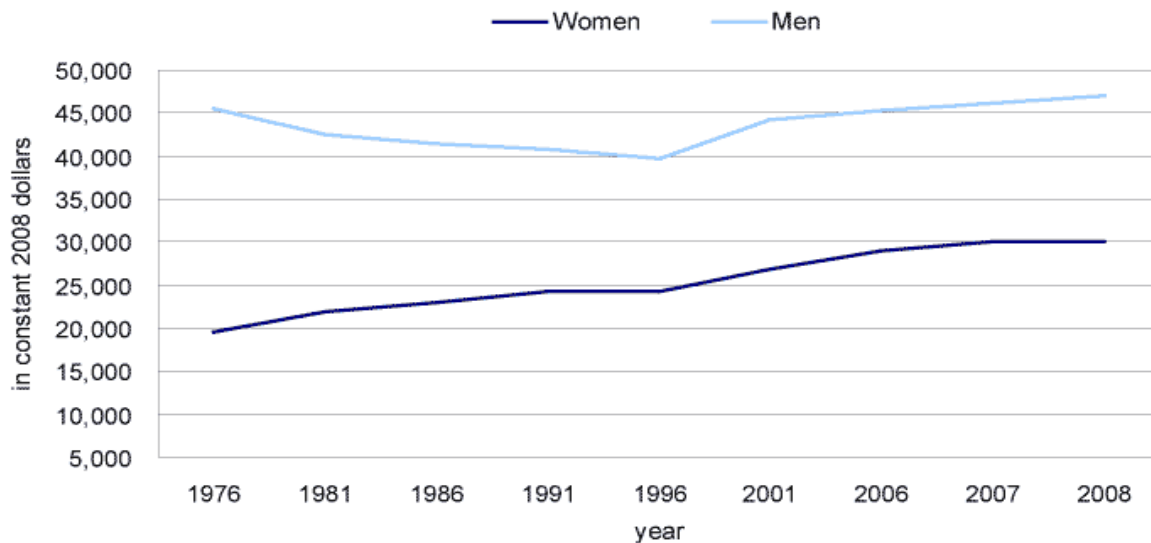
91. Vosko, *Temporary Work*, 84.

92. Cecilia M. Benoit, *Women, Work and Social Rights: Canada in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 2000), 75.

93. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Economic Well-Being* (Women in Canada: A Gender Based Statistical Report, Catalogue no. 89-503-X), May 26th, 2012.

income, but women continue to earn less than men at all educational levels: female-earned professional or graduate degrees earn 96 cents to the dollar, bachelors earn 89 cents and trade school or registered apprenticeship certificates earn 65 cents.⁹⁴ Conversely, lower-paid, less-skilled jobs have less of a gender wage gap, though men do still earn more.⁹⁵ As a result, women continue to be classified as low-income with the effect of consistently contributing less to retirement plans; no matter the plan, women are represented less than men, and the number of women covered by such plans is also declining.⁹⁶ This is often due to women's non-standard work where employers are not obliged to pay CPP or benefits or the employee is simply not covered under government regulations (e.g. self-employed women).⁹⁷ Given this lack of financial planning and future financial security, it is not surprising that “41% of women aged 45-54 have no specific retirement date in mind.”⁹⁸

Chart 1
Average total income of women and men, 1976 to 2008



Source: Statistics Canada, [CANSIM table 202-0407](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11388/c-g/c-g001-eng.htm). <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11388/c-g/c-g001-eng.htm> May 26th, 2012

Social Assistance and Value:

It has been well documented how the Employment Act of 1996 has had a negative impact

94. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Economic Well-Being*, May 26th, 2012.

95. Benoit, *Women, Work and Social Rights*, 74.

96. Canada. Statistics Canada, *Economic Well-Being*, May 26th, 2012.

97. Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. *Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, Improving the Economic Security of Women: Time to Act* (1st Session, 39th Parliament, 2007) 14.

98. Mary Condon, “Privatizing Pension Risk: Gender, Law and Financial Markets,” in *Privatization, Law and the Challenge to Feminism*, edited by Brenda Cossman and Judy Fudge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 131.

on women's ability and eligibility to claim employment insurance benefits,⁹⁹ but it is not the only neo-liberal restructuring to have had a negative impact on women. Whilst it is now socially acceptable for women to work outside the home whether or not they have children, it has become increasingly difficult for a woman to do so. Gone are the days when it was financially possible to raise a family on a single income, but there is a distinct lack of measures to match the increase of working mothers in the labour market. The climate has changed from one of entitlement to one of individual risk, but rather than government policy reducing dependency, it can encourage it.

The low-pay and insecurity of women's work is such that they more than men are dependent upon social assistance¹⁰⁰ to provide coverage for food, housing, transportation and health costs.¹⁰¹ The nature of social benefits and income assistance is such that women on welfare could find work to replace the income supplement, but they would not be able to cover the additional costs listed above as well as childcare; in fact, an individual's likelihood of poverty is increased if on social assistance.¹⁰² Despite these restrictions many women do work and want to work, contrary to stigmatising social perceptions.¹⁰³ The fact that women's work, be it domestic, economic or that needed to maintain public assistance, is not valued¹⁰⁴ is reflected in the federal budgets from 1994 to 2008. The areas which most benefit women (i.e. affordable child care, post-secondary education, housing) have been ignored,¹⁰⁵ resulting in increased barriers to female equality.¹⁰⁶ Many services and benefits that have aided women have been cut because they were considered 'soft,' and therefore of lesser value than 'hard' services such as sewers.¹⁰⁷ Without adequate assistance women face reduced choice in the type of work they pursue and in the type of child care they use, resulting in increased stress, job insecurity and socio-economic polarisation; access to education is also reduced.¹⁰⁸ Female autonomy is thus eroded through life, from being a young woman earning less, to a mother sacrificing personal income through childrearing to a senior with little retirement money.

Summary:

During the war, female paid and unpaid work was socially needed and therefore found acceptable and actively supported. Women were not discriminated against due to age, marital status or the presence of children. Social schemes were expanded to help them be active members of the labour market and the unpaid domestic market, resulting in greater economic security and well-being. It is true that a gendered perspective of women existed, but the war created an environment where women could step out of their prescribed roles and think of

99. For an in-depth look, please see Ann Porter's *Gendered States: Women Unemployment Insurance and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945-1997*.

100. Katherine Scott and Status of Women Canada, *Women and the CHST: A Profile of Women Receiving Social Assistance in 1994* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1998), 17.

101. Canada. Parliament. House of Commons, *Time to Act*, 29-32.

102. Scott, *Women and the CHST*, 47.

103. Tanis Doe et al. and Status of Women Canada, *Re/Working Benefits: Continuation of Non-Cash Benefits Support for Single Mothers and Disabled Women* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 2003), 22.

104. Gillian Doherty et al. and Status of Women Canada, *Women's Support, Women's Work: Child Care in an Era of Deficit Reduction, Devolution, Downsizing and Deregulation* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1998), 31.

105. Armine Yalnizyan, *Budget 2008: What's In It For Women?* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008), 5.

106. Armine Yalnizyan, *Canada's Commitment to Equality: A Gender Analysis of the Last Ten Federal Budgets (1995-2004)* (Ottawa: Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, 2005), 99.

107. Doherty, *Women's Support, Women's Work*, 32-37.

108. *Ibid.*, 34.

themselves in new ways. Once the need was eradicated, women were forced back into those roles and society's treatment of them reflected this process. The labour market, however, was such that women could not help but re-enter it, thereby forcing social changes to accommodate their needs. The paradigm shift of the neo-liberal ideology, however, reverted women back to a more subordinate role through gender-blind restructuring policies. Women may be recognised as members of the workforce, but not as members with unique needs due to their life circumstances as women. Women continue to be concentrated in traditional sectors and precarious non-standard work, with little, if any, beneficial social assistance to aid them balance the often conflicting responsibilities of home and work. It would seem then that, despite being viewed as temporary workers rather than workers in their own right, the social value prescribed to women during the war provided them on average with greater employment opportunity, greater income security and greater state support than today.

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